



Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin

Copyright statement

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

Liability statement

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

Access Agreement

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

WORKING-CLASS DUBLIN IN
FICTION AND PLAYS, 1954-2004

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH,
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN,
IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

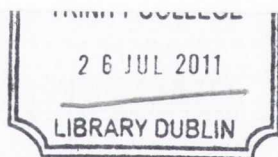
IN
ENGLISH LITERATURE

2009

BY
MICHEÁL MAC PIARAIS

I hereby declare that this thesis, "Working-class Dublin in fiction and plays, 1954-2004", has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. It is entirely my own work, and I agree that the Library may lend or copy it upon request. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.

Signature:



THESIS
9308

Summary

This thesis explores the depiction of working-class Dublin in fiction and plays from 1954 to 2004. It examines how proletarian identity is depicted in this body of writing, the common themes and ideas it sustains, and what these parallels contribute to the understanding of Irish literature and culture. Chapter 1 outlines Seán O'Casey's considerable influence on later writers of the working class. Chapter 2 looks at three plays, James McKenna's *The Scatterin'* (1959), Heno Magee's *Hatchet* (1973) and Lee Dunne's *Goodbye to the Hill* (1976), and how they depict working-class masculinity. In Chapter 3, the discussion turns to working-class women, with a study of two novels, Paul Smith's *The Countrywoman* (1961) and Peter Sheridan's *Big Fat Love* (2003). My fourth chapter engages with issues of industry, labour and the effects of capitalism on working-class consciousness in James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969) and Paul Smith's *Summer Sang in Me* (1972). Chapter 5 shows how three plays on prison life – Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1954), Peter Sheridan's *The Liberty Suit* (1977) and Paula Meehan's *Cell* (1999) – indict the treatment of the poor by a capitalist society. In my sixth chapter, sexual repression, cultural conservatism and their impact on working-class Dublin are the central issues raised in a reading of Christy Brown's *Down All the Days* (1970) and Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990). The seventh and final chapter of this thesis engages with Roddy Doyle's novel *A Star Called Henry* (1999), as a means of assessing the political impetus behind that writers' work and his depiction of working-class life. A close reading of these texts finds that Dublin's working class is the subject of a sociological and cultural paradox, as it is represented as being central to the foundation and modernisation of the Republic while remaining acutely alienated within it. Most of the works examined here have received little or no academic attention to date and their function as part of a heretofore unrecognised lineage of working-class writing has gone unnoticed and untheorised. This thesis therefore seeks to make a new departure in Irish Studies.

Acknowledgements

A thesis such as this is the product of many influences, encouragements and generousities that are impossible to condense into a number of paragraphs. My journey to this point would have proved impossible without the assistance of a number of individuals and organisations, for whose time, advice and altruism I am forever grateful:

- I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr Paul Delaney, at the School of English, TCD, for his guidance, patience and indefatigable positivity. His honesty, wisdom and perseverance have encouraged me greatly in bringing this project to fruition.
- The Dublin Docklands Development Authority, who assisted me financially during my undergraduate years and the initial year of my current postgraduate research.
- Peter Sheridan, Paula Meehan, Lee Dunne, Heno Magee and Dermot Bolger, who gave generously of their time for interviews, and provided otherwise elusive material. Peter Sheridan, in particular, has showed an enthusiasm for this project which helped confirm my own hopes for its possibilities. I am grateful also to Paul Mercier and Joe O'Byrne for access to unpublished plays. All of these writers have provided critical insights that guided my writing and opened doors.
- My English teachers at Coláiste Mhuire, Michéal Ó Heffearnáin and Seán Ó Haitheasa, who sowed seeds in young minds.
- Dr Eoghan Mac Cárthaigh, for recommending me for this research, and Máire Ní Bháin, for her kindness, which I will not forget; Dr Aileen Douglas, for the lively tutorials on working-class writing, which presented possibilities I might otherwise have missed. My conversations with Terry Fagan, and his tireless work with the Inner City Folklore Project, did likewise.

- My colleague Mary O'Regan for some casual, but very fruitful conversations on literature (and some overly long loans of books); Tony Dack and Martin Daniel, for their insights and advice.
- Damian Lawlor, for his friendship and for providing comment on my introduction, despite the burden of his own impending publication; Micheál Mac Giolla Easbuig for his companionship and encouragement.
- Paul 'Bubbles' Cumberton, for his friendship and inspiration.
- My parents for their faith, love and unconditional support.
- My fiancée, Brenda McCabe, for her patience, affection and perseverance over many years of study. For the belief you had in me when I had none, and for the fun, laughter, love and unshakeable optimism, I am thankful and ever in wonderment.

Contents

Summary	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Class matters	4
Working-class Dublin	12
Education, the academe, culture and class	21
Theory, class, taste and shame	31
Chapters	35
Chapter 1: The Shadow of Seán	40
The uses of literacy: The politics of O’Casey’s aesthetic	41
Ireland is greater than a mother: O’Casey and gender	49
Commitment: The life we live	57
Chapter 2: Angry Young Men, Class Injuries and Masculinity	66
Sculptor of words: James McKenna and his “book of liquid history”	70
<i>Hatchet</i> : The monstrous mother	84
<i>Goodbye to the Hill</i> : “This country should be given back to the Leprechauns, with apologies!”	97
Chapter 3: From Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the System	116
A century of change: Gender and Irish society	117
Smith’s realism in mid-century Dublin: “This is not a nice book”	121
Sheridan’s Philo Darcy: The madwoman in the convent	138
Chapter 4: Industry and the City – Workers in Struggle	159
<i>Strumpet City</i> and the making of Dublin’s working class: “The word of the modern, and the word <i>en masse</i> ”	161

Child labour and the bildungsroman: “When have they had time to be childer?”...
..... 175

Chapter 5: Prison Stories – Writing Dublin at its Limits 190

Othering the Other Fellow: Behan’s anti-capitalism 192

“Scrub some of the Dublin scum off yourselves”: *The Liberty Suit* and social
defecation 201

Cell: “An intensified microcosm” 209

Chapter 6: Return of the Oppressed – Sexual Repression, Culture and Class

..... 224

Planning his own birth: Cultural anxieties and reproduction in *Down All the Days*
..... 227

The end of history: Bolger’s bleak suburbs 244

**Chapter 7: Revising the Revolution – Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry*,
Historiography, Politics and Proletarian Consciousness 260**

“Revisionists and ‘revisionists’”: The Troubles with historiography and class
..... 261

Poking fun: A “shocking substitute” for history 266

Anomalous violence: representing revolution 270

Conclusion 293

Bibliography 306

Introduction

“The ‘working classes’ have been the source of much disappointment and disgust for the middle-class observers who have studied them, and, in large part, this is marked out through the lack of legitimacy granted to working-class cultural capital,” writes Steph Lawler. In orthodox academic and cultural terms, “they do not *know* the right things, they do not *value* the right things, they do not *want* the right things”.¹ How, then, could the working classes *read*, let alone *write*, the right things?

Social class has in recent decades taken a back seat in the broad fields of cultural and literary studies, overlaid by a growing interest in the politics of identity, race, gender and sexuality. Sally R. Munt’s recollection of a Queer Studies conference in Iowa – in which an unexpected “coming-out moment” occurred – powerfully illustrates the anxieties inherent in the contemporary relationship between the working class and academia, while also recalling a personal epiphany about class:

Someone had organized a workshop for working-class academics; a room full of us sat there, some cried. I hadn’t really articulated until then the intensity of shame I had brought with me. Silent, not speaking, I began to realize how my career as a lesbian academic had been prefaced by a professionalization which demanded that certain other identities had to be forsaken. Thus, I was caught between two forms of silence: that of the American identity politics context, in which having a ‘voice’ seems so troublesome, and that of the British bourgeoisification of my perversity, which resulted in my feeling that in Huddersfield, where I grew up, I am ashamed of being gay, whereas in Brighton [as an academic], I am ashamed of coming from the northern working class.²

Class is a taboo subject in the contemporary academe, Munt argues. She had lived “through the years of lesbian feminism” in Brighton, but as the identitarian politics she

¹ Steph Lawler, “Escape and Escapism: Representing Working-Class Women”, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 116. [Emphasis in original.]

² Sally R. Munt, “Introduction” to *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 9.

espoused came to the fore of academic discussions, “class became a wound” — “to articulate its concerns was to be labelled a spoiler, a guilt-tripper, a Manichean thinker, a fifth columnist”.³ While British society shifted cumbersomely towards the acceptance of sexual and racial diversity, its new pluralism overshadowed the old class war, not least because class is not as blatant as skin colour or as clear-cut an issue as sexual equality. “As a butch lesbian, my sexual status was visible,” Munt explains; “it was my (classed) history that feared exposure”.⁴

In the same volume of essays, another Cultural Studies academic, Andy Medhurst, also extrapolates from personal experience to illustrate the evacuation of class from mainstream academic concerns. During tutorials on the study of soap operas, Medhurst noted the hypocrisy of identity politics *sans* class consciousness. His students would “cluck like good white liberals about the paucity of black characters” in soaps, “but yet also make fun of the working-class accents, lifestyles and even names found in those serials”:

I even had otherwise impeccably progressive students distribute handouts to groups which give characters’ names not as they are really spelled, but jokingly respelled in a mocking approximation of how these students hear the characters talk.

Thus, *Eastenders*’ Bianca becomes “Beeang-urgh”, and while such juvenile antics may seem trivial or even harmless, Medhurst makes the point that “these students would be outraged if they saw an Asian or West Indian accent reproduced in such parodic terms by white people”.⁵ The use of working-class accents for humorous/deflationary effect in advertising, comedy, television and film has attracted some level of commentary in Britain, but in Ireland – while such uses are apparent – they remain almost completely undocumented and untheorised.⁶ The widespread capacity to unquestioningly accept the kind of class discrimination that Medhurst reveals illustrates the enduring

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andy Medhurst, “If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics”, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 29.

⁶ See Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 95; See also Beverly Skeggs’ essay, “Classifying Practices: Representations, Capitals and Recognitions”, in *Class Matters: ‘Working-class’ Women’s Perspectives on Social Class*, ed. Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek (London: Taylor & Francis, 1997), p. 125.

prevalence of class prejudice and class shame: “evidently class is fair game for the ideological exercise of linguistic condescension”.⁷

In a recent article, Irish commentator Fintan O’Toole also invoked comparisons from popular culture to illustrate how “social class” arouses “an underlying discomfort” in Irish society. After a number of boxers from working-class Dublin were fêted for their successes at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, O’Toole rained on the proverbial parade:

As so often in the past, national pride was salvaged by those of whom the nation generally feels least proud: young, working class men from marginalised communities. While the horsey set, with all their money and self-regard, were making a show of us yet again, the competitors who demonstrated honesty and discipline, pride and passion, were from the invisible Ireland that is represented only in court reports.⁸

Like Medhurst and Munt, O’Toole draws attention to the role of popular culture in the marginalisation of the nation’s proletarian bêtes noires. “Their accents are heard most often in caricatured advertisements, where they stand for criminality or stupidity,” he observes: “Unless they become individuals by making waves in sport, they are skangers, chavs, hoodies, knackers”. These social Others come from “non-place[s]”, with galling levels of poverty and exceptionally low educational attainment. Stereotypes popular amongst Ireland’s “well-to-do”, of young men who “wear hoodies and white socks and throw shapes and sip cans of Dutch Gold lager on the back seat of the bus”, allow for “a reassuring distance” from such places.⁹

Candid discussions of class like this chafe with postmodern sensibilities. The structuralist categorisations required for class analysis are the very anathema of the fixation on “slippage” and deconstruction that has emerged from the “Linguistic Turn”. Class’s invocation in academic discussions is hedged with apprehensions surrounding its rationality.¹⁰ Gordon Marshall draws attention to the tendency towards opaque

⁷ Medhurst, “If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics”, p. 29.

⁸ Fintan O’Toole, “Boxers offer a window into our marginalised society”, *The Irish Times*, 26 August 2008, p. 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the relationship between postmodernism and class, see Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 25-30.

theorisation in postmodernism, noting that “the postmodernist critique of class analysis has largely detached itself from empirical reality”.¹¹ That reality is essential in any understanding of the social aspects of literature, and class, as I shall show, is still a valid and useful tool in attempting to delineate the exploitative social relations and polarised cultural positions which characterise, spatially and socially, the contours of modern Irish society. My undertaking in this thesis is to explore how class manifests in Dublin’s literature, and to argue that the body of literature examined represents a distinct, heretofore academically unrecognised lineage in Irish writing. In this introductory chapter, I will first examine the importance of class in general theoretical terms. I will then proceed to a short discussion of Ireland’s and Dublin’s working class, its endurance throughout various economic changes, its relevance to Irish Studies, and some of the reasons why it has attracted so little academic commentary — *particularly* in terms of literature. I will then outline the principal theoretical approaches that guide the central arguments of this thesis, and elaborate its hermeneutic methods and its influences. Some clarifications on the scope of the research, including a chapter outline and a rationale for my choice of authors and primary works follows. A summary of the central arguments of the study concludes the chapter.

Class matters

Class exists objectively as “an empirical category, and its enduring subjective existence as lived experience”. Relative deprivation “not only affect[s] life-chances (quantifiably), but also lifestyles, in the way that we measure and differentiate our social status (quantifiably). The gradations of such social status inform and prescribe our mobility through social space; they affect our bodily practices, circumscribe our ideational reality, our sense of self”.¹² Why, then, has class become the proverbial elephant in the drawing room of so many disciplines, not least Irish Studies? Why, if

¹¹ Gordon Marshall, *Repositioning Class: Social Inequality in Industrial Societies* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 17.

¹² Munt, “Introduction” to *Cultural Studies and the Working Class*, p. 3.

class is inextricable from “aesthetic” matters, from our “way of life, appearance or language”, has it become the unfashionable shibboleth of a hidden Ireland?¹³

In general terms, class encompasses not only the economic rubrics under which humanity is objectively categorised, but also a great deal of the quotidian social and cultural manifestations of subjective human experience. As E.P. Thompson put it, “class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences [...] feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves”, and class consciousness is “the way in which those experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and cultural forms”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the theorisation of class is notoriously prone to ambiguity, slippage and vigorous disagreement. As Joan Craig puts it in Ellen Wilkinson’s English novel of the 1926 General Strike, *Clash* (1929), even amid the polarisation of industrial unrest, class is a “complicated business”: “There must be a line between capitalist and worker somewhere, but whenever you think you’ve got it, it’s always somewhere else. There’s an obvious gulf between Harry Browne and the Duke of Northumberland, or Mr. Gordon Selfridge, or his own immediate boss, but where does the line shade off?”¹⁵ Theory must strive to loosen the straitjacket of impossibly restrictive dogma, Wilkinson suggests, but it must also atomise the dynamics of exploitation in a way that can explain prevailing socio-economic relationships on a basic, empirical level. In the gulf between the micro and macro, the typical and the particular, theories of class often come undone.

Thompson indeed warned against “a static view of class”, postulating that it “is a relationship, not a thing”.¹⁶ Class is an organic, mutable concept, shifting according to the vicissitudes of historical change, but nonetheless charting a solid continuity of human affairs under capitalism. “Class is never simply a category of the present tense. It is a matter of history, a relationship with tradition, a discourse of roots.”¹⁷ Whereas Thompson problematised theories of class structure – corresponding with more recent studies that re-evaluate class in light of the fragmentary and consensual nature of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 8, 9.

¹⁵ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 297.

¹⁶ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 9, 10.

¹⁷ Medhurst, “If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics”, p. 20.

modern capitalist society – his essential achievement was to delineate their durability in British life.¹⁸ As John R. Hall has put it:

to come to terms with these challenges, it is necessary to avoid the twin modernisms—the Charybdis of historicism and the Scylla of reified formal theory. We need to acknowledge the role of theory in providing language that makes analytic discussion of classes possible, yet account for classes in their historicities.

The challenge, Hall contends, is to negotiate between the “structural holism” of Marxist approaches to class and the stress on “slippage between the empirical world and any ‘structures’ presumed to undergird or represent it” that inheres in poststructuralist thinking.¹⁹

The roots of a discourse

Karl Marx’s conception of class defined it in terms of sharp economic disparities. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), class is explained as a register of antagonisms, whereby, “insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in a hostile contrast to the latter, they form a class”.²⁰ In *Capital* (1867), his three “great classes” are postulated as “the owners of mere labour-power, the owners of capital and the landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground rent – in other words, wage-labourers, capitalists and landowners”.²¹ Marx allowed for the existence of intermediate strata in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, but these were mere anomalies in capitalism’s irrevocable progress towards a “pure form”.²²

¹⁸ See, for example, Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class* (London: Sage, 1996); Marshall, *Repositioning Class: Social Inequality in Industrial Societies*; or more recently Nick Cohen, *What's Left? How Liberals Lost their Way* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007).

¹⁹ John R. Hall, “The Reworking of Class Analysis”, in *Reworking Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell UP, 1997), p. 9.

²⁰ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Hugh Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 200.

²¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by David Fernbach, 3 vols. (London: Penguin, 1993) III, p. 1025.

²² *Ibid.*

However, herein lies the rub: in those who fall between Marx's three stools, the question continually arises as to how occupational positions that have ostensibly contradictory or possibly conflated class interests are to be read from within structuralist paradigms. The exceptions threaten to destabilise the rule, and the endurance of this question – not least because of the failure of Marxism's predictions of capitalism's progress to a "pure form" – compounds the quandary for traditional Marxists. If capitalism allows for mobility, slippage, contradictory class locations, the modern consensual arrangements between unions and capitalists and the various other grey areas of the welfare state, how can stratification analysis stand? What happens when, in advanced capitalist societies like those of modern Europe, the development of service industries and white-collar jobs begins to fudge the barriers between working and middle-classes?

Reconceptualising class

According to Nicos Poulantzas, in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1975), two criteria can be employed to clarify the cleft between proletariat and bourgeoisie.²³ Returning to the determinist discourse, he defines the working class as those workers who produce surplus value and who are directly employed in material production; returning to tradition, he locates the division of proletarian and bourgeois between manual and mental labour. But Poulantzas' theoretical approach to stratification would seem to merely add to the confusion. Such a formula appears entirely outmoded in societies where the barrier between both definitions (profiteers/surplus value producers and mental/manual workers) is increasingly blurred.

Some neo-Marxist theorists, like Serge Mallet in *Essays on the New Working Class* (1975), readily acknowledge this blurring, but proceed by contrast to a *proletarianisation* thesis.²⁴ They argue that traditional middle-class elements are in fact brought into a larger proletariat in Western economies.²⁵ Wage earners of all types are

²³ Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, trans. D. Fernbach (London: New Left Books, 1975).

²⁴ Serge Mallet, *Essays on the New Working Class*, ed. Dick Howard (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975).

²⁵ See for example Rosemary Crompton and Gareth Jones, *White-Collar Proletariat: Deskilling and Gender in Clerical Work* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

amalgamated into a “new working class” by the reduction of educational and technological hierarchies in workplaces and the clearer alignment of society into two conflicting class interests: those of the wage earners and the profit makers. But with highly paid professionals and trades workers earning far in excess of the cost of labour reproduction in advanced economies – with wage earners with shares in multinational companies and apartments in foreign resorts – can this thesis really be sustained?

The proletarianisation analysis is accompanied by sociological approaches to class which stratify society into smaller groups, based not only on the division of wealth, but also on educational attainment and social status. This analysis seeks to find the subtle lines of division “between capitalist and worker” that Wilkinson’s trade unionist had found so elusive. Erik Olin Wright (1985, 94) identifies twelve different class positions within the modern capitalist economy.²⁶ He strives to resolve the debate over Marx’s shortcomings by redefining the allegiances of seemingly anomalous positions in the modern class system *within* Marx’s original mould. Managers in capitalist enterprise – who might well be wage labourers, but are also clearly allied with wage payers – are reassessed in terms of “organizational assets”: their relative authority over workers and control of production. Professionals, who might equally confound the traditional classifications, are reconstituted in terms of “skill” and “credential” assets.²⁷ Wright posits “skill exploitation” and “organization exploitation” as new interventions in the Marxist tradition, and new ways of conceptualising class divisions:

In skill exploitation, owners of scarce skills are able to extract a rent component in their wages. This is basically a component of the wage above and beyond the costs of producing and reproducing the skills themselves [...] In organization exploitation, managers are able to appropriate part of the surplus through the power which they command inside the bureaucratic structures of capitalist production.

This understanding of exploitation explains

²⁶ Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985) and *Interrogating Inequality: Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism* (London: Verso, 1994).

²⁷ Erik Olin Wright, “Rethinking, Once Again, the Concept of Class Structure”, abridged by Maureen Sullivan, in *Reworking Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell UP, 1997), p. 55.

those locations in the class structure which were exploited on one mechanism of exploitation but were exploiters on another. Professional and technical employees, for example, can be seen as capitalistically exploited but skills exploiters. They thus constitute ‘contradictory locations within exploitation relations’.²⁸

These workers very often receive stakes in business from employers keen to retain their indispensable assets; they are part of a “hierarchy of authority”.²⁹

But while Wright conceptualises a new paradigm of class in terms of status, wealth, socio-economic alignment and education, he frames it within the old tripartite model of owners, industrialists and workers. Hall argues that this analysis amounts to a shift towards the Weberian approach to class, “incorporating Weberian themes within a structuralist Marxist edifice”, but Wright counters that the Weberian refusal to accept class warfare as a principle dynamic of social reproduction would not allow for his own adherence to a core Marxist precept — the centrality of the worker’s exploitation to all economic understanding.³⁰ Wright conceptualises complex, modern social and economic relations, “stubbornly working inside of Marxism”.³¹

This accommodation of modern occupational and economic subtleties into a Marxist paradigm is attractive in theorising working-class consciousness. While it admits the deficiencies in Manichean concepts of class formation, it also allows for the enduring sense of class as a lived experience of wage labourers, with varying degrees of skills, education, and earnings. Mostly, working-class people come from the same communities, are born into the same class as their parents (as studies show), and experience shared cultural, political and economic references. The challenge is to elaborate on Marx, as Wright puts it, “to explore a new way of adding complexity to the concept of class structure”, which explains “empirical variations” and develops, “within a broadly Marxist theoretical framework, a class structure capable of being used in analyses of micro-level processes at a relatively low level of abstraction”.³²

²⁸ Wright, *Interrogating Inequality*, p. 251.

²⁹ Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 80.

³⁰ Hall, “The Reworking of Class Analysis”, p. 13.

³¹ Wright, *Interrogating Inequality*, p. 13.

³² Erik Olin Wright, “Rethinking, Once Again, the Concept of Class Structure”, pp. 42-43. While Wright himself conceptualised the theory of “contradictory [class] locations” in the late 1970s, which allowed for the anomalies that gradations of management and self-employment, for instance, highlight within

Within this, it is imperative to remember that “class structures define a set of ‘locations’ filled by individuals subjected to a set of mechanisms that impinge directly on their lives as they make choices and act in the world”, therefore “moving from the *abstract* to the *concrete*”.³³ Taxonomies of class that draw on theories of historical development and structural antagonisms are only useful insofar as they represent lived experience. Classes “share common dilemmas with respect to collective action as well as individual pursuit of economic welfare and power”.³⁴ The “experience of being forced to sell one’s labour power in order to survive [...] does not simply define a set of material interests of actors, but a set of experiences as well”.³⁵ Indeed, it is interesting in this context that when Irish people were recently asked what defined class mostly for them, “accent [was] regarded as the most significant indicator of class—more than house, job, clothes, car or schooling”.³⁶ When class inflects things like accent and idiom, when it affects a person’s social status, cultural interests, gender relations, and occupational prospects, it seems rather obvious that it is still a vital tool in exploring culture.

However, in its focus on economic determinism, the debate between Wright and his detractors tends to obfuscate another important element in class formation: the extent to which the working class forms itself internally, *after the fact* of its exploitation. Etienne Balibar (1970) believes that “classes are *functions of the process of production as a whole*. They are not its subjects, on the contrary, they are determined by its form”.³⁷ But this reduction of class to mere formula is something that a student of literature is likely to find unattractive, particularly in illuminating the study of working-class *cultural* and *social* life — and in attending to the organic formation of subjectivities from *within* that life. Thompson himself rebuffed Balibar’s reductivism

Marx, such contradictory locations only show that “people in certain locations within the class structure are simultaneously exploited through one mechanism of exploitation but exploiters through another mechanism”. Ibid. pp. 53-55. Notwithstanding this complexity, “classes are fundamentally polarized around processes of exploitation”. Ibid. 60.

³³ Ibid. 44. [Emphasis in original.]

³⁴ Ibid. 48.

³⁵ Ibid. 49.

³⁶ David McWilliams, *The Pope’s Children: The Irish Economic Triumph and the Rise of Ireland’s New Elite* (NJ: Wiley, 2008), p. 27.

³⁷ Etienne Balibar, “The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism”, in *Reading Capital*, ed. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar (London: New Left, 1972), p. 267. [Emphasis in original.]

by stressing working-class agency in class formation. He lamented that, in Balibar's hypothesis, "the subject (or agent) of history [had] disappear[ed] once again" and "for the *n*th time, [was] re-ified". Since

classes are 'functions of the process of production' (a process into which, it seems, no human agency could possibly enter), the way is thrown open once again to all the rubbish of deducing classes [...] within a mode of production [...] conceived as *something other than* its eventuation in historical process.³⁸

Crucially for Thompson, this view omits the consideration of class "self-activity" — his belief that "the working class 'made itself as much as it was made'":

We cannot put 'class' here and 'class consciousness' there, as two separate entities [...] since class formations and class consciousness (while subject to determinate pressures) eventuate in an open-ended process of *relationship*—of struggle with other classes—over time.³⁹

This discussion recurs in the seventh chapter of my thesis, in which I analyse Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999) in terms of its conception of working-class agency, or the lack thereof. For the moment it suffices to observe that Thompson advocates the effective *humanisation* of the working class within the Marxist mould, which, he suggests, cannot be performed from within a narrow and "re-ified" framework of deterministic class analysis. The working class is conscious because it exists in a dynamic struggle with other classes. It is the product of a dialectic of economic development and self-actuation; it has a culture, a history, a sense of its own existence that renders theoretical debates on whether class exists or not irrelevant. It is my contention in this thesis that Wright's and Thompson's respective conceptualisations of class as *empirical reality* and as *intra-class cultural re-production* offer a fruitful and relevant continuation of the Marxist tradition in an advanced capitalist context. Wright overcomes the obsession with Marx as a Manichean dogma by reformulating his theories to reflect the modern context, but the centrality of

³⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin, 1978), p. 298-299; for further discussion of the contrast in approaches see Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), pp. 9-11.

³⁹ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, pp. 298-299.

exploitation and antagonism remains. Thompson attends to the contingencies of history and economics, while also highlighting the role of working-class *people* in creating class as a *social* and *cultural* phenomenon. My understanding of class in this thesis proceeds from this neo-Marxian concept of class structure, and a belief in the enduring relevance of the proletariat as a culturally, socially and empirically self-evident cohort. But, following Thompson's stress on the importance of history, how has this cohort manifested and developed in Ireland's capital city?

Working-class Dublin

"Irish society is often thought of as a classless society", as Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran observe in *A Sociology of Ireland* (2007). Irish people's legendary warmth and lack of reverence for status is proffered as evidence of a lack of obvious stratification, they note. People here prefer "to use first names even with relative strangers rather than titles and surnames", and the Republic of Ireland, despite deep inequalities, is assumed by many to be a less hierarchical state than others. Furthermore, in the first decade of the twenty-first century there is a general perception of increased opportunities for social mobility that problematises the clarity and application of class analysis.⁴⁰ Drawing on Kieran Allen's analysis of the lexicon of "social problems" – which frames debates on wealth distribution in public discussions – Share, Tovey and Corcoran convey how Irish perceptions of class have shifted into a common perception of "gross differentiation between the majority – the 'more or less middle classes' – and an 'underclass' made up of the poor, the long-term unemployed, substance abusers and marginalised groups".⁴¹ This, they argue, is a fanciful characterisation of class inequalities, but it is true that popular discourse and common perception often confute the Marxian dissection of Irish society by class.

As Allen expounds in another publication (and as Share, Tovey and Corcoran's analysis attests), the facts of Celtic Tiger Ireland disprove such familiar assumptions of

⁴⁰ Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), p. 170.

⁴¹ Kieran Allen, "The Celtic Tiger, inequality and social partnership", *Administration* 47.2 (summer 1999), p. 39; Share, Tovey and Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland*, p. 170.

classlessness. While the perception of generally increased wealth in Ireland has undoubtedly been embedded in a real, unprecedented increase in living standards across the board, “workers [are] receiving a lower share of the wealth they [were] producing than before”.⁴² Indeed, a widening chasm in earning levels accompanied the rising tide that lifted all boats, Allen notes, and he concludes that “class divisions and even class struggle have become more relevant than ever before in Ireland today”.⁴³ Perhaps this slippage between the rhetoric of public discourse and the glaring reality of Irish life in the Celtic Tiger years betrays something more fundamental in the Irish psyche. As Share, Tovey and Corcoran attest, sociological research has shown that “despite common-sense assumptions to the contrary class inequality is and has been a highly significant feature of Irish social organisation”.⁴⁴ Even at the height of Ireland’s ballooning affluence in 2005, a survey conducted by Amárach consultants found that 30 per cent of the Republic’s population still designated themselves as working class.⁴⁵ Self-designation of this sort can be fanciful (although it generally tends to underestimate the size the working class and inflate that of the bourgeoisie), but it conveys that a strong sense of class divisions still obtains in this society.

Peter Beresford Ellis’s *A History of the Irish Working Class* (1972, revised 1985) provides a useful, if at times theoretically flawed overview of working-class Ireland. It locates the development of the Irish working class within a broad field of historical evolution, and pays particular attention to the conditions that led to the 1913 Dublin Lockout strike and the subsequent diminution of proletarian struggle in the Free State. It also accords due attention to the effect of Partition and the 1969-1998 Northern Ireland conflict on working-class life. However, Beresford Ellis’s inclusion of a chapter-long discussion on James Connolly’s “Celtic Communism”, for instance, lends a needless and misleadingly primitivist twist to the work; his constant digressions into dogmatic polemics also overshadow his essential achievement.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he sacrifices a more detailed discussion of the social history of working-class Ireland for

⁴² Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), p. 71.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 2.

⁴⁴ Share, Tovey and Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland*, p. 171.

⁴⁵ 50 per cent saw themselves as middle class; cited in McWilliams, *The Pope’s Children*, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Peter Beresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (Dublin: Pluto, 1989), pp. 11-26.

an inordinate focus on the macro-politics of decolonisation, relapsing into the standard discursive obsessions of Irish historiography despite his stated intention of tracing a very specific *history of the working class*.

In terms of political developments, Brian Girvin provides an excellent analysis of the Irish working class from the 1920s to the 1980s in an essay published in *Saothar*, the journal of the Irish Labour History Society — a publication which has proved indispensable to my work.⁴⁷ But both Girvin's essay and the bulk of *Saothar*'s research concentrate specifically on the history of trade union and left *political* activity, as does Charles McCarthy's *Trade Unions in Ireland 1894-1960* (1977) and Emmet O'Connor's *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-1960* (1992). Apart from the work of Kevin C. Kearns, discussed below, and a number of memoirs and local history books, social and cultural histories of working-class life are few and far between.

As Girvin notes, "the absence of industrial expansion prior to 1932 severely restricted the impact of the working class on politics and society", notwithstanding the 1913 Lockout and the execution of trade union leader James Connolly three years later.⁴⁸ Additionally, with the introduction of economic protectionism after that year, the state continued to experience low levels of industrial development. The Republic's heavy reliance on agriculture and small-scale business during the first half of the twentieth century retarded its industrialisation in European terms.⁴⁹ And the first three decades of independence were grim ones for urban proletarians, with slum conditions persisting, and the effects of the economic war with Britain and rations during World War II stifling opportunities for material betterment. While Britain and much of Europe entered a period of relative affluence for their working classes in the 1950s, Ireland plunged further into poverty, with a decade-long economic slump after Seán McEntee's

⁴⁷ Brian Girvin, "Industrialisation and the Irish Working Class Since 1922", *Saothar* 10 (1986), 31-42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 31.

⁴⁹ Nonetheless, in 1942 the Labour Party managed to become the largest single party in Dublin Corporation, and it achieved its largest share of the vote since 1922 in the general election of the following year. This gain was turned to substantial losses in the election of 1944, but it registered, at least for a time, a measure of the often dormant or unrecognised potential of labour sentiment in working-class Dublin.

1952 budget.⁵⁰ During this decade, the state experienced unprecedented levels of emigration and joblessness. From 1951 to 1961, 400,000 people left the state, many for Britain.⁵¹ From 1955 to 1957 – which was the worst period of the decade economically – unemployment went from 70,000 to 95,000.⁵² Working-class Dublin was greatly diminished by emigration, isolation and ghettoisation in these years.

Abandonment of protectionism in the 1960s, however, breathed a new vitality into social and economic relationships across the country. Charles McCarthy would characterise trade unionism in Ireland in the 1960s as a “decade of upheaval”.⁵³ While huge numbers of working days were lost to industrial disputes in 1961, 1964, 1965, 1966 and 1969, the more important underlying factor here was the changing *nature* of the economy, as it was transformed into an increasingly open, free-trading and industrialised modern financial system.⁵⁴ O’Casey’s urban proletariat was still there, with its distinctive “urban subculture”:

In particular, Dublin is its home; and to a lesser extent Cork. In Dublin it has inherited from its rich history a conviction of superiority, a conviction that one mile west of Inchicore, the bog begins. This is the subculture of the 1913 strike, of the O’Casey plays, and of the Irish trade union movement [...] is a tradition which has little place in our national histories, although there are few Irishmen who are not aware of it.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ The interim return to government of a second inter-party coalition headed by John A. Costello in 1954 led up to the second economic crisis of the decade in 1956. While sixty per cent of Irish workers earned less than £10 per week by 1960, the comparative figure in Britain was a mere eight per cent.

⁵¹ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 578.

⁵² See Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 2006), pp. 187-188. For an analysis of the unemployed movements in this period, see Evanne Kilmurray’s *Fight, Starve or Emigrate: A History of the Irish Unemployed Movements in the 1950s* (Dublin: Larkin Unemployed Centre, 1988). Dublin’s class consciousness was illustrated in political terms in 1957, when Unemployed Protest Committee candidate Jack Murphy was elected to the Dáil for Dublin South Central. The Labour Party only had one seat in Dublin in 1961, although it doubled its vote in the city in the 1965 election. From 1961-69, Labour’s vote went from 8.4 per cent of the total vote in Dublin, to 28.3 per cent. See Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2004), pp. 559-562.

⁵³ Charles McCarthy, *The Decade of Upheaval: Irish Trade Unions in the Nineteen Sixties* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1973).

⁵⁴ Working days lost due to strikes were at 377, 264 in 1961, 545, 384 in 1964, 552, 351 in 1965, 783, 635 in 1966, and 935,900 in 1969; See Teresa Brannick, Francis Devine and Aidan Kelly, “Social Statistics for Labour Historians: Strike Statistics, 1922-99”, *Saothar* 25 (2000), 114-120.

⁵⁵ McCarthy, *The Decade of Upheaval*, p. 7.

Isolated from “the bog”, this Ireland was “quite different from the Anglican—and the Gaelic” Irelands.⁵⁶ Alexander Humphries noted in 1966 that “the sense of class remain[ed] strong among Dubliners” who exhibited a “strong, continuing class consciousness”.⁵⁷

But now Dublin’s proletariat was being enlarged, joined by displaced rural dwellers who came to the city for jobs.⁵⁸ Terence Brown comments that it was also in the 1960s that the Republic became truly alive to the debates on class issues and social conditions that had long preoccupied the rest of modern Europe.⁵⁹ Following on recommendations made in the government’s *Investment in Education* report of 1965, the 1967-68 free post-primary education scheme facilitated the attendance of poorer children at secondary schools. This was a key enabler for the working class, and is identified by poet Paula Meehan as responsible for bringing it into contact with a formerly alien sphere of educational endeavour.⁶⁰ It created new opportunities and a heightened social status, while also laying the groundwork for growing literary interest. Supposed cultural certainties were eroding too. Tom Garvin cites the late 1960s as the period from which there was “a steady increase in the post-Catholic and ‘à la carte’ Catholic segments of the population”; an increase, he adds, which followed a “class and urban-rural divide”.⁶¹ Indeed, for the first time more people were living in cities and towns than in the Irish countryside, and less people were working in rural occupations, such as farming and fisheries.⁶² Many more were now engaged in electronics,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Alexander Humphries, *New Dubliners* (London: Routledge, 1998; orig. 1966), p. 196.

⁵⁸ Despite the growing profile of the urban working class, with its “subculture of the 1913 strike”, and despite the growth in industrial unrest during the decade, the assertion of working-class issues in the political sphere was hampered by a divided left. Political splits, characterised in the 1960s and 1970s by a proliferation of socialist organisations – such as the Workers’ Party, Sinn Féin, the Socialist Labour Alliance, the Socialist Party of Ireland, People’s Democracy, the League for a Workers’ Republic, Young Socialists, the Communist Party of Ireland and Saor Éire – created confusion rather than cohesion.

⁵⁹ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Harper, 2004), p. 94.

⁶⁰ Interview by present author with Paula Meehan, 11 May 2005.

⁶¹ Tom Garvin, “A Quiet Revolution: The Remaking of Irish Political Culture” in *Writing in the Irish Republic*, p. 199.

⁶² In 1961, half of Ireland’s employed men worked in farming; by 1981, the figure decreased to one fifth. I use figures for men here and below, as figures for women’s work tell us less about their social position than that of their male partners does. From the 1930s to 1961, the number of Irish women in the paid workforce actually decreased; See Share et al., *A Sociology of Ireland*, p. 262. Even as late as 1971, only 8 per cent of married women in the Republic were involved in the paid labour force, with the figure rising to (only) 17 per cent in 1981. However, the period 1951 to 1991 overall saw a seven-fold increase

engineering, the professions and office work, and the Irish population was increasingly concentrated in Dublin.⁶³ Michel Peillon observed that the “rapid urbanisation which [had] engulfed” the city with a pace of “almost crisis proportions”, made Dublin less of a “Pale” on the periphery of the rustic and revered culture of the Gaelic peasantry, than a social, economic and cultural centre in which formerly dominant, conservative cultural norms were increasingly outmoded.⁶⁴

But while the 1960s engendered a renewed vitality in the city in industrial and demographic terms, the history of the working-class community it contains is best understood in terms of actual levels of class cohesion (or mobility) and the inequalities that have maintained (or mitigated) it. By the 1970s, seventy per cent of workers were wage earners, compared with forty-eight per cent in 1926. Nonetheless, poverty endured, with less than half of skilled manual and one third of semi-skilled and unskilled households being owner occupiers by 1973.⁶⁵ Moreover, while big business was beginning to thrive from the 1960s, and while this would suggest that conditions were emerging for increased social mobility, working-class people largely remained working class.

By the mid-1980s nearly seventy five per cent of working males were employed in businesses not owned by their respective families, and skilled manual occupations had increased along with managerial and white-collar occupations, but the Republic’s proletariat still suffered from chronically low levels of upward social mobility. Even in the late 1980s, seventy per cent of working-class men in the state were themselves the children of working-class men, and “in comparison with other Western European countries, the Irish figure for immobility [was] comparatively high”.⁶⁶ Indeed, with 300,000 unemployed in the Republic by 1988, mobility was often downward in Dublin’s most impoverished communities, where unemployment rates sometimes

in the number of married women in the paid workforce; *Ibid.*; Kieran A. Kennedy, Thomas Giblin, and Deirdre McHugh, *The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 71, 148.

⁶³ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 246.

⁶⁴ Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982), p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 117.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 175. Richard Breen and Christopher T. Whelan also observed an “extremely low level of upward mobility” from the working-class into middle-class jobs at this time; Richard Breen and Christopher T. Whelan, *Social mobility and Social Class in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), p. 169.

exceeded 80 per cent of the working-age population. Class inequality in Ireland since the middle of the twentieth century has remained gaping.

In the previous fifty years, life chances were heavily predicated on family ownership of farms or businesses, and on position within the family.⁶⁷ For those seeking employment, “not many positions were available to those who had only educational qualifications to rely on”. On the contrary, “family contacts and connections” were often the means of occupational attainment for those who didn’t emigrate or enter the religious orders — a reality comically illustrated by Lee Dunne’s Paddy Maguire, in his novel and later play, *Goodbye to the Hill* (novel 1965, play 1976), where the shifty working-class Dubliner is forced to lie and inveigle his way into an office job. Michel Peillon also noted the pervasive nature of the anti-meritocratic culture of “who you know” as the “magical” formula for success.⁶⁸ The lack of useful connections amongst the dispossessed is a theme that recurs in literature – from A. P. Wilson’s *The Slough* (1914), to Paul Mercier’s *Studs* (1986), as I discuss in Chapter 2 – but by the latter quarter of the twentieth century, Ireland’s dramatic shift in economic activity might be expected to have transformed such familiar, stunted social and economic relations. However, despite the considerable adjustment that “external dependent industrialisation” entailed, it seems that the prospects of mobility for, and the socio-economic power of working-class Dubliners actually *diminished* during this period.⁶⁹

This paradox may be partially explained by the diverse quality of the industrialisation. While in nearby Britain the “enclave character” of major industry – mass local employment in coal mines or super-factories, for instance – led to an intensification of class solidarity, in Ireland a “very different structure” prevailed.⁷⁰ Many branch plants in the Republic employed small numbers of maintenance craftsmen and relatively large numbers of semi-skilled employees, but because of the specified nature of the work in such companies, “the experience of work [was] unlikely to

⁶⁷ During the 1940s, over half of the Irish workforce was still engaged in agricultural work, as against only 14 per cent in industry; Kenneth D. Brown, “Trade Unionism in Ireland”, *Saothar* 5 (1979), p. 58.

⁶⁸ Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society*, p. 37.

⁶⁹ James Wickham, “The New Irish Working Class?” in *Saothar* 6 (1980), p. 84.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

militate in favour of a strong working-class identity — least of all the macho male type typified by the early 20th century Clydeside or South Wales”.⁷¹ This macho male type was perhaps akin to that associated with the brawny Dublin docker, but the port industries that employed Dublin’s radicalised inner-city labourers were by the 1960s facing dramatic decline.

New industries were often located away from the larger population centres that had an established trade union tradition and which might have harnessed the new opportunities in different ways. Surprisingly, by 1974 “less than a quarter of new manufacturing employment was in the Eastern Region, although this contained nearly half of existing such employment”.⁷² In the period from 1973-1977, when manufacturing employment rose by 60 per cent in the Western Region, it actually *dropped* by 10 per cent in the East.⁷³ In 1980, James Wickham argued that despite the increase in the relative size of the working class in previous decades, the growth of jobs dependent on large multinational organisations had actually reduced the influence of that class.⁷⁴ The old industries, such as metal foundries – which had expanded to meet domestic needs during the state’s protracted period of protectionism – were now also in decline. Plants producing items such as footwear or motor parts, with their “strong trade union organization [and] transferability of skills between plants” were “almost completely destroyed”.⁷⁵ Dublin was experiencing a period of “deindustrialisation” — despite what is largely remembered as an era of *national* industrial growth. Expansion in white-collar jobs and occupations traditionally held by women was availed of in the main by displaced rural dwellers. Along with the construction of council housing estates and flats that created ghettos of unemployment and disadvantage throughout the city – with little in terms of amenities and infrastructure – the decline in traditional working opportunities compounded the alienation of working-class Dublin in economic

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 85.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ James Wickham, “The Politics of Dependent Capitalism: International Capital and the Nation State”, in *Ireland: Divided Nation, Divided Class*, ed. Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (London: Ink Links, 1980), pp. 53–73.

⁷⁵ James Wickham, “The New Irish Working Class?”, p. 85.

and social terms. Such alienation resonates throughout the fiction and plays I have studied.

A further irony is that despite widespread contemporary assumptions that the Republic has become a more meritocratic, classless society, the rigidity of the class structure continues to confound economic indicators. Recently, Whelan and Layte have shown that the number of Irish people in professional and managerial jobs “has grown substantially since the 1970s”, that “this trend has intensified over the past decade” and that “the proportion of the population in low-skilled occupations has fallen steadily”.⁷⁶ But again the figures mask a deeper inequality. Notwithstanding the demonstrable overall increase in skilled and managerial employment, “those at the top of the class structure have enjoyed considerable success in maintaining an unfair advantage”.⁷⁷ Where children from different social classes attain the same levels of education, “working-class children are still less likely to attain the better occupational position than their middle-class peers”.⁷⁸ Additionally, whereas in “absolute” terms social mobility has increased, “the offspring of working-class groups” are still “relatively disadvantaged in comparison to the offspring of middle-class groups”; the children of farmers and office workers are on the move, but not so the children of the lower socio-economic groups.⁷⁹

In 1982, Peillon noted how class lines were closely marshalled in Ireland by social norms: few people from other classes married into the working class; office workers on low wages, despite their “transitional position”, refused to recognise their shared interests within the working class; social mobility for working-class children could be measured “over very short distances”.⁸⁰ This rigid inequality has endured throughout the period I examine. In the Celtic Tiger era, “even where working-class children have an identical IQ and educational qualifications to middle-class children, they are still less likely to make it into the most advantaged occupations and social

⁷⁶ Christopher T. Whelan, and Richard Layte, “Opportunities for All in the New Ireland?”, in *Best of Times? The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger*, ed. by Tony Fahey, Helen Russell and Christopher T. Whelan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2007), p. 67.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 68.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 72.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 77.

⁸⁰ Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society*, p. 29, 32, 31.

classes”, amounting to “a reduction in [...] equality over time”.⁸¹ Things are getting better, for some, but slowly, and the rhetoric of “modernisation” that assumes a corollary between overall economic growth and social mobility across classes rings hollow in the light of empirical data. Recently, Peadar Kirby observed that

young people whose parents are unemployed or from unskilled manual groups tend to experience disproportionate levels of unemployment. The result can be clearly identified in the concentration of pockets of high unemployment and severe social problems in a number of urban centres, even at the height of Ireland’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ phase.⁸²

Whether this social inequality that has persisted in the years of the boom will intensify in the years of the bust remains to be seen.

Education, the academe, culture and class

What emerges in all this evidence of inequality is that Dublin’s working class has grown considerably over the past half century, that its members have largely remained in that class and that, despite the various advantages of economic growth, this community has continued to live on the margins of social and economic power. This reality resonates in the fiction and plays I explore.

It is also apparent that working-class life has remained out of sight in terms of many areas of academic study in Ireland, notwithstanding the work of sociologists cited above. As Wickham argued, “Labour history can no longer be equated solely with the history of the trade unions” and “traditions and subcultures must be studied seriously and not plucked out of thin air and used to explain everything else”.⁸³ Kevin C. Kearns’ 1990s social histories broke new ground in this regard. His publication of *Dublin Street*

⁸¹ Whelan and Layte, “Opportunities for All in the New Ireland”, p. 81, 85.

⁸² Peadar Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 172.

⁸³ James Wickham, “The New Irish Working Class?”, p. 82.

Life and Lore: An Oral History (1991), *Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History* (1994), *Dublin Pub Life and Lore: An Oral History* (1996) and *Dublin Voices: An Oral Folk History* (1998) has been an immense resource for my work. The richness and vitality of social and cultural life in working-class Dublin is deftly captured through oral testimonies that contribute significantly to the historical body of work on proletarian Dublin. But as Fintan Lane and Emmet O'Connor remind us in a 2001 appeal for research on "the 'everyday life' of workers", there is still a relative paucity of writing on "how and why were particular cultural practices constructed and deconstructed" in working life, and "how did they spend their non-working hours".⁸⁴

A partial explanation for this absence is the classed nature of the Irish education system. Wickham propounds that

if capitalism is a structure of economic domination, then it is also one of cultural domination. In any capitalist country, working class children 'learn' in school that they are not suited to anything else but manual work — their values, their lifestyle, their very language, are not proper.

Furthermore, in such environments the lesson is "redefined by those on the receiving end": "manual labour for example becomes the only work that is really (men's) work".⁸⁵ To be sure, such cultural inequality runs far deeper than the inculcation of predilections around work. At the beginning of the 1960s the children of the working class were "less involved in post-primary education than children from any other social category".⁸⁶ And, according to Patrick Clancy in his analysis of school leavers in the early 1990s, parental backgrounds still had a direct relation with educational attainment in the last decade of the century. Of the twenty-two per cent of school leavers who left without attaining a Leaving Certificate at the time, forty seven per cent were from unskilled manual backgrounds, whereas only three per cent came from higher professional backgrounds. While over half of the children from this latter social stratum

⁸⁴ Fintan Lane and Emmet O'Connor, "Speed the Plough", *Saothar* 26 (2001), p. 4.

⁸⁵ James Wickham, "The New Irish Working Class?", p. 85.

⁸⁶ Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction*, p. 36.

left school with more than five honours in the Leaving Certificate, only four per cent from the former did the same.⁸⁷

Similar disparities were identified in terms of entrants to higher education and – despite significant advances since the early 1990s – the gap is still particularly glaring in Ireland’s most prestigious universities, fed by a massively disproportionate percentage of students from state-assisted, fee-paying schools.⁸⁸ While significant advances in mainstream state education have occurred since the 1960s – when the Department of Education’s *Investment in Education* (1966) report prompted a refocusing of educational provision on perceived economic and technological needs – as Denis O’Sullivan notes, “equality in the effects or outcomes of schooling was never a serious concern” for policy makers. Economic expediencies often overshadowed “limitations and problems associated with the access dimension” of the system, leaving this concern “trivialised or obscured”.⁸⁹ In Dublin, the inequality is intensified in ghettos of low educational attainment, such as Clondalkin, a working-class suburb, in which only 4.5 per cent of children progress to third-level education — as compared to affluent Rathgar, where the respective figure is 54 per cent.⁹⁰ Joan Hanafin and Anne

⁸⁷ See Patrick Clancy, “Education Policy”, in *Contemporary Irish Social Policy*, ed. Suzanne Quin, Patricia Kennedy, Gabriel Kiely and Anne O’Donnell (Dublin: UCD, 1999), pp. 72-107.

⁸⁸ See recent front page reports in Ireland’s two main daily broadsheets: John Walshe, “Fee schools stretch lead in race for top courses”, *Irish Independent*, 4 December 2008, p. 1; Seán Flynn and Gráinne Faller, “Over 60% of top schools limit admission to certain groups”, 4 December 2008, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Denis O’Sullivan, “The Ideational Base of Irish Educational Policy”, in *Irish Educational Policy: Process and Substance*, ed. D. G. Mulcahy and Denis O’Sullivan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1989), p. 262. As Kirby notes, “educational policy has given priority to the needs of the economy rather than seeing education as a means to generate greater social equality and mobility”; Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress*, p. 152. See Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, pp. 237-242, for some discussion on the effects of fee abolitions following the *Investment in Education* initiative. Emer Smith and Damian Hannan find that despite continuous increases in formal educational participation in recent decades, “educational inequalities by social background” persist. Emer Smyth and Damian F. Hannan, “Education and Inequality”, in *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*, ed. Brian Nolan, Philip J. O’Connell and Christopher T. Whelan (Dublin: IPA, 2000), p. 117. At third level, the comparative gap between entry levels of children from professional and unskilled manual backgrounds has grown. Clancy’s study of third-level access across class divides in 1998 found that 58 per cent of higher education entrants were from middle-class groups – the higher and lower professional, farming, business and managerial backgrounds – despite these groups constituting only thirty-seven per cent of the relevant population. Clancy, Patrick, “College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education” (Dublin: HEA, 2001) <<http://extranet.hea.ie/uploads/pdf/Clancymaster%20.pdf>> [accessed 2 December 2008], p. 82.

⁹⁰ Share, Tovey and Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland*, p. 233. In contemporary Ireland, a rural bias also persists: “The Dublin region, with its high concentration of working-class people, has the lowest

Lynch show that “social-class origins remain the greatest predictor of academic school success and failure” and of “future location in the labour market”.⁹¹

Share, Tovey and Corcoran use Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital to hypothesise the effects of this inequality on working-class children, on how they behave and how they perceive the society in which they live.⁹² As I show below and throughout this thesis, education is continually linked with feelings of shame, inadequacy and alienation in the literature of working-class Dublin. Furthermore, the persistent inequalities in educational attainment partially explain why Ireland has yet to produce its own Raymond Williams or Richard Hoggart, and why, at third level, the working class remains underrepresented in terms of participation and the curriculum.

Regarding curriculum issues, Honor Fagan suggests that the failure of the Irish educational system to reflect the realities of students’ lives is at the heart of its broader class inequalities. Working-class experience is elided by schools’ characteristic preoccupations, early school leavers feel. For example, “the curriculum and examinations are completely geared toward white-collar work. Thus the curriculum is divorced from the reality of working young people.”⁹³ While research has not begun to scratch beneath the surface of how, for instance, the choice of literary works in school examination programmes is inflected with class and social biases, it is obvious at university level that Irish working-class culture has failed to be acknowledged in any significant, proportionate way.⁹⁴

participation rate in tertiary education, while the western counties, such as Galway, Sligo and Leitrim, have the highest”; Ibid. 233.

⁹¹ Joan Hanafin and Anne Lynch, “Peripheral Voices: Parental Involvement, Social Class, and Educational Disadvantage”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23.1 (March 2002), p. 36. As Tovey, Share and Corcoran put it, “three decades of educational reform [...] have left patterns of class inequality in education largely unchanged”; Share, Tovey and Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland*, p. 219.

⁹² Ibid. p. 235.

⁹³ Honor Fagan, *Culture, Politics and Irish School Dropouts* (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1995), p.100.

⁹⁴ Apart from a module entitled “Working-class communities in Dublin”, under Dr Laurence Cox at the Department of Sociology, NUI Maynooth, there is little evidence of formal academic interventions specifically tailored to the culture of one of Ireland’s largest social cohorts. Professor Helena Sheehan’s Dublin City University course on Social History and TV Drama puts a strong emphasis on class in the history of Irish television, which is also useful in terms of understanding broader cultural influences that undergird the context of my thesis. Dr Aileen Douglas’s module on British working-class fiction at Trinity College Dublin – which played a significant part in inspiring my own interest in and awareness of the possibilities for analysing literature in class terms – is the only module of this kind I am aware of across English departments in Irish universities.

In Britain, working-class culture has been enshrined in the academe, with many courses on proletarian literature and Cultural Studies, and the formal recognition of centres such as the Working Class Movement Library in Manchester that holds thousands of books and pamphlets pertaining to working-class life. (Although Birmingham University's much-lauded Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was controversially closed in 2002.) Munt notes that "Cultural Studies was a field formed by social class", being heavily influenced by Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and other leftist theorists like Stuart Hall.⁹⁵ With the notable exceptions of the foundation of the Irish Labour History Society in 1973, and the Irish Labour History Museum in 1990, the Irish Republic has failed to value its working class in similar terms. Campaigners such as Terry Fagan – who has worked tirelessly to found a cultural centre for the study of inner-city life – have sadly made little material progress in their efforts to bring the study and celebration of that life onto an academic or state-funded footing.⁹⁶ Writers like Brendan Behan, James McKenna, Paul Smith and Lee Dunne would also complain of the failure of governmental arts funding and institutional practices to support their work.⁹⁷

But working-class cultural production has endured in part as a response to outside influences. With the increasing and well-documented representation of working-class culture in British television, literature and media from the mid-century onwards, Dubliners took many of their cultural icons in music, sport and popular culture from across the water — as James McKenna was keen to emphasise in *The Scatterin'* (1959), or as Dermot Bolger stressed much later in *The Journey Home* (1990). I have chosen to use the working-class literature of British life for comparative purposes partly for this reason, and simply because many of the issues it typically deals with resonate in the writing I examine. While British television embraced the working class from early on, as Helena Sheehan notes of the period from 1962-87 in Ireland, the standard fare of RTÉ – which played a momentous part in shaping Irish identities – was

⁹⁵ Munt, "Introduction" to *Cultural Studies and the Working Class*, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Fagan has been attempting to secure a local history centre in the North Inner City since the 1970s; a survey of his work can be viewed on < <http://www.dublinfoolklore.ie> > [accessed 8 December 2008].

⁹⁷ The latter pair's careers have been marred by state censorship, which of course affected writers of all classes. Dunne is the most banned author in Ireland and Smith's domestic market was almost completely wiped out because his major works had to be published abroad during the censorship era.

curiously oblivious to working-class city life: “RTÉ had failed to come to terms with the real texture of contemporary urban life and particularly with its cutting edge [...] It had been most remiss with respect to its representation of working class life and strikingly negligent in relation to the most socially conscious and culturally advanced elements of urban life”.⁹⁸

As Peillon argued, the identification that Irish youths found in British culture was partly due to “a long tradition of emigration [that] created many close links”, and also a sense that the rural identity purveyed by domestic culture was out of sync with Ireland’s “stark class contrasts, which reveal themselves not only in differences of status but also in differences of behaviour”.⁹⁹ These differences of behaviour expressed themselves in “a specific life-style” in working-class life that was radically averse to the norms of the Irish state: “the particularity of the working class appears from whatever aspect one studies it, and it asserts itself *as a pole of differentiation in Irish society*”.¹⁰⁰ According to Peillon’s research, by the 1980s working-class people were more open to contraception, less stifled by religious practices, and while the size and

⁹⁸ Helena Sheehan, *Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories* (Dublin: RTÉ, 1987; re-published in a revised edition on CD-ROM, 2004), p. 131. This is not to underestimate the influence of domestic television, for instance, about working-class life, such as *Tolka Row* (1964-68, which Maura Laverty had first written as a play in 1950), *Babby Joe* (1966), *Shadows in the Sun* (1967), *The Testimony of James Connolly* (1968), *I’m Getting Out of this Kip* (1973), *Hatchet* (1973), and *The Spike* (1978). *Tolka Row* was a particularly important intervention in working-class consciousness, as Sheehan observed: “For the first time, with *Tolka Row*, it was people like themselves on the screen whose lives were seen as having dramatic significance. It made them feel differently about themselves and their own lives and they warmed to it greatly. When it was gone, they missed it, not perhaps because it was irreplaceable, but because nothing comparable did replace it for many years”; *Ibid.* 34.

⁹⁹ Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society*, p. 2. Michael P. Hornsby-Smith and Angela Dale noted, in their study of the assimilation of Irish immigrants in Britain, that by the 1960s survey evidence suggested an increasing affinity with British cultural mores – something that would inevitably impact on the Irish back home. They found that Irish emigration to Britain resulted in cultural and social changes for those who chose to leave the Republic. Research from 1967-1976 showed that “Irish-born women adopted ‘reliable’ methods of contraception during the decade” and “by the mid-1970s their contraceptive practices were approaching those of the population generally”. Endogamous birth rates decreased since at least 1970, indicating the increase in marriages between Irish and non-Irish and assimilation generally, as did the convergence of religious opinion between Irish and non-Irish. While it was apparent that the Irish in England enjoyed far less social mobility than the indigenous English, “time-space analyses have suggested [...] a process of economic embourgeoisement and geographical mobility outward from the inner-cities into the new suburban estates” for Britain’s largest immigrant group. Michael P. Hornsby-Smith and Angela Dale, “The Assimilation of Irish Immigrants in England”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 39.4 (December, 1988), pp. 524-525, 526.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35. [Emphasis added.]

economic character of poorer areas of working-class Dublin had changed since the time of Seán O’Casey’s writing, its social and cultural character had endured:

It would require few changes to bring O’Casey’s portrait up to date: this social group still exists almost unchanged, and perhaps its persistence explains in part the fascination it continues to exert. But it exists very much on the periphery of Irish society and remains marginal in every sense of the word, situated on the edge of a stable society, and a constant source of embarrassment.¹⁰¹

Class, education and art

In the literature I have explored in this thesis, classed behavioural and social differences are contextualised within the state’s “embarrassed” ostracism of its working-class. Part of the problem is repressive church-dominated schools in which working class concerns have been eschewed. As Catherine Dunne’s carpenter, Farrell, recalls of his experience of education in inner-city Dublin in the sixties and seventies, “I hated school then. Brothers worrying about the margins in your copies when you hadn’t even had a breakfast”.¹⁰² In *11 Emerald Street* (2005), Hugh O’Donnell’s narrator recounts how his father had wanted to become a teacher in childhood until one violent encounter with a Christian Brother changed his mind. For his son also, his school days “certainly weren’t the happiest days of my life”.¹⁰³ In his similarly titled novel, *Emerald Square* (1987), Lar Redmond also recalled the ritualised violence of school life: “One sum wrong — one stroke. Six sums wrong — six strokes. Not one exercise attempted — eight strokes. It was the same for algebra and geometry. I rarely escaped with less than six.”¹⁰⁴ His educational experience vacillates between this early cruelty and later indifference: when Lar manages to get into an architectural drawing course in Bolton Street Technical School — one of the vocational institutions in which many working-class men attained qualifications and trades — the quality of the education is poor. “No one cared whether you learned or not. One was [now] never corrected or caned”.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰² Catherine Dunne, *A Name for Himself* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 41.

¹⁰³ Hugh O’Donnell, *11 Emerald Street* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 37.

¹⁰⁴ Lar Redmond, *Emerald Square* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 259.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 286.

Thomas Kinsella expresses the feeling of being confined by religious education in his poem, “Model School, Inchicore”, by narrowing the lines following a stanza that recalls the ritual of religious instruction. The child Kinsella feels that “the taste / of ink off / the nib shrank your / mouth”.¹⁰⁶ His symbolism and form convey the experience of being silenced by (the “ink” of) educational texts. Doyle’s Paula Spencer also recalls being made feel “that I wasn’t good at all” in secondary school by teachers who “were all the same, cunts. Cunts. I hated them.”¹⁰⁷ Her (mis-)education there falls under a singular rubric of experience, “finding out that [she] was stupid”, teaching her to be “rough” and “think dirty”: “I had to fight. I had to be hard.”¹⁰⁸ Paula’s negative behaviour in class relates to her class of school, Doyle emphasises: “I wouldn’t have done it if I’d gone to the Holy Rosary”.¹⁰⁹ In his novel *A Walk in Alien Corn* (1990), Redmond again speaks of feeling “sunk” and “slotted for life” without a Leaving Certificate: “I was a blue collar worker, branded forever, as surely as an Indian Untouchable”.¹¹⁰ Unlike his younger brothers and sisters – who get the benefit of better schooling after his father comes into wealth – Lar is restricted by his relative poverty in youth. The divide between siblings is emblematic of a wider class divide — a divide that is inextricable from the hypocrisy of the state. When he ponders on the blatant double standards of a publican who is a member of the temperance organisation “The Sacred Thirst”, he considers how such glaring hypocrisies are integral to Irish life. The publican, “who hated drink” can yet “earn a comfortable living dishing it out” to labourers who can ill afford it; his duplicity is “no worse than the clergy, Catholic and Protestant alike, who ran posh boarding schools for the sons and daughters of the rich, and belted the bejaysus out of the poor”.¹¹¹ Working-class children have learned to recognise their alienation from society through the harshness and inferior quality of their education.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Kinsella, *A Dublin Documentary* (Dublin: O’Brien, 2006), p. 62.

¹⁰⁷ Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 25-26

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 28, 35. In RTÉ’s ten-episode television drama series *The Spike* (1978), written by Patrick Gilligan, a school set in a working-class area of Dublin was used in a similar way to show how the education system buttresses class divisions. See Sheehan, *Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories*, pp. 89-97.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 41.

¹¹⁰ Lar Redmond, *A Walk in Alien Corn* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 9-10.

As I have already suggested, such inequalities can be made a virtue of by the subaltern class: if working-class experience is denigrated by formal education, then formal education, and its connotations, are often denigrated by the working class. Redmond makes the point again: his largely-autobiographical character loves learning, and feels in learning that he is mounting a rebellion against all that the state has deprived him of: “I was a square peg in a round hole, born on the wrong side of the tracks [...] I was in the same league as Jack London and Charles Dickens, Emile Zola, and many other working class writers who had had to study, spare time, to appease the yearning inside them to express themselves”. But although he expresses a sense of following in hallowed proletarian tradition, Lar’s yearning for knowledge is something he must hide. Education is the preserve of other classes, something his mates would frown upon: “I was trying to step outside my class, and so I belonged nowhere. I had two faces, one for the companions I found myself among, and then the secret one, the secret me, who would have loved to have been with the likes of Charles Lamb and his companions, and ‘You, my darlings, my midnight Folios!’”¹¹²

Such thoughts recall the depictions of indeterminate, educated working-class characters in British writing: in Kingley Amis’ *Lucky Jim* (1954), Raymond Williams’ *Border Country* (1960) and *Second Generation* (1964), David Storey’s *Pasmore* (1972), James Kelman’s *A Disaffection* (1989), or as characterised by Richard Hoggart’s “scholarship boy” cast adrift on the bourgeois terrain of academia.¹¹³ However, in contrast with these narratives of British class mobility, Lar and other working-class Dubliners like him who harbour educational aspirations – Lee Dunne’s Paddy Maguire, Peter Sheridan’s Curley, in *The Liberty Suit* (1977), Brendan Gleeson’s Frank, in *Breaking Up* (1988), the doomed inner-city students of Val Mulhern’s *Very Like a Whale* (1986) – all stay *within* their class, regardless of their yearnings. The suffocating toughness of Lar’s Liberties upbringing recurs in his thoughts throughout the novel — at times this is something to be proud of, at other times it is something to lament, but always he feels excluded from the bourgeois world. Art is seen as something effete and emasculating, something to hide.

¹¹² Ibid. 61.

¹¹³ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 238-249.

In Jim Sheridan's *Mobile Homes* (1976), Shea is a painter, which makes him "another bleedin' headcase", a "waster" and a "bleedin' dosser".¹¹⁴ An accidental attack on him by local vigilantes is symbolic of the internecine destructiveness of working-class life, which is inferred by these disparagements of his work. Writer and sculptor James McKenna was deeply concerned with this classed aversion to art, which he believed was worsened by the location of cultural institutions and amenities outside of working-class areas — something that famously prompted him to stand for election in 1970s Ballyfermott with (hilariously) incongruous pictures of Grecian urns on his placards. "People feel the impulse not their own," one of his poems complained: "The Dance of Art — sounds like a dirty word".¹¹⁵

Such distaste for genres perceived as the preserve of an emasculated bourgeois world might be engaged to explain the lack of poetry in working-class life. To invoke Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash* again, there is a sense that poetry is a taboo:

Some of the miners were well read in economics and history, but poetry would have seemed too grim a mockery in the mining towns. The young souls who might be thrilled by it had to keep this a dark secret like some fearful vice, unless they could stand endless chaff.¹¹⁶

But in working-class Dublin, the long ballad tradition in particular is something to be proud of — at least before mass culture sent it to the margins. Articulating the discourse of prevailing political conditions in poetry and song, the ballad was part of a communal, folkloric culture. As James Stephens put it, "where but in Dublin will you meet the author of a ballad in a thousand limericks".¹¹⁷ In his study of Irish street ballads and rebel songs, Georges Denis Zimmermann notes how the ballad was ideally suited to social and political commentary from people with limited educational attainment, acting as "a running commentary on Irish life seen 'from below'".¹¹⁸ Ballads, a form of "subliterature", could transcend the pervasive problem of limited

¹¹⁴ Jim Sheridan *Mobile Homes* (Dublin: Irish Writers' Co-operative, 1978), p. 16, 26.

¹¹⁵ Illustration for month of January on *The Goldsmith Press Calendar*, 1975)

¹¹⁶ Wilkinson, *Clash*, p. 249.

¹¹⁷ James Stephens, "Dublin, A City of Wonderful Dreams, Silent and Voluble Folk", in *The Uncollected Prose of James Stephens: Volume 2*, ed. Patrick McFate (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), p. 159.

¹¹⁸ Georges Denis Zimmermann, *Songs of Irish Rebellion – Irish Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), p. 2.

educational attainment, being “within reach of the virtually illiterate”.¹¹⁹ While it would be “ludicrous” to present “the bulk of these texts as poetry”, he contends, some can be seen as such, and those that cannot – but which could still be heard in twentieth-century Dublin – surely form their own cultural repository of Dublin life and lore.

Other sources for further analysis in this regard can be found in John McDonnell’s *Songs of Struggle and Protest* (1979), Helena Sheehan’s compact disk, *Songs of Labour* (1998), The Ballad Corner of the *Irish Socialist* in the 1960s and 1970s, and such individual works as Donagh Mac Donagh’s “Dublin City, 1913”, trade unionist Martin Whelan’s “Talk to Me of Freedom” – a song regarding unemployment – and Ewan McColl’s lyric on the Dunnes Stores strike of the 1980s, “Ten Young Women and One Young Man”.¹²⁰ The persistence of Michael J. Moran – popularly known as Zozimus – in Dublin legend, suggests a further direction for future scholarly work. Paula Meehan’s early poetry in particular contains recurrent themes on the political and social alienation of her class. The poems of James Connolly, James Stephens, Seán O’Casey, James McKenna, Christy Browne, Dermot Bolger, Michael O’Loughlin and Thomas Kinsella are all inflected with such concerns — along with those of less known writers like Rose O’Driscoll, (*Rose of Cabra* (1990)) and Sheila O’Hagan (*The Peacock’s Eye* (1992); *The Troubled House* (1995)). I would like to suggest here that, while it is outside the scope of the present thesis, further scholarly study of working-class Ireland might benefit from assessing this poetry and the ballad tradition.

Theory, class, taste and shame

Some explanation is also necessary at this point of theoretical terms employed and academic sources cited in the coming discussion. Throughout this thesis I have used a number of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of class, culture and capitalism, which require some prior elaboration. Supported by extensive sociological research, Bourdieu argues that there is a systematic corollary between social class and matters of aesthetic taste.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

¹²⁰ See Helena Sheehan’s website for further information on Irish labour songs: <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~sheehan/hsheehan/lsongs.htm> [accessed 8 December 2008].

Furthermore, he maintains that class preferences suffuse dichotomies in cultural production, between the tautologous “good taste” of the elites and the easily dismissed popular culture of the working class.

One might recall for instance the scene of disruption that occurs in the work of another Frenchman, Mathieu Kassovitz, to illustrate an extreme example of what happens when working-class culture meets with middle-class art. When three young men “from the estates” of Paris chance on some free refreshments at an art exhibition in *La Haine* (1995), their alienation from middle-class France is vividly illustrated by their utter incomprehension of the art on show, and the ensuing disintegration of their social graces, which results in them being thrown out.¹²¹ The “anti-Kantian aesthetic” of the working class – which prioritises the meaning and function of a work of art over its stylistic or formulaic abstractions – characterises the proletariat’s preferred modes of representation, Bourdieu argues. Kant “strove to distinguish that which pleases from that which gratifies and, more generally, to distinguish disinterestedness, the sole guarantor of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from the interest of reason”, whereas “working-class people expect every image to explicitly serve a function, if only that of a sign, and their judgements make reference, often explicitly, to the norms of morality or agreeableness. Whether rejecting or praising, their appreciation always has an ethical basis”.¹²² Moral purpose and utilitarian pleasure are to the fore in the preferred art of proletarians, Bourdieu contends; “judgement never gives the image of the object autonomy with respect to the object of the image”.¹²³

This, of course, approximates Hoggart’s view of working-class art as “essentially a ‘showing’” that “has to begin with the photographic” and be “underpinned by [...] moral rules”.¹²⁴ Furthermore, this class predilection leads inexorably to typologies of aesthetic representation that tend to challenge social orthodoxies — art that is given to “satisfy[ing] the taste for and sense of revelry, the plain speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over

¹²¹ *La Haine*. Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Canal. 1995.

¹²² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 5.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 42.

¹²⁴ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 100.

heels, overturning conventions and proprieties".¹²⁵ In assessing the theoretical and stylistic innovations that undergird the writing in this thesis, Bourdieu's model of cultural production as something grounded in the distribution of "capital" in social and cultural life has proved extremely useful.¹²⁶

I will also employ Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" – which refers to the acquired group mindset, behaviours and assumptions inculcated by social forces – to develop an understanding of how the key issue of social conditioning is depicted in the novels and plays explored in this thesis. In Bourdieu's use of the term, it refers to "durable, transposable dispositions" that are acquired by individuals in response to social forces in their environments, such as class, religion, and education — which he collectively terms "field".¹²⁷ Habitus is "the system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures", and the parenthetical qualification is important here.¹²⁸ Bourdieu is not a rigid determinist who sees people as mere "products" of their environments. Indeed, he side-steps the sociological conflict between determinism and individualism, subjectivity and objectivity, by postulating that what shapes the habitus is the interaction of individual will and social forces; this is, "the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality", as he puts it — a rather similar point to Thompson's above.¹²⁹ The habitus is not reducible to simple determinist rules; it is always subject to change and never complete. Like Gramsci's hegemony, it is "collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor", and it is *partially* available in all human products of the same structures.¹³⁰ Yet it is also the case that "organic individuality [...] can never [be] entirely removed from the sociological discourse".¹³¹ Individuals, who influence and are influenced by their environments, have their own "organic" agency too. The

¹²⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 34.

¹²⁶ Alain de Botton's popular analysis of status as the social reproduction of economic distinction and control, in *Status Anxiety* (2004), and Michael Marmot's similar analysis, in *Status Syndrome* (also 2004), have renewed interest in this interrelation of class, status and power. Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety* (New York: Pantheon, 2004); Michael Marmot, *Status Syndrome* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

¹²⁷ Pierre, Bourdieu, *Outline of Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Cambridge UP, 1977), p. 72.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

“paradoxical product” of habitus is, Bourdieu concedes, “difficult to conceive, even inconceivable”, but “only so long as one remains locked in the dilemma of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity”.¹³²

Another conceptualisation I employ throughout the following study is that of “the hidden injuries of class”.¹³³ This I take from a seminal study, by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, of the emotional and psychological effects of class branding, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972). “Even in the case of the contemporary working class,” James C. Scott observes, “it appears that slights to one’s dignity [...] loom at least as large in accounts of oppression as do narrower concerns of work and compensation”, and such concerns are fundamental in any study of culture and class.¹³⁴ Working-class people are constantly exposed to the cultural and psychological deprecations of bourgeois society that Bourdieu atomised, and these play an enormous role in the cognitive and emotional lives of literary characters.

It is there, for example, in Roddy Doyle’s *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993), in the casual slagging of “my da has a better job than yours” and “your ma only works in Cadbury’s because she has to”, or in the alienation of children from Corporation houses, who wear cheap shoes that make them the butt of schoolmates’ jokes, and are told they should be in the “thicks’ class”.¹³⁵ Such “injuries” are evident also in Lee Dunne’s *Paddy Maguire is Dead* (1972), in his mother’s desperate shame at having to

¹³² Ibid., p. 95.

¹³³ Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977); Sennett and Cobb wrote, like Bourdieu, of feelings of duality in working-class men, whereby, due to their subordinate position in class relations, they feel divided within themselves as to their identity in the class system and their feelings of dispossession. This was an existential problem, they concluded, that “subjects a man internally to a cross-fire of conflicting demands for fraternity and assertion of his own worth”; Ibid. 118. Bourdieu’s landmark study, *The Weight of the World*, has equally emphasised not only the material injuries accruing from capitalism, but also the related lack of self-esteem and respect suffered by those from working-class backgrounds.

¹³⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), p. 23.

¹³⁵ Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Minerva, 1994), pp. 34-35, 180, 184. It is voiced again in the argument between Briget and George in Roddy Doyle’s *War* (1989), which erupts over their inability to pay school registration fees for their children and Briget’s determination that “I’m not havin’ Gavin an’ Joanne an’ Derek tellin’ their teachers tha’ they can’t pay their registration money cos their daddy’s on the labour”; Roddy Doyle, *Brownbread and War* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 154.

spend her son's savings to make ends meet.¹³⁶ Working-class Irish people are deeply aware of these injuries, as Peillon noted, while making another important point:

The fact that members of the 'inferior' categories should interiorise their 'inferior' status – and many instances might be cited of young people ashamed of 'give-away' addresses, and of girls associating with boys from a higher social group – does not, however, mean that they accept or resign themselves to the position of inferiority to which society assigns them.¹³⁷

But "judgements of prestige" are nonetheless contingent on "a perception of the distribution of material and social privilege and a recognition of the different life-styles which underline these inequalities".¹³⁸ Thus, while "the principal of identity underlines the way in which the working class perceives itself", this identity is infused with the ambiguous and conflictive interplay of class discomfort and defiant pride.¹³⁹

Chapters

O'Casey's enduring relevance for later writers, and the aesthetic discourse of communal engagement they share, is the subject of my first chapter. It aims to re-evaluate O'Casey's place in Irish literature, beyond his common acclamation as the author of three iconic Dublin plays, and to reposition him as the towering figure in a distinct lineage of heretofore neglected writing. While most of his work falls outside the time-frame I have set for this thesis, its considerable influence on later writers of the working-class merits some prior elaboration. For this reason, the chapter takes the form of a survey of essential paradigms and ideas, rather than a close reading of specific texts. I will also argue that O'Casey's assignation as a (lower) middle-class interloper by critics is inaccurate and problematic for scholars of Irish literature, and that it effaces his true role. O'Casey provided exemplars for other aspiring working-class writers to emulate — and these are important for their encouragement of working-class achievement as well as on their own aesthetic and cultural merits. I reconsider O'Casey

¹³⁶ Lee Dunne, *Paddy Maguire is Dead* (London: Arrow, 1972), p. 63-65.

¹³⁷ Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society*, p. 45.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 50.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 75.

within the context of my work as an enabler of Dublin proletarian culture from within, whose success would act as a spur to later writers.

In the following chapter, which concerns Dublin's own generation of "angry young men", I qualify this analysis by conveying how plays by James McKenna, Heno Magee and Lee Dunne chart the growing irrelevance to working-class life of that preoccupation in O'Casey's early plays — Ireland's narrative of becoming. While O'Casey eschewed nationalism *sans* socialism as an enemy of the working-class — and while these writers also show how alienated the post-1950s working class Dublin is from national life — these later authors frame the message in distinctly modern terms. In particular, they highlight the growing embrace of Anglo-American mass culture. And while O'Casey often diminished the complexity of *male* concerns in working-class life, McKenna, Magee and Dunne seek to explain the dysfunctional behaviour of disaffected proletarian men with greater sympathy. The plays attend to the habitus of mid-century Dublin, exploring the acquired ideas, behavioural patterns and tastes that characterise their environment and — as my titular reference to Britain's "angry young man" genre suggests — they also highlight the increasing role of British influences in working-class Dublin. As Declan Kiberd notes, an affinity with British proletarian culture was a natural progression for working-class Dubliners, even for a republican rebel like Brendan Behan who "conceded how hard it was for him to admit that the borstal boys from Liverpool and Manchester whom he met in jail seemed to know the same cultural parameters as himself".¹⁴⁰ In all three plays, emigration represents the only hope of finding personal fulfilment and as such it becomes a powerful motif for the indeterminate place of working-class Dublin in the Irish nation. In all three, there is a sense that Britain is a more hospitable home.

In Chapter 3, my discussion turns to the oppression of women in working-class culture, and employs two novels from different historical periods to convey both the similarities and discontinuities in women's experiences. While fiction about working-class Dublin women has gained considerable prominence in recent decades — particularly with Roddy Doyle's publication of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*

¹⁴⁰ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 492.

(1996) and its sequel *Paula Spencer* (2006) – the relative absence of writing by working class women remains conspicuous. I argue that Paul Smith's *The Countrywoman* (1961) and Peter Sheridan's *Big Fat Love* (2003) suggest that this absence of an *écriture féminine* is a central problem in their novels, *despite* their focus on women's lives. Sheridan's later work reflects both wider changes in the conditions of working-class women and, in parallel, his hopes for the transformation of working-class life. Both authors nonetheless show how the state has played a crucial role in silencing these women.

In Chapter 4, the role of industry, or the lack thereof during different historical periods, is explored in terms of the thesis's overarching themes of alienation, counter-cultural radicalism and class conflict. The chapter briefly returns to the unique development of industrialisation in Dublin and the equally unique political and cultural climate it has sustained. It then examines James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969) and Paul Smith's *Summer Sang in Me* (1972), two novels written on the cusp of Ireland's greatest period of industrialisation, but which portray earlier periods of working life as a window on contemporary concerns. This reading also shows that Plunkett and Smith manipulate the novel's form – a theoretically “national” and “bourgeois” genre – in order to subvert its association with both the national and the bourgeois.

My fifth chapter centres on prison drama written by Brendan Behan, Peter Sheridan and Paula Meehan. *The Quare Fellow* (1954), *The Liberty Suit* (1977) and *Cell* (1999) dissect life under capitalism by bringing those on the margins of society – its prisoners – quite literally centre-stage. Any discussion of this sub-strata of social pariahs necessitates some commentary on Marx's theoretical formulation of the “lumpenproletariat” and where it fits in the broad scheme of social stratification. In each play, audiences are asked to question the inequalities that lead to the degradation and suffering of jailed convicts, and to see their plight as a thematic defence of those who suffer the inequalities of society at large. The prison acts as a microcosm of the social order, and a platform on which to promote a leftist political message.

Sexual repression was one of the consequences of the Republic's religious and political hegemony, and I show, in my sixth chapter, that despite a gap of several

decades in their respective publication dates, Christy Brown's *Down All the Days* (1970) and Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990) treat issues of sexuality, culture and class in very similar ways. Sexual repression is employed as a metonym for broader cultural repression in both works, and their shared critique of the Republic also provides a Bourdieuan evaluation of social distinction and the particular strictures of working-class life. Allying psychological repression with the negative influences of national culture, both chime with the fundamental preoccupations of writers in this thesis. Brown criticises the norms of working-class Dublin by showing how its class interests are subjugated by orthodox ideology, and he presents his own development to sexual maturity as a corollary for the emergence of cultural challenges to the stifling powers of Catholic dogma and state hegemony. Bolger, by contrast, uses sexual perversity as a motif for the deterioration of Irish public life in the 1980s. He indicts bourgeois Ireland in this hyperbolic tale of sexual abuse, broadly excoriating the superstructure of Irish society. Both writers aim to shock, jolt and horrify their readership into a recognition of the terrible degradations of Irish life, and they do so from a distinctly classed perspective.

Roddy Doyle's writing at the end of the twentieth century is most recognised in Ireland, and further afield, as a crucial intervention in popularising the culture of working-class Dublin. It is therefore appropriate that my final chapter engages with his hugely successful work, *A Star Called Henry* (1999), which encapsulates Doyle's aesthetic and political concerns. Doyle reflects on the role of a proletarian Dubliner in the foundation of the Irish state in order to develop a complex and symbolic critique of the marginalisation of the working class since then. He rearticulates the common thematic paradox of an urban community that is simultaneously *eschewed by* and *central to* the development of the Irish Republic. But Doyle also questions the relevance of political action generally to working-class Dublin, asking what ideology has to offer people like his protagonist, Henry Smart. In doing so, he embraces modern historical revisionism's rejection of nationalism, linear history, and homogeneity, preferring instead to present heterodoxy and fragmentation, and to follow the modern revisionist insistence, as Seamus Deane has put it, on "no system, no metanarrative, just

discrete issues discretely interlinked now and then”.¹⁴¹ In doing so, he produces a proletarian perspective, but it is one in which politics is depicted as the preserve of the middle class.

My conclusion filters the varied themes of each chapter into the central arguments of this thesis, while also assessing more recent developments in working-class writing of the Celtic Tiger. Dublin’s working class is depicted by the writers I explore as the subject of a sociological and cultural paradox, both central to the foundation and modernisation of the Republic and acutely alienated from its hegemonic power. The fiction and plays develop a number of cognate themes to illustrate this marginalisation, and their recurrence over the fifty-year period examined argues forcefully for a reappraisal of the place of working-class literature in Irish Studies. I will also argue that the highly politicised character of working-class writing lends itself continually to subversive literary forms, with shocking kitchen-sink realism, magic realism, anti-kunstslerroman, anti-bildungsroman, grotesque hyperbole and exaggerated didacticism, all employed to jolt readers and audiences into a recognition of the pervasive and pernicious social realities to which sociological research and lived working-class experience attest.

¹⁴¹ Seamus Deane, “Wherever Green is Read”, in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), p. 245.

Chapter 1: The Shadow of Seán

In a scene from *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (1949), Seán O’Casey is reluctant to leave a pub with friends to attend James Stephens’ weekly soiree because he is engrossed in the conversation between a man and a woman there. The woman, a street flower-seller, talks politics, criticising De Valera; the man talks about them both going back to his place, slyly attempting to unbutton her blouse. “O Gawd,” exclaims a companion of the dramatist, “let’s go – it’s too revolting”. But O’Casey is enthralled.

They led the way from the snug, Sean following slowly. He longed to stay where he was, watching common life unfolding on the bench opposite; smoky life, catching the breath with a cough at times, but lit with the red flare of reckless vigour [...] He liked James Stephens, loved him, really, and many fine people assembled there; but they were never themselves.¹

Of greater attraction than Dublin’s superficial “bohemianism”, the gritty, lively energy of working-class life – with its “smoky” authenticity of “reckless vigour” – absorbs the playwright inexorably. With lyrical nostalgia, the “slum dramatist” recalls here the impulse that this thesis attempts to capture amongst writers who emerge from his shadow, and what follows is a brief analysis of O’Casey’s importance for these later writers and the aesthetic discourse of communal engagement they share. As this thesis attests, understanding O’Casey and the various motifs and preoccupations of his work is essential to any discussion of Dublin’s subsequent working-class literature. As such, this chapter sets out to re-evaluate O’Casey’s place in Irish literature, beyond his common acclamation as the great author of three iconic Dublin plays. It seeks to assess his contribution as the towering figure in a distinct lineage of heretofore neglected writing.

¹ Seán O’Casey, *Autobiography Volume 4: Inishfallen Fare Thee Well* (London: Pan, 1972), p. 204.

The uses of literacy: The politics of O'Casey's aesthetic

For O'Casey, politics was inextricably linked with art, and this dialectic resonates in later writing of working-class Dublin. His tendency towards agitprop and consciousness-raising drama, and his success in having a political impact with his work, were examples that others sought to follow. His significant contribution to writing indeed began with political broadsides, letters to newspapers and propagandist pamphlets, such as *The Story of Thomas Ashe* (1917, the biography of a famous rebel friend, who died on hunger strike) and *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* (1919), of which he was once a member. Early on, O'Casey developed a scepticism towards the relationship between the political elite and the working class, his eyes opened to war's exploitation of the poor as he "thought bitterly" of Tom, his soldier brother, "risking all for England", or more accurately, "for the gold and diamond mines of Johannesburg" (or so his later account would say).² And while this revelation on the folly of blind loyalty did not stop the young Ó Cathasaigh (as he styled himself for a time) becoming a nationalist fanatic, later developments – such as Pádraig Pearse's defiant use of trams during the 1913 Lockout, and the IRB's failure to weigh in behind the Labour Movement after the event – sent him on the path to disillusionment with nationalist politics, and eventually outright hostility towards Sinn Féin.³ Nonetheless, he remained sympathetic towards republicanism and was an antagonist of Partition until his death, even supporting IRA prisoners in England into the 1950s and '60s, when such support would hardly have endeared him to his adopted home. (He had emigrated to England in

² Seán O'Casey, *Mirror in My House: Autobiographies of Sean O'Casey*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1956), I, p. 361.

³ This disillusion with constitutional nationalism was illustrated by the message of an early play, since lost, *The Crimson in The Tricolour*, which Lady Gregory feared would "hasten the attack on Sinn Féin"; Garry O'Connor, *Seán O'Casey: A Life*, p. 131. O'Casey later launched a blistering attack on Pearse's political credentials, pointing out that: "This leader of democratic opinion consistently used the trams on every possible occasion, though the controller of the Dublin tramway system was the man who declared the workers could submit or starve" – qtd. in John Newsinger, "'In the Hunger-Cry of the Nation's Poor is Heard the Voice of Ireland': Sean O'Casey and Politics 1908-1916", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20.2 (April 1985), p. 231. Newsinger relates that the Lockout was a watershed in terms of O'Casey's relationship with socialism and republicanism, between which he had always tried to find a synergy of political ideology, but "Larkin's fiery oratory, together with Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* won him over to the left [...] experience showed him republicanism's feet of clay"; *Ibid.* 228. Newsinger also shows, however, that although O'Casey withdrew from the IRB – which feared upsetting its more affluent elements by any outright alignment with socialism – he was afterwards to show great admiration for Pearse.

the late 1920s and remained there till death.) He was also a lifelong communist, refusing to acknowledge the failings of the Soviet Union. Such complexity was the mark of the man.

O'Casey's curious vacillation between political disenchantment and ideological fervour was something he exhibited from early works onwards, such as in the Bolshevik radicalism of his second play, *The Harvest Festival* (1919), in which the hero proclaims that "if the workers are content to remain slaves, then, as Emerson says, it is but the case of any other vermin — the more there are the worse for Labour".⁴ (How ironic it was that he would later castigate rebels who refer to tenement dwellers as "slum lice".⁵) In these dogmatic terms, Jack Rockliffe's conflicted emotions of affinity and repugnance for the resignation of his own class expresses the kind of impulses that would recur throughout O'Casey's work, and that are echoed too in later working-class writing.⁶ James Plunkett, Peter Sheridan, Lee Dunne, Aidan Parkinson, Jimmy Murphy and James McKenna all illustrate the frustration of the working-class radical with the inertia of those about him. Jimmy Murphy's bleak, sardonic play, *Brothers of the Brush* (1995), for instance, conveys how O'Casey's political scepticism and muted hope have persisted as conflictual themes. In its darkly comic climax, painter Heno's role as leader of a farcical strike is shockingly undercut by his Machiavellian abuse of union power. Heno forces his employer to promote him over a more deserving and honest colleague, leaving capitalist boss Martin utterly bewildered: "Aren't they supposed to be on the side of the workers?"⁷ Aidan Parkinson's *Going Places* (1987) exhibits an equal measure of political cynicism during a bus workers' strike.⁸ In a surreal, stylized scene, the stage becomes a hive of activity and Kellegher and Kiely, worker and boss, "repeatedly take 'The Cap' off each other's head and put it

⁴ Seán O'Casey, *The Harvest Festival: a play in three acts* (Gerrard's Cross: Smythe, 1980), p. 10.

⁵ Seán O'Casey, *Collected Plays, Volume One* (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 232.

⁶ It is there in other contemporary works too, for example in Daniel Corkery's *The Labour Leader* (1920), which depicts a dockers' strike in Cork, when one trade unionist laments that his fellow workers cannot "see" that "there's something worth fighting for", content to live "like worms and grubs"; Daniel Corkery, *The Labour Leader* (Dublin: Talbot, 1920), p. 130.

⁷ Jimmy Murphy, *Two Plays, The Kings of the Kilburn High Road, Brothers of the Brush* (London: Oberon, 2001), p. 134.

⁸ In the play, a sceptical, picket-crossing worker warns a young firebrand, "Little Larkin", that her attempts to galvanise the solidarity of her colleagues are futile: "you'll get fuck-all except headaches and hang-ups [...] I've had me bellyful o' workin' class struggle"; Aidan Parkinson: *Going Places* (Dublin: Passion Machine, 1991), pp. 41-42.

on their own”.⁹ The symbolism is vivid — while they might trade places, the system remains unchanged. Kellegher’s view that “principles” and “politics” are “nonsense” and “shite” is buttressed by Parkinson’s disenchanting plot, in which workers and bosses betray each other as they grapple for personal advancement.¹⁰ As Thomas Kinsella suggests in his poem “The Messenger”, industrial unrest in Ireland has failed to change things significantly for the exploiters O’Casey despised: “baton struck, / gun spat, / and Martin Murphy shall change his hat”.¹¹

Three quarters of a century earlier, O’Casey would be querying Labour leaders who allied themselves with the Treatyite Cumann na nGaedheal party in 1922 — another act that estranged him from parliamentary politics in Ireland.¹² His disdain was both for the changing character of the Labour movement and the changing profile of its adherents, like Jerry Devine, in *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), who is cast in the same mould that Murphy would later cast his Heno: “He is a type, becoming very common now in the Labour Movement, of a mind knowing enough to make the mass of his associates, who know less, a power, and too little to broaden that power for the benefit of all.”¹³ Such scepticism towards political activists posing as proletarian advocates recurs in various works explored in this thesis, such as James Plunkett’s *Strumpet City* (1969), Peter Sheridan’s *The Liberty Suit* (1977), Dermot Bolger’s *Night Shift* (1985), Paula Meehan’s *Cell* (1999) and Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry* (1999). It is a particularly striking feature of Dublin’s working-class writing. But O’Casey’s cynicism

⁹ Ibid. 43.

¹⁰ Ibid. 57.

¹¹ Thomas Kinsella, *A Dublin Documentary* (Dublin: O’Brien, 2006), p. 50.

¹² It is perhaps an attitude he had borrowed from Gogarty’s *Blight* (1917), which juxtaposes a powerful elongated piece of oratory from its central character (on how the working class will “shake capitalism off our back as a terrier shakes canal water out of its hide”) with his dramatic betrayal of his class through corrupt profiteering; Oliver St. John Gogarty, *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty* (Delaware: Proscenium, 1973), p. 35. Traces are perhaps there too of Wilson’s *The Slough* (1914), with its depiction of a strike that collapses due to a lack of working class solidarity. Dublin tradesmen continue to work with “scab materials” that dockers refuse to handle, despite “all their fine promises”, leaving the industrial action “smashed”. Liverpool’s workers are asked to support their struggling Dublin colleagues by strike-leader Jack Allen, “but they only laughed at him”; A. P. Wilson, “Peg Hanlon’s Part Act III”, *The Slough* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Papers, 1914; National Library of Ireland Mss. Dept.), p. 5. It is “not the masters” who leave the strikers “wallowing, sinking, struggling, choking in the slough” of despond, Wilson argues. “Tom Robinson’s Part Acts II and III”, *The Slough*, p. 12. This unpublished play’s manuscript is still available in the National Library of Ireland, but only in fragmented format, with dialogue broken into actors’ parts.

¹³ Seán O’Casey, *Collected Plays, Volume One*, p. 8.

at times was just one aspect of his political vision. To paraphrase Pádraig Yeates, if Irish politics lost a clerk when O'Casey left the Irish Citizen's Army (ICA) in disgust, it had gained a playwright.¹⁴ O'Casey's engagement with political ideas and his leftist aesthetics are the major contributions his oeuvre makes to later working-class writing.

The Flying Wasp: Alienation of the centre

O'Casey's life as an internal exile, a man forever after on the outside of the political structures staring in (but nevertheless thoroughly absorbed by them) mirrors the development of the working class itself in the Irish Free State. Both were central to Irish political life, but both were ironically ostracised by it. O'Casey, in Austin Clarke's opinion, became "in exile", "much more than Joyce [...] the 'conscience' of his country and the incessant critic of its indifference to social justice".¹⁵ Working-class writers ever since have struggled to explain this curious sense of being simultaneously central and peripheral to Irish culture — a core aspect of the writing that this thesis examines.

Following the Irish Revolution, "the class that thus came to power and influence was not a labouring class" but "a new middle class", O'Casey lamented.¹⁶ The metaphor of the "flying wasp" — the sobriquet he used in a book of (often caustic) critical essays — is one which appositely encapsulates the consequent sense, integral to Dublin's proletarian writing, of being one of a collective, yet also a breed of pariah, pestering the body politic — vigilant always lest a sudden sting can be administered.¹⁷ O'Casey's immersion in the Gaelic League, IRB, GAA, the St. Laurence O'Toole (SLOT) Club and the ICA was the political manifestation of his zealous support for various causes that would later, in his view, be subverted by some of the selfsame political activists who lent them their allegiance. He was ever the political outsider, a fierce critic of the colonial and capitalist establishment under British rule, and perhaps an ever fiercer critic of the Catholic and capitalist establishment obtaining thereafter.

¹⁴ As Yeates wittily puts it in his original phrase, "the upshot of the faction-fighting was that the Citizen Army lost a clerk and Ireland gained a playwright"; Pádraig Yeates, *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2000), p. 626.

¹⁵ Austin Clarke, "Tales from Dublin", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 6 September 1963, p. 674.

¹⁶ Herbert Goldstone, *In Search of Community: The Achievement of Seán O'Casey* (Dublin: Mercier, 1972), p. 16.

¹⁷ Seán O'Casey, *The Flying Wasp* (London: Macmillan, 1937).

Like Brecht, O'Casey marries wider social upheaval in his work with subjective stories to create the sense of his class's real role in historical change.

While some critics have focussed on the attendant gap between the domestic and political spheres in his work, Ronan McDonald has noted that the domestic realm in the early plays is by no means a settled concept, but rather subject to various forms of slippage.¹⁸ From the very beginning, O'Casey's plays express the ironic sense of what I will call in this thesis an "alienation of the centre", by depicting the impoverished, anti-heroic Dublin poor at the epicentre of political tumult. *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) evokes both the human frailty and the contrasting capacity for superhuman courage among slum dwellers that are simultaneously bit-players in the anti-colonial revolution and disempowered observers of it. Donal Davoren, the poet who lodges with his friend, Seamus Shields, is craven and opportunistic in exploiting the mistaken notion of his tenement neighbours that he is really a republican revolutionary in hiding. There is comic bathos in his flirtations with Minnie Powell, who mistakenly idolizes him as a rebel hero, but real tragedy too in her own death at the hands of British soldiers. This ordinary heroism amidst the quotidian, with its realistic counterbalance of human folly, is a key dialectic of O'Casey's plays. Above all, in the early plays O'Casey observes humanity in its many guises with a clarity and complexity that denies the existence of heroes, but trumpets the ordinary heroism of flawed human beings.

These flawed beings exist on the margins of the main events of history, but their fates rotate inextricably around them. In *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), the eight tenement dwellers on whom the play's action centres are both integral to and alienated from the locus of the Easter Rebellion, a message most graphically rendered in its public house scene, where Pádraig Pearse's silhouette delivers a lofty message of ritualized martyrdom outside while some of those insulated from his public display in the bar will ironically bear witness to the worst effects of his rhetoric. Moreover, the rebels' decision to shoot at looters conveys their paradoxical contempt for the nation of real people they propose to liberate and foreshadows a sham revolution, after which the

¹⁸ Ronan McDonald, "Seán O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy: disillusionment to delusion", in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 148.

Dublin poor will still be treated as “slum lice”.¹⁹ O’Casey himself wrote of the courage of looters in their acquisitive zeal; that unethical and instinctual courage is conspicuous by comparison with the craven but politically reasoned logic of insurrectionaries.²⁰ The contrast is perhaps in part the reason that Fluther Goode, having imbibed his surfeit of looted alcohol, cares little for the nation or the city the rebels fight to liberate; “Th’ whole city can topple home to hell, for Fluther!” he blasts.²¹

Such themes of working-class alienation recur throughout his plays. In *Red Roses for Me* (1942), Police Inspector Finglas’s attitude to the “flotsam and jetsam” beggars (whom trade unionist Ayamonn manages to organize into political action) typifies what many later writers convey of the relationship between Dublin’s underprivileged and its police who, according to James McKenna, are “paid to walk in Dublin / and guard property like a dog”.²² But Finglas’s abhorrence of the poor, his repugnance for their appearance and his violent vitriol when someone accidentally spits on him, is also a metonym for the broader alienation of working-class Dubliners from official Ireland. It finds parallels also in writings by Paul Smith, Lee Dunne, Peter Sheridan, Mannix Flynn, Dermot Bolger and Mark O’Rowe, in which the forces of the state are often anathematized. McKenna’s *The Scatterin’* (1959), Bolger’s *The Journey Home* (1990) and Mark O’Rowe’s *Made in China* (2001) and *From Both Hips* (1997) all feature official abuses of power. In *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), *Nannie’s Night Out* (1924), *The Silver Tassie* (1928) and *The Star Turns Red* (1940), plots in which the political is intertwined with the personal are constantly redeployed to show how working-class people make history but are denied its spoils, and as such they anticipate one of the major concerns of later working-class writing of the city.

Theocracy

O’Casey is also a pioneer in his attacks on Irish theocracy from a class-conscious perspective. Although the young O’Casey embraced religion, the later playwright

¹⁹ Seán O’Casey, *Collected Plays: Volume One*, p. 232.

²⁰ Seán O’Casey, *Mirror in My House: Autobiographies of Sean O’Casey*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1956), I, p. 684.

²¹ Seán O’Casey, *Collected Plays: Volume One*, p. 237.

²² Seán O’Casey, *Red Roses for Me: A Play in Four Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 95.

detested unquestioning religious fervour. Mrs Gogan's funereal fixation, her "thresspassin' joy to feel meself movin' along in a mourning coach" and her obsession with death and all its trappings in *The Plough*, is the peculiar expression of a fixation with mortality that O'Casey exaggerated for comic effect. However, it is also, more seriously, the logical expression of her belief in the futility of human action. She embodies teleology gone mad — a hyperbolic example of how faith in an omnipotent and all-controlling deity can make human agency seem pointless.

A.P. Wilson had earlier castigated religion's role in the oppression of the working class, who "are told by priest and parson that there is a God of Love guarding the world's destiny" — a distortion of reality that protects the "cloud of commercialism".²³ In *Red Roses*, O'Casey again ridicules this religious folly, portraying Eeada, Dympna and Finoola childishly worshipping the idol of their patron saint and then unable to cope when the statue goes missing. He saw unquestioning faith as an enemy of the proletariat and this theme is supported by many later writers for whom organised religion's impact on working-class Dublin continued to cause concern. With the increasing sway of censorship and the Catholic Church of the 1930s to the 1960s, O'Casey's ire turned mainly on the theocratic state and its recalcitrance towards modernity. For him, this too was a leftist mission, as the Church was now "the biggest and most unscrupulous enemy confronting communism".²⁴ Equally, he felt that organised religion had eroded democracy in Ireland, that "an almost all-powerful clergy" was "*ipso facto* the Government of the country".²⁵ Ireland's was "the oldest civilisation in Europe, though she is still", socially and culturally, "in her teens", with a "people pathetically submissive to their clergy".²⁶

Within the Gates (1933) was the first full-length play to feature religious hypocrisy as its central theme, but while it and a number of subsequent plays on the subject of religion are set in areas outside of O'Casey's native Dublin, the essentially

²³ Wilson, "Tom Robinson's Part Acts II and III", *The Slough*, p. 14.

²⁴ Christopher Murray, *Sean O'Casey: Writer at Work, A Biography* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. 284.

²⁵ Goldstone, *In Search of Community*, p. 157. The original comment was made in O'Casey's own notes for the Mermaid production of *The Bishop's Bonfire*.

²⁶ Seán O'Casey, "They Go the Irish", in *They Go, The Irish*, compiled by Leslie Daiken (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1944), p. 7.

proletarian message is the same. The play derides the Anglican Bishop who “never soiled a hand in Jesu’s service”, and whose “elegant and perfumed soul” studiously avoids “the stress, the stain, the horrid cries, the noisy laugh of life”.²⁷ In *Purple Dust* (1940), the attack on religion continues with a celebration of sensual, pagan joy, what Canon Creechewel dismisses as the “lower inclinations of the people”.²⁸ *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949) is a more sustained attack on religious hokum. Father Domineer, the local priest of a rural town, attempts to retain control of his flock by exorcising the “Cock”, a masque figure who plays a symbolic role in the play. Loreleen, a vivacious and sensuous young girl who arrives from London, seems to have precipitated a series of magical happenings — a commentary by O’Casey on the clash between modern England and regressive, superstitious, Ireland. A statue of the amusingly titled “St. Crankarius” is seen “standin’ on his head to circumvent th’ lurin’ quality of her presence”, and an image of St. Patrick makes “a skelp at her with his crozier”.²⁹ The spectre of the Cock, personifying the pre-Christian worship of nature, is exorcised from the village, and with it goes its youths (Lorna, Loreleen, Marion and Robin), who flee rural Ireland together at the end of the last act. “Is it any wondher that th’ girls are fleein’ in their tens of thousands from this bewildhered land?” Loreleen asks, in an authorial comment on emigration trends.³⁰ The youths of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* emigrate from a barren society where “a whisper of love [...] bites away some of th’ soul”; such a disenchanting vista would re-emerge with striking similarity in a city context just a decade later in James McKenna’s *The Scatterin’* (1959).³¹ Similar portrayals persist in writing of a more recent vintage, like that of Dermot Bolger, with his vividly depressing meditation on the effects of mid-century theocracy in *The Holy Ground* (1990). O’Casey’s *The Bishop’s Bonfire* (1954), also set in a rural town, continued the theme that “joy, within the lights or under the darkness, is joy under the

²⁷ Seán O’Casey, *Within the Gates: A Play of Four Scenes in a London Park* (London: Macmillan, 1934), p. 69-70.

²⁸ Seán O’Casey, *Selected Plays of Seán O’Casey* (New York: G. Braziller, 1954), p. 582.

²⁹ Seán O’Casey, *Collected Plays: Volume Four* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 124.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 194.

³¹ *Ibid.* 219.

frock of death”.³² In these plays and their echoes in later works by other writers, there is a dialogue between the working-class writer and Irish society, yet their rural setting indicates O’Casey’s increasing alienation from urban Dublin — creating a gap which other writers would soon begin to fill. A year after *The Bonfire* appeared, Jimmy Porter, the brash, sex-charged, working-class anti-hero of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956), was to cause controversy on the London stage, and it is interesting to note at this point (as I later explore in greater depth), the organic development of a proletarian literary rejoinder, British and Irish, to the increasingly staid and unrepresentative literature of the mid-century. The angry old man of Dublin and Torquay (where O’Casey now lived) was alive to the underlying currents of British and Irish life, and his legacy was that of an enabler, who would create a space for equally angry, younger men (mainly) and women to vent their spleen. Indeed, as Murray notes, some young British writers of this time, such as John Arden and Edward Bond (though not, incidentally, Osborne), saw O’Casey as having paved the way for their left-wing dramaturgy.³³ But O’Casey was, in his own words, looking “forward in anger”.³⁴

Ireland is greater than a mother: O’Casey and gender

O’Casey’s stance on gender issues, to which I have already alluded, is another of the areas in which his influence on later writers is notable. Women’s plight in working-class life is a key, abiding theme of his *oeuvre*, as are the androcentric attitudes that he criticises unrelentingly. But what has been perceived as a gross caricaturing of gender roles along neatly dichotomous lines in O’Casey has courted the kind of criticism that the polemicist playwright would have undoubtedly taken great umbrage to. Seamus Deane sees O’Casey’s characteristic portrayal of gender roles as a spurious and artificial division between personified ideas along male and female lines, men representing solipsism and vacuous ideology, women espousing a simpler,

³² Sean O’Casey, *The Bishop’s Bonfire: A Sad Play Within the Tune of a Polka* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 35.

³³ *Ibid.* 374.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 375.

domesticated humanism.³⁵ Lionel Pilkington believes *The Plough* in particular “presents a sentimentalized version of patriarchal sexuality as the ethical norm against which all forms of political militancy are found wanting” and while he admits that the play celebrates sexuality, it is a “sexuality that is sexist to the point of misogyny”.³⁶ Shakir Mustafa voices similar concerns.³⁷

In contrast to these accusations we find O’Casey described as a feminist by other scholars.³⁸ While this latter assessment may have found a place in the general run of popular attitudes to O’Casey, as Nicholas Grene observes, it might be based on a selective reading of the plays. “O’Casey’s cult of the woman went on to become a cliché in criticism of his work”, but “it is noticeable that in this, as in many other respects, the three plays of the ‘trilogy’ are atypical of O’Casey’s drama as a whole”:

Certainly nobody would think of O’Casey as a feminist on the basis of *The Harvest Festival* or *Red Roses For Me* with their positively Christ-like heroes, *The Silver Tassie* with its predatory wives and sex-object girlfriends, or the later plays in which male sexuality (*Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*) and male-led activism (*The Star Turns Red*) are so often associated with liberation.³⁹

³⁵ Seamus Deane, “O’Casey and Yeats: Exemplary Dramatists”, in *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber 1985), pp. 108-122.

³⁶ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 99, 102.

³⁷ Shakir Mustafa, “Saying ‘No’ to Politics: Seán O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy”, in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, ed. Stephen Watt et al. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), p. 110.

³⁸ See Garry O’Connor, *Seán O’Casey: A Life*, pp. 153-155. Marianne Peyronnet makes a forceful argument for O’Casey’s categorisation as a feminist writer; “Was O’Casey a feminist playwright?” in *Times Change: quarterly political and cultural review*, 12 (Winter 1997/8), 23-26. Paul Kerryson, who directed O’Casey’s *Trilogy*, takes a similar view of O’Casey: See interview with Kerryson in Victoria Stewart, *About O’Casey: the playwright and the work* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), pp. 94-95. Jules Koslow equally describes O’Casey’s portrayal of women as “ennobling”; Jules Koslow, *The Green and the Red: Seán O’Casey . . . the Man and His Plays* (New York: Arts Inc., 1950), p. 43. Neil Blackadder argues of *The Plough* – which received a hostile response from suffragettes – that “ironically, [O’Casey’s] play can more justifiably be considered feminist than the protests [by suffragettes] against it”; Neil Blackadder, *Performing Opposition: Modern Theatre and the Scandalized Audience* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 128. One production of *The Plough* which might put this controversy in a new context is the 1991 Abbey revival by Garry Hines. In this modernised version, the stage was stripped bare and the actors were depicted in punk style, with female players’ heads shaved bare. This had the effect of refocusing the action away from its emotive historical resonances and towards its more fundamentally liberated, humanist portrayal of its women.

³⁹ Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 125.

Grene concludes that, even within the *Trilogy*, “the issue of gender is oversimplified in the traditional view of women as heroes, men anti-heroes”.

O’Casey’s own expressed view on the matter paints him as a *differencialiste* feminist. In an interview in 1958 with the *New York Herald Tribune*, he asserted his belief that women were more logical than men: “In life, yes. They’re much more near to the earth than men are. Men are more idealistic, stupidly idealistic. They’re not as realistic as the women.”⁴⁰ This kind of dichotomy between idealism and humanism would echo again in Brendan Behan’s astonished youthful ponderings on why his mother, an ardent republican, made sandwiches for British soldiers whom she pitied: “And I lay on my bed that night and reflected and felt, in my opinion, that that is what happens to make up a woman”.⁴¹ But O’Casey’s own depiction of women is more complicated than his expressed opinion suggests, as any thorough analysis of creations like Minnie Powell, Nora Clitheroe, Bessie Burgess and Juno will attest.

These women’s heroism is repeatedly deflated by their self-interest and sentimental folly: Minnie Powell is brave in death, but foolish in her awe-struck worship of Donal; Nora Clitheroe is brave in her bullet-dodging search for Jack, but her excessively self-interested, cocooned mindset is shown to be dangerously oblivious to the reality around her when she finally goes mad; Bessie is heroic by misadventure, when she is killed while trying to save Nora, but the bullet that kills her comes from a British gun — inferentially, her jingoistic loyalism comes back to haunt her. Equally, Juno may finally shirk the burden of her reckless husband, but her continual willingness to accede to his whims throughout the play – and her excessive indulgence of the wily Bentham – leave her culpable in part for the general familial wreckage that ensues. As Herbert Goldstone writes, Juno is someone who “simply doesn’t realise that she has let the very conditions of life which have victimized her become her ultimate standard of value”.⁴²

The characteristic and overriding mistake in O’Casey criticism in this regard is the tendency to always extrapolate the universal from the particular in any selection of his plays (normally *The Trilogy*); to suggest that a handful of female characters can

⁴⁰ Reprinted in Stewart, *About O’Casey*, p. 64.

⁴¹ Brendan Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (London: Arrow, 1990), p. 98.

⁴² Goldstone, *In Search of Community*, pp. 39-40.

stand in for the whole is misleading. The role of women in working-class life as a nurturing and heroic force is strong in O'Casey, to be sure. From the normally benevolent Mrs Henderson of *The Shadow*, with her righteous outburst against the British Army, and Minnie Powell, the martyr of that play, to later figures like the Ayamonn's nostalgically-imagined mother in *Red Roses for Me* (1942), women often represent humanity at its best. And later writers follow O'Casey in showing how women's heroism in working-class life is often forgotten, a constant theme in this literature.

Yet O'Casey, overall, depicts women in varied and often conflicting forms. Yes, many are portrayed as nurturers and subalterns to male protagonists — as when the writer acknowledges his own indebtedness to his mother in *Red Roses for Me* (1942): “you gave me life to play with as a richer child is given a coloured ball”.⁴³ But this is only one type of O'Casey woman: Bessie's ultimate heroism stands in stark contrast to the avarice and callousness of the women of *The Tassie*, for instance, whose enjoyment of the advantages of freedom and finance that war brings is galling (and is echoed in Smith's *The Countrywoman* (1961)). The breadth of O'Casey's life's work exhibits women in various states, ranging from the abject to the exalted, the heroic to the ignoble.

It is also true that the suppression of women's sexuality, for example, is an acute concern in his work which has received even less attention, and this is also a theme that echoes in later Dublin writing. *Young Whore*, the protagonist of *Within the Gates* (1931), parades her sensuality brazenly before her bishop father, confounding his hypocritical morality and upbraiding English concerns (this play is based in Hyde Park, London) with outward shows of propriety. Two years later, O'Casey's short story, “I Wanna Woman” (1933), would illustrate his perception of women beyond the maternal, nurturing roles associated with his work. A lively and uninhibited London prostitute teaches the sexually obsessed, misogynistic and immoral Jack Avreen a lesson when she charges him an extravagant fee for sex and keeps the expensive bracelet with which he had intended to seduce another woman; his moral self-deception, like that of the Covey's in *The Plough*, is ironically exposed for the sham it is by a personification of

⁴³ O'Casey, *Red Roses for Me*, p. 13.

immorality. *Bedtime Story* (1958), a play loosely based on the same theme as “I Wanna Woman”, is set in a bachelor flat in Dublin. It depicts the haphazard efforts of young lodger John Jo Mulligan to sneak a young girl from his room without being detected by his landlady, fellow lodger and parish priest, whose censure he fears. In turn, the girl, Angela, who is uninhibited by her sexual antics or anyone’s opinion of them, comes to despise her boyfriend’s craven shame. She uses his “futile sense of sin” against him, threatening to expose his impropriety as she takes off with his money and a number of his personal possessions.⁴⁴

The somewhat jaded tone of the morality play in these works is offset by their obviously risqué nature — particularly that of *Bedtime Story*, which ridicules Irish Catholic guilt. The movement towards such female characters also offsets the common perception of women in O’Casey plays. These are of a similar vogue to the liberated Julia Elizabeth O’Reilly of James Stephens’ one-act tenement play (also a short story), *Three Lovers Who Lost* (circa. 1913), who rebuffs her parents’ influence. The short play centres on a young man’s attempt to secure Julia’s hand in marriage by asking for her parents’ consent to their union. However, the play ends with a telegram from their daughter — who never appears on stage — which curtly reveals that she has married another man without their knowledge. Julia is “a gad-about, a pavement-hopper, and when she has the tooth-ache she curses like a carman”, according to her incensed father.⁴⁵ The “pavement-hopper” defies discursive orthodoxy by refusing to be dominated — by acting like a (car)man. One is reminded here, perhaps, of the contrast between Christy Brown’s depiction of the mother/nurturer Mrs Brown in *My Left Foot* (1954) and the bawdy and quick-witted prostitutes of Madame Lala’s “house of pleasure” in *Wild Grow the Lillies* (1976). The panoply of such ribald, uninhibited women within the works of other working-class writers — whose depictions often intentionally antagonise Catholic Ireland with hyperbolically lascivious antics — follows O’Casey’s lead in these plays. Less exuberant but equally engaging depictions of female suffering with brutal men are there in O’Casey too. “The Star Jizzer”, a short tenement story about rape within marriage, and “The Job”, another, which depicts a

⁴⁴ O’Casey, *Collected Plays: Volume Four*, p. 228.

⁴⁵ James Stephens, *The Lover Who Lost* (National Library of Ireland: Abbey Theatre Mss., microfiche, n.d.), p. 9.

woman being sexually harassed, were both published in the collection *Windfalls* (1934), and they illustrate a darker aspect of female experience that becomes a major preoccupation for writers like Paul Smith, in *Esther's Altar* (1959) and Roddy Doyle, with *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996).

“Is there anybody goin’ with a tither o’ sense?”

The other side of this gender coin is of course O’Casey’s depiction of men, which has also come in for criticism as undeveloped, crude and stereotypical — and which has left its traces too on subsequent writers. This charge bears greater scrutiny than those made against his depictions of women, for O’Casey most often shows himself to be exasperated with men’s inhumanity, narcissism and recklessness. There are also levels of subtlety in his work that destabilise such claims, but within them there is an irrefutable kernel of truth. O’Casey continually reduces men to caricature, obfuscating their political motivations and relegating them to convenient roles as mere egoists with little self-awareness, but a great deal to offer in terms of comic development. One later writer of working-class Dublin, James McKenna, even claimed that O’Casey mounted “an assault on Irish manhood not seen since the *Punch Magazine*”.⁴⁶ A reassessment of working-class manhood was part of McKenna’s *The Scatterin* (1959), which is explored in Chapter 2.

Many of O’Casey’s men act as flawed foils for female courage. To look at the male *dramatis personae* of *The Shadow* is to anticipate the recurrence of similar caricatures in later plays. Adolphous Grigson, the corpulent, bourgeois, buffoon Orangeman of the play, shamelessly seeks to preserve his own safety during the Black and Tan raid. He stands in contrast to his exhausted and emaciated wife, whose principal concern is her husband’s care; such couples recur in some other works (*Juno and Boyle*, for example). Tommy Owens extols chauvinistic nationalism in principle, but fails, unlike Minnie, to take a heroic role in the Tan War. Donal Davoren is peevish and whining, with Shelly’s plaintive line – “ah me, alas! Pain, pain, pain ever, for ever” – his habitual refrain.⁴⁷ Bentham, in *Juno*, is treacherous and self-serving, while the

⁴⁶ James McKenna, *Abbey Ambiguities* (n. p.: n. pub., May 1980, pamphlet), p. 2.

⁴⁷ O’Casey, *Collected Plays, Volume One*, p. 156.

dedicatedly unemployed Captain Boyle and his friend Joxer Daly are utterly absorbed in their own myopic egoism. Boyle's nickname, "Paycock", fits with his strutting rodomontade and unintentionally comic self-aggrandising. He is shown to be intellectually dishonest and hypocritical, at one time criticising the Catholic hierarchy for their treatment of Charles Stewart Parnell, then contradicting this view later on when he acquires wealth and wants to adopt the moral pose of the middle-class. His comic *volte face*, contrived for audience mirth, is a classic device in O'Casey's mockery of shallow males. His weak moral calibre echoes in young Labour leader Jerry's moralistic Puritanism when he cannot come to terms with the prospect of Mary's pregnancy. Jerry's humanity "is just as narrow as the humanity of the others", Mary jibes, when his declarations of love quickly evaporate at the revelation of her possible pregnancy to another man; like the Paycock's, the rhetoric of Jerry's idealism echoes hollowly *vis á vis* the challenge of a real moral dilemma; he is The Covey, he is Jack Avreen, he is Harry Heegan.⁴⁸ He is perhaps who Robert Collis was thinking of when he created his trade unionist, Joe, "the great social reformer and all", who turns out to be a thief who cares little for his fellow proletarians.⁴⁹

O'Casey's depiction of Pádraig Pearse in *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) crystallises the charge of male hypocrisy. The portrayal of the nationalist icon in silhouette is a parody of itself, a metaphor for O'Casey's ill-defined sketches of so many men. The contrast between Pearse's sanguinary invocations of "terrible war" – the "homage of millions of lives" in "glorious sacrifice" and "shedding of blood" – and the awful reality of proletarian suffering, is a biting condemnation of both warfare and its main instigators. In its ironic juxtaposition of rhetoric and action, it filters O'Casey's composite judgement on the folly of man into one scene. The consumptive Mollser articulates the dramatist's own frustration with the futility of men's wars: "Is there anybody goin'," she famously asks, "with a tither o' sense?"⁵⁰ Such explaining away of political action is repeated at the end of the century in Roddy Doyle's revisionist *A Star Called Henry* (1999) and is why Seamus Deane asserts that the Dublin of *The*

⁴⁸ Ibid. 81.

⁴⁹ Robert Collis, *Marrowbone Lane: A Play in Three Acts* (Dublin: Runa Press, 1943), p. 75.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 191.

Plough “is not a city in which politics has any truly social or human basis. Instead, only in repudiation of politics can humanity express itself”.⁵¹

There are also male characters in O’Casey who exhibit truly heroic traits, such as Fluther Goode, with his chivalry in defending Rosie and Nora. Indeed, the characters that are presented as obvious authorial stand-ins in the plays exemplify, in a crudely narcissistic way, how men can be selflessly heroic. Jack, in *The Star*, dies fighting fascists in the streets. In *Red Roses*, Ayamonn Breydon dies at the hands of brutal police violence. His relationship with the devout Catholic, Sheila Moorneen, his mother’s similarity to the Mrs O’Casey the playwright depicted in his autobiographies, and other autobiographical events in the play (as well as the fact that in earlier versions Ayamonn’s name is “Sean O’Casside”) construct the young O’Casey as a stylised heroic icon: a painter, actor, intellectual and trade union activist/martyr — a William Morris-esque ideal.

But men’s self-delusion is a more potent and abiding theme in the plays, including short works like *The End of the Beginning* (1934), a one-act farce in which a domineering, pompous husband tries to humiliate his wife by betting that he can do her domestic work better than she can. Darry Berrill ends up enlisting his short-sighted friend, Barry Derrill, in this task, which results in a comic Laurel-and-Hardy-esque trail of carnage about the house. This slapstick vignette, of course, is a metaphor for what men do most in O’Casey: cause havoc in the domestic sphere because they can’t see far enough beyond themselves. This tendency in O’Casey has remained the subject of contention in working-class literature. Many of the male characters in Dublin’s working-class writing after O’Casey are indeed egotistical and self-absorbed, although none of the subsequent writers conduct such a sustained attack on manhood, or indeed ideology. Yet it is true that there are (at times more disturbing) echoes of O’Casey in Smith’s Pat Baines (*The Countrywoman* (1961)), Magee’s Hatchet (*Hatchet* (1978)), Sebastian Barry’s Joe (*The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007)), Doyle’s Charlo (*The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996)) and a great many more of the deeply flawed and often violent males that emerge in later working-class writing. Doyle in particularly

⁵¹ Seamus Deane, “O’Casey and Yeats: Exemplary Dramatists”, in *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1985), p. 111.

exhibits a tendency towards the caricature of working-class men, as my final chapter shows. However, the relative complexity of some later males might also be seen as a reaction against O'Casey's stereotypes, and my second chapter conveys how Magee, McKenna and Dunne develop male identities after O'Casey with far more subtlety and vision. This matter of conflicting male typologies resonates throughout this thesis.

Commitment: The life we live

Moreover, O'Casey shows his influence on later writers in terms of his dramaturgical style and aesthetic vision. Herbert Goldstone writes that the concept of artistic "commitment" is "closely related to, if not synonymous with, community" in O'Casey. "Underlying this search is a deep conviction that the individual fulfils himself through involvement in some order larger than himself".⁵² An early reviewer of *Juno* quantified the conceptual departure the play signalled for the National Theatre in similar terms: "Democracy has at last become articulate on both sides of the curtain with what the great public hungers after [...] the drama of palpitating city life".⁵³ This captures what O'Casey was trying to achieve: the advancement of the proletarian struggle "through art and culture and the people of culture", as he was to tell Lady Gregory.⁵⁴ For him, culture meant "the life we live", and was "far more than books on our shelves and pictures in our galleries", but something "that is within us".⁵⁵

It is certain that Lady Gregory's *Workhouse Ward* (1908, produced in Liberty Hall in 1912), A.P. Wilson's *Victims* (1912) and *The Slough* (1914), and Oliver St. John Gogarty's *Blight* (1917) – all plays about workers' suffering – would have affected O'Casey deeply; as perhaps would James Stephens' novel *The Charwoman's Daughter* (1912), his short story *Hunger* (1918), and St. John Ervine's tragic play, *Mixed Marriage*, first performed at the Abbey in 1911. Lady Gregory and Wilson's plays were used as agitprop by the Irish Workers' Dramatic Company under the

⁵² Goldstone, *In Search of Community*, pp. 5-6.

⁵³ William J. Lawrence, in the *Irish Statesman*, 15 May 1954; cited in Hogan, Robert and Richard Burnham, *The Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History VI: The Years of O'Casey, 1921-1926* (Gerrard's Cross: Smythe, 1992), p. 193.

⁵⁴ Murray, *Seán O'Casey: Writer at Work*, p.165.

⁵⁵ Seán O'Casey, *Blasts and Benedictions: Articles and Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 77.

direction of O'Casey's ally and Jim Larkin's sister, Delia Larkin, and this manner of consciousness-raising through theatre was to influence O'Casey towards his ultimate vocation. In his comic-tragic and realistic portrayal of slum life, Gogarty was anticipating O'Casey; it was one of a handful of Abbey plays the "slum dramatist" saw before embarking on his literary career — and no doubt one, with typical tenacity, which the then obscure Dublin labourer had vowed to surpass.⁵⁶ Wilson's pre-Lockout play, *Victims* (1912), had also vilified the "profit fiends" of Dublin.⁵⁷ His interplay of public and private lives amidst political tumult was something O'Casey may have also observed and sought to emulate, but if he did "he kept quiet about it" — notwithstanding the comparisons Murray now draws with O'Casey's *The Harvest Festival* (1919), a play about a strike that also ends in violence.⁵⁸

In the early plays that he did see, O'Casey had observed the possibility for localised dramatic propaganda. The theatre could present new opportunities for political agitation, and didacticism came naturally to the son of a proselytiser (his father worked for the Irish Church Missions) — the Abbey theatre presenting itself as a pulpit from which to pontificate, "the temple entered" for the "acolyte" in his "full canonical costume".⁵⁹ The Abbey's doors had been flung open to proletarian drama in the 1910s, having staged also Wilson's *The Slough* in 1914.⁶⁰ But the Abbey was still the domain of the middle classes that James Plunkett would mock in *Strumpet City's* (1969) riot scenes. In Plunkett's novel, a comic contrast is drawn between the polite theatre-going gaiety of Horse Show Week and the proletarian uproar on the streets outside the playhouse in 1913. After his sacking from the GNR, O'Casey engaged in amateur

⁵⁶ Yet there was obvious emulation too, as James F. Carens notes. The "general resemblances" between Gogarty's Tullys and O'Casey's Boyles include crippled males (Jimmy Foley and Johnny Boyle), peevish whiners (Tully with his backaches and the Paycock with his notorious "pains"), boasting male leads, and while "Mary Foley's roots in reality go not so deep as Juno's", nonetheless "they go deep". James F. Carens, "Introduction" to Oliver St. John Gogarty, *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty* (Delaware: Proscenium, 1973), p. 11. Add to this the *deus ex machina* of compensation from a construction site accident — which catapults Tully into unexpected wealth — and also Tully's Paycockian bravado as paterfamilias, and one can delineate the extent of O'Casey's borrowing for *Juno*.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Liberty Hall Plays No. 1*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Murray, *Seán O'Casey: Writer at Work*, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁹ O'Casey, *Mirror in My House*, p. 139.

⁶⁰ Robert Hogan describes it as "the first notable play about the Dublin working man" in *The Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History IV: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1979), p. 342.

dramatics with the SLOT club in Seville Place, which allowed him to hone his theatrical style, but also brought to bear the sense of community and social interaction that pertains to amateur theatre, a key influence on his work. He wrote a play for SLOT in 1918, *The Frost in the Flower*, which was lost, but he had not visited the Abbey, he insisted, until 1917 — due partly to lack of funds, partly to social awkwardness. Less than a decade later, he would make the theatre his own.

Nonetheless, the Abbey had a lesser influence on O’Casey than earlier, less expensive forms of entertainment. Kiberd notes the trace of conventional Victorian melodramas at the Queen’s Theatre, which, at an admission fee of sixpence, the young John could afford.⁶¹ There, he learned the raucous power of stock situations and music-hall melodrama, the influence of which Beckett would laud in O’Casey’s work as his “principle of knockabout”, which “discerns the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities”.⁶² John had seen Boucicault’s *The Shaughraun* in the Queen’s Theatre in the 1890s, describing it as “a wonderful revelation” and he, like Boucicault, always wrote with an eye to entertainment, vaudeville and variety.⁶³ O’Casey’s comic interludes and slapstick squabbles were undoubted elements in the success of his earlier plays — a lesson that would be passed on to popular writers such as Lee Dunne, Christy Brown, Peter Sheridan and Roddy Doyle later on, for whom *divertissement* is indispensable. This too is a perilous path to tread, however. As Kiberd warns, “people, confronted with a sweetened propaganda pill, might learn how to suck off the sugar coating and leave the pill behind”.⁶⁴ Comedy and its ambiguous use in proletarian fiction and plays is another of the concerns this thesis engages.

Towards the end of his career, the “life we live” was increasingly elided from Irish literature by censorship, and O’Casey despised what he saw as its evisceration of national culture. *The Bishop’s Bonfire* (1955), for instance, centres on the civic welcome for a bishop in which all heretical literature is to be burned, conjuring up associations with the recent past in Europe, with the Nazi regime’s burning of proscribed books, and, by association, levelling a serious accusation of literary fascism

⁶¹ Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 220.

⁶² Qtd. in Kiberd; *Ibid.*

⁶³ Murray, *Seán O’Casey: Writer at Work*, p. 44.

⁶⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 221.

against the Irish Government. This was prescient stuff indeed, for the greater part of working-class writing from Dublin in the coming decades was to fall under the jack boot of Ireland's own cultural commissars. O'Casey stresses the class prejudice that underlies censorship in an opinion voiced in *The Bonfire* by the Canon to Father Boheroe. The poor simply aren't capable of dealing with freedom of expression, he explains: "Can't you understand that their dim eyes are able only for a little light? Damn, it, man, can't you see Clooncoohy can never be other than he is?"⁶⁵ His comments seek to disrupt the paternal power of Catholic hegemony in cultural matters. This theme also emerges in many works engaged by the following study.

Within all of this – O'Casey's early "drama of palpitating city life" and later drama of palpitating pulpits – one observes the continual desire to combat aesthetic snobbery and the promotion of an art form based on democratic principles, a literature *engagé*. Fundamentally this desire is, to return to Goldstone's point, about "commitment", which is most blatantly the case with a play like *Hall of Healing* (1958), one of the shorter plays, which portrays the ill-treatment of Dublin's working class by the service providers at a medical dispensary. Such politically obvious agitprop is also a formal and aesthetic legacy that O'Casey developed and bequeathed to his successors. In plays about drug addiction – such as Paula Meehan's *Mrs Sweeney*, or Enda Walsh's *Sucking Dublin* – in works about institutional abuse – like Sheridan's *The Liberty Suit* or Mannix Flynn's *Nothing to Say* and *James X* – we see examples of politically engaged works that owe a debt of gratitude to O'Casey's aesthetic vision and the space it created in Dublin for socially engaged art. My chapter on prison plays in particular supports this point.

Distortions

O'Casey plays an important part in Irish and Dublin working-class literature. He posed questions of class's place in literature and literature's place in class, asking, for instance, "why should the docker reading Anatole France or the carter reading Yeats be a laughter-provoking conception?"⁶⁶ For this reason, misleading assignments of

⁶⁵ O'Casey, *The Bishop's Bonfire*, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 32.

O'Casey as an interloper on working-class culture must first be debunked if any case for the study of proletarian literature is to be fostered within the remit of Irish Studies. Although the matter of O'Casey's class has been questioned *ad nauseam* since his death – not least because his family lived in somewhat better conditions than those the writer himself depicted – it is worth discussing the matter as an illustration of how issues of class are so desperately under-theorised in Irish literary scholarship. It may seem trite to make the point that O'Casey *was* working class, but because so many academics have insisted on categorising him otherwise, a brief elaboration of this discussion is necessary if a reassessment of O'Casey, as a progenitor of working-class writing, is to be sustained.

The O'Caseys' general economic status would seem to render suggestions that Seán was not working class mere mislead and pointless pedantry.⁶⁷ O'Casey was born into genteel poverty — if that is an appropriate description of what it is to be born to (self-) educated parents in working-class Dublin of the 1860s. His father, Michael Casey, the son of a Limerick farmer, may have worked as a clerk for the proselytising Irish Church Missions (ICM) in Dublin, but he earned less than the average skilled tradesman at the time.⁶⁸ His mother, Susan (*née* Archer), was the daughter of Abraham Archer, an auctioneer, but her marriage to Michael ensured a life of bare subsistence. The young Seán worked as a despatch clerk in a wholesale chandler's office and also as a van boy at Eason & Son newsagents. Having no skilled trade, he later worked as a bricklayer's assistant on the Great Northern Railway (GNR), from 1901 to 1911, was sacked for trade union activity, and became unemployed and frequently malnourished, undergoing surgery for tubercular glands in 1915. His family always struggled to make ends meet, and had lost at least three children in infancy. Life itself, as well as livelihood, was extremely precarious.

Seán's brothers worked in typically working-class jobs: Mick and Tom in the Post Office and later as soldiers, and Isaac toiling through 14-hour-shifts as an office boy with the *Daily Express*. The dramatist's Gorkiesque descriptions of his mother

⁶⁷ Some years after O'Casey's death, Seán McCann's *The World of Seán O'Casey* (1966), and later, Martin Marguiles' *The Early Life of Seán O'Casey* (1970), questioned the writer's working-class credentials.

⁶⁸ Murray, *Seán O'Casey: Writer at Work*, p. 15.

scrubbing floors, “washing away the venom of poverty”, have the ring of truth; his subjection to the tyranny of a hostile schoolmaster, his educational privations – having little money to see plays, or buy books – all conjure up a bleak vista of working-class poverty in late nineteenth-century Dublin.⁶⁹ According to the first of his autobiographies, *I Knock at the Door* (1939), John (later Seán O’) Casey was, like Roddy Doyle’s Henry Smart in *A Star Called Henry* (1999), the third child in succession to be given the same first name – the other two having died in infancy – and as the first success after two false starts he was the embodiment of both his class’s tenacity and its precarious poverty. A family of eight children (or thirteen, according to O’Casey), living successively in cramped rented residences on Dorset Street, Inisfallen Parade and East Wall – on an income less than that of a carpenter and then, after Michael’s death in 1886, on whatever paltry earnings the children could muster for their mother – was not, by any economic index, “lower middle class”.⁷⁰

It seems superfluous to say so, but it is necessary when so many critics insist on attaching this nebulous, “especially anxious” class assignation to O’Casey’s family.⁷¹ Furthermore, it is difficult to decipher from categorisations of his family as lower middle class precisely what the categorisers believe to be *working* class. This is not to discount the need to correct O’Casey’s own misleading talk of being born in a “slum”, or the need to point out that Susan Casey was from a bourgeois background, but it does indicate a level of unnecessary and unhelpful revisionism. Grene’s assertion that O’Casey’s parents were “lower middle class” because “Michael was a clerk” may accord with cultural inclinations of white-collar workers to *perceive* themselves as a cut above the industrial working class, but clerks on lesser wages than tradesmen, living in tenement areas at the turn of the century, were not necessarily distinguishable from their more readily identifiable working-class neighbours.⁷² Moreover, the education and occupations of his sons confirm that Michael’s family largely affirmed rather than bucked the economic trends in working-class life. Grene asserts that Bella, O’Casey’s

⁶⁹ O’Casey, *Mirror in My House*, I, p. 216.

⁷⁰ Only eight children were recorded or spoken about, leading O’Connor to doubt the truth of O’Casey’s recollection; Garry O’Connor, *Seán O’Casey: A Life* (London: Paladin, 1989), p. 4.

⁷¹ Andy Medhurst, “If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics”, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 19.

⁷² Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama*, p. 111.

sister, was “a trained National School teacher” – another “lower middle class” profession. But Bella only worked as a teacher for five years, and was forced to leave her job because of the scandal of being eight months’ pregnant when taking marriage vows; thereafter she was a charwoman, scrubbing floors for the better part of her working life. She indeed *personified* the sexist, economic disempowerment of working-class women at the time. Further, to argue that O’Casey’s sister’s work for a short period – while her family remained largely in poverty – partially renders the entire family lower middle class, is unconvincing. While Grene allows that O’Casey was “from a middle class family gone down in the world” (itself a questionable assertion), he does not allow that going “down” made them proletarian.⁷³

O’Casey’s own opportunist cultivation of the “slum playwright” tag does play its part in this distortion. An *Irish Times* reviewer maybe best summarised O’Casey’s six volumes of autobiography as “a strange rainbowed fantasia of fact, dream-fulfilment and paying off old scores”.⁷⁴ In the *Autobiographies*, written between 1939 and 1954, O’Casey misrepresented his age, the chronological order of historic events, his outlook at different junctures, that of his family, his level of formal education, the street of his birth and the real facts of many different “rainbowed” events. They conform to the contours of a continuing effort on the author’s part to reconcile the many antinomies of his life, and to dramatise them in a flattering way. Perhaps also it is the general tendency to romanticise such writers of humble origins that arouses critical scepticism; O’Casey’s frequent sobriquet of “slum dramatist” (one he was glad to accept as “suitable and accurate”), like that of Patrick McGill as the “Navy Poet”, or Francis Ledwidge as the “Scavenger Poet”, is ripe for the kind of wry reception that inspired Flann O’Brien’s parodic Jem Casey, the “Poet of the Pick” and “Bard of Booterstown”, in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939).⁷⁵ In O’Brien’s satiric commentary on the cult of the quotidian, the Bard’s efforts to be close to his people are mocked in his own poetic travesty, “A Pint of Plain is Your Only Man”.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid. 112.

⁷⁴ Anon., “Recent Paperbacks”, *The Irish Times*, 26 March 1971, p. 10.

⁷⁵ O’Connor, *Seán O’Casey: A Life*, p. 4; Flann O’Brien, *At Swim-Two Birds* (Dublin: Penguin Books, 1992), p.76.

⁷⁶ Ibid.77.

Such concerns with hagiography and hackneyed, self-aggrandising autodidacts like “Jem” might partially explain statements like that of biographer Garry O’Connor, that O’Casey’s “assumption of poverty was, like a saint’s, ultimately an act of will”.⁷⁷ Christopher Murray believes too that the labouring class was “to be the class O’Casey *chose* to belong to”.⁷⁸ But in all of this discussion of the playwright’s intentions, it must be asked how much a poor, half-blind, glaucoma-stricken, only slightly educated boy from East Wall at the time had any *choice* in the matter of his class.⁷⁹ Both economically and culturally, the playwright was working class; why, then, the insistence that his fancies necessarily expose him as a Dickensian Bounderby?

True, in 1881 and 1882, Michael Casey was listed in *Thom’s Directory* under “Nobility, Gentry, Merchants, and Traders” as the lessee of a tenement building, but whatever the circumstances of his short and failed spell in property management, Michael’s membership of such an esteemed group was doubtful, and in any case short-lived.⁸⁰ It is also true that the Casey family, as unionists and Protestants, would have been aligned in a political sense to the viewpoint, if not always the class interests, of their economic betters in the unionist elites, and true that this provided some privileges in terms of career opportunities — including for the young John, who attained work with Eason’s (for a mere week) and later the GNR, at least partly on the basis of his religion.⁸¹ But Seán self-consciously shunned these sectarian values in early adulthood. This may bolster the claim that his descent into poverty was the result of personal volition, but O’Casey’s doggedness in resenting sectarian advantage does not mean that he *chose* his class, for there are no indications that he had any prospects of attaining bourgeois status, regardless of his inclinations.

⁷⁷ O’Connor, *Seán O’Casey: A Life*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Murray, *Seán O’Casey: Writer at Work*, p. 18. [Emphasis added]

⁷⁹ As Murray has noted, the class ambiguities of the 1901 census form filled in at their Abercorn Road home are instructive in this regard, with Susan making a “very political statement” by denominating her family “Church of England” (aligning them with the imperial centre), but their occupations are unequivocally working class, with Mick a “telegraph labourer”, Tom a “postman” and John a “Junior Delivery Clerk”; Murray, *Seán O’Casey: Writer at Work*, pp. 54-55. O’Casey would later subvert his mother’s social snobbery in the 1911 census, mischievously describing himself in Gaelic as “sclábhaidhe do lucht an bhóthair Iaranais”, or “slave for the Railway crowd”; *Ibid.* 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 20.

⁸¹ See O’Connor, *Seán O’Casey: A Life*, p. 32, 39.

Kiberd's judgement of the "working-class realist" comes closest when he writes that "though O'Casey's family was nothing like the poorest of the poor, this was a life which he knew fairly well"; he was of the working class and close to its poorest members.⁸² O'Casey's assignation as a (lower) middle-class interloper by critics is inaccurate, and perhaps illustrates the pernicious and pervasive nature of this problem of the class concept in Irish studies with more clarity than anything else. As trailblazing autodidact, O'Casey provided *the* towering example for other aspiring Dublin writers to emulate, which was as important for its encouragement of working-class achievement as it is for its own aesthetic and cultural merits. He was an enabler of Dublin's proletarian culture, whose success would act as a beacon to later authors from impoverished backgrounds, such as Brendan Behan, Paul Smith, Christy Brown, Lee Dunne and Heno Magee. In the interviews I have conducted for this thesis, each writer (Sheridan, Magee, Meehan, Bolger and Dunne) has cited O'Casey as an outstanding influence. Unwittingly, the misleading critical reception of O'Casey is also an eloquent commentary on why these writers' commonalities of class (and so much else) have received so little critical attention. In the coming chapter, my discussion of writers who began to emerge from O'Casey's shadow endeavours to show how such commonalities, and such cultural alienation, are depicted by three young writers of a new generation.

⁸² Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 218, 220.

Chapter 2: Angry Young Men, Class Injuries and Masculinity

Billy don't like it living here in this town,
He says traps have been sprung long before he was born,
He says "hope bites the dust behind all the closed doors
And pus and grime ooze from its scab crusted sores".
There's screaming and crying in the high rise blocks;
It's a rat trap, Billy, but you're already caught,
But you can make it if you want to or you need it bad enough.

— The Boomtown Rats, "Rat Trap"¹

In "Rat Trap" (1978), the first Irish rock song ever to top the British music charts, Dubliner Billy's sense of being ensnared, and his consequent need to "find a way out" of poverty by "kick[ing] down that door" of social immobility, echoes the mood of the three plays that this chapter explores in a number of ways. Billy's vacillation between dreams of escape and the reality of poverty is a central dilemma for Dublin's own Angry Young Man generation of writers, who correspond with but differ in ways from the "Angries" of mid-century Britain. James McKenna, in *The Scatterin'* (1959), Lee Dunne, in *Goodbye to the Hill* (1976), and Heno Magee, in *Hatchet* (1972), are part of a movement in Dublin writing that castigated a society of "closed doors". It predates The Boomtown Rats' "Five Lamp boys", but accords with their pessimistic slice of working-class life in the same city.²

The three authors articulate the emotional turmoil of detached young men who struggle to cope with the expectations and encumbrances that society foists upon them. Their plays share a parallel social function: to question Irish society's treatment of these working-class men and to unravel the complexities of their "habitus" — the

¹ Boomtown Rats. *Rat Trap*. A Tonic for the Troops. Ensign. 1978.

² In reference to *Goodbye to the Hill*, I refer to the theatre version. Dunne's earlier novel of the same name appeared in 1965.

acquired ideas, behavioural patterns and tastes that characterise their environment.³ All three writers present working-class men as a marginalised social cohort within the nation state and each play presents emigration as their only prospect of escape from the “rat trap” of cyclical poverty. In this respect, they reiterate concerns voiced by the later O’Casey — particularly in plays set in rural Ireland like *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949), where socially inhibited youths are forced to emigrate or live at home in chronic boredom. However, whereas this later O’Casey, who was increasingly alienated from the Dublin of his youth, had focussed his ire on rural conservatism, there is a sense in these later works of a new and unprecedented impetus in working-class culture. Equally, while O’Casey had caricatured and lampooned men in a way that McKenna found offensive, these younger writers seek to explain, not *explain away*, issues of working-class masculinity.

As I shall show, the plays’ counter-cultural message — their criticism of state hegemony — is linked with the experience of emigration, influences from abroad and the contemporary proletarianisation of culture in Britain. Additionally, there is a key ideological change in how the working classes are represented. Departing from the focus of earlier writing, by O’Casey, A.P. Wilson, Denis Johnston, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Joseph O’Connor, and Robert Collis — which centred largely on the *material* privations of proletarian life — the post-1950s writers shifted the terms of class contention towards *cultural* and *social* deprivation. In the three works, politics makes way for sociology and class angst is substituted for class warfare. Material realities of class inequality are explored and deplored in the plays, but they act as secondary preoccupations to their primary inquiries into the cognitive and cultural inner worlds of working-class life.

Stylistically, the realism of these plays is in itself both an aesthetic frame and a reaction against the unreal façade of social and literary discourse that, they suggest, has obfuscated the true nature of social conditioning. As I have noted in my introduction, in Bourdieu’s use, *habitus* refers to “durable, transposable dispositions” that are acquired and interiorised by individuals in response to social forces in their environments, such

³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Cambridge UP, 1977), p. 72. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge, 1998), esp. pp. 101-103.

as class, religion, and education.⁴ Explaining the habitus of working-class life, the “system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures”, is key for Dunne, Magee and McKenna.⁵ It is often noted in Cultural Studies, however, that such theories of social determinism can patronise the oppressed, assuming their (particular) inability (and presumably the theorist’s/writer’s ability) to see beyond the immediacy of their predicament.⁶

Richard Hoggart, in *The Uses of Literacy*, criticised a cognate tendency in the middle-class Marxist’s concept of working-class culture:

He admires the remnants of the noble savage, and has a nostalgia for those ‘best of all’ kinds of art, rural folk-art or genuinely popular urban art [...] He pities the Jude-the-Obscure aspect of working people. Usually he succeeds in part-pitying and part-patronizing working people beyond any semblance of reality.⁷

Hoggart referred to Thomas Hardy’s Jude Fawley, the hero of *Jude the Obscure* (1895), as the archetype of a working-class protagonist who functions as an “open book” for readers, a character who is determined sharply by his social conditioning and thus one who can be readily understood and explained in terms of his upbringing. The omniscient narrator’s and implied reader’s very act of “understanding” affirms their superior awareness and, by extension, their superior social standing. The working-class subject becomes a kind of puzzle, readily understood by the bourgeois reader. Andrew Sayer notes that “it is common for the behaviour of oppressed groups to be either pathologised or patronised”, and Jude’s function exemplifies perfectly this discursive tendency. According to Sayer, such a condescending view of socialisation proceeds from and supports a rigid sense of determinism that portrays individuals as mere

⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline of Theory of Practice*, p. 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶ Harold Perkin wrote, in a somewhat acerbic but salient essay, that “the sociology of the well-heeled Marxist intellectuals of the old and new ‘new left’ would make a fascinating study, if they would allow someone to pursue it—they believe in studying the social conditioning of everyone but themselves [...] the trademark of the middle-class intellectual ‘labour historian’ is his condescension toward the working class which he seeks to control and manipulate”; p. 88. See Harold Perkin, “The Condescension of Posterity: The Recent Historiography of the English Working Class”, *Social Science History*, 3.1 (Autumn, 1978), 87-101.

⁷ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 16.

products of their environments — devoid of what Bourdieu calls “organic individuality”.⁸

Illustrating this tendency in literature, there is at times a Manichean cleft between exceedingly good, “special cases” (the Jem Wilson of *Mary Barton* or the Frank Owen of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*), and the unheroic, tragically corrupted denizens of their working-class world (exemplified in Gaskell’s novel by Esther Barton, who becomes a prostitute through circumstance, and her brother John, who murders a tyrannous capitalist, and in Tressell’s by the class unconscious plebeians Owen identifies as “despicable” and “dirt”).⁹ On the one hand, authors show how capitalism damages the poor; on the other, they choose to focus on protagonists who seem relatively – even implausibly – unscathed by those damages. Bourdieu’s concept of social conditioning is useful in both contexts in that, while it refutes the reductionism of the special case, it also refuses the temptation of determinism’s extremities. He stresses that “one cannot, in fact, without contradiction, describe (or denounce) the inhuman conditions of existence that are imposed on some, and at the same time credit those who suffer them with the real fulfilment of human potentialities”.¹⁰ Bourdieu’s argument is neither “part-pitying” nor “part patronising”; he merely acknowledges the truism that poverty limits choice.

In working-class life, “necessity imposes a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary, a resignation to the inevitable”.¹¹ This does not make him a rigid determinist; indeed, Bourdieu counsels that one “abandon[s] all theories which implicitly treat practice [behaviour] as a mechanical reaction”.¹² In characterising the entire process of social conditioning as a complex of interactions between human beings, habitus and field, he deconstructs a

⁸ Andrew Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 207.

⁹ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Flamingo, 1993), pp. 45-46.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 75-6. In claiming that the less socially empowered are susceptible to social restraints in direct relation to their level of economic disadvantage, this view is naturally controversial. Jan C.C. Rupp characterises Bourdieu’s “social space” as “a funnel, in which there is a greater degree of differentiation at higher class levels”, warning that he “risks regarding the culture of lower classes as a negatively defined, homogenous mass culture”. Jan C.C. Rupp, “Rethinking Cultural and Economic Capital” in *Reworking Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 224-225.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 372.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of Theory of Practice*, p. 73.

system from which none of us are immune, but to which the economically disadvantaged are more susceptible because of their lack of social and cultural power — *notwithstanding* the potential of organic individuality. The parallels between *The Scatterin'*, *Hatchet*, *Goodbye to the Hill* and this analysis are salient, insofar as the plays wish to represent working-class characters as they are, rather than how a bourgeois writer might wish his/her representative “heroes” to be, and this is a departure from the discourse of pitying condescension that pervades writing on the working class. Like the French sociologist, the three writers seek to comprehend men’s own imperfect construction of themselves *vis à vis* their environments, to depict what Walter Greenwood had termed “unpleasant people whose qualities, perhaps, are sad reflections of sadder environments”.¹³ But they seek to show how their creations are neither completely determined nor “free”, but subject to a dialectic of self and society that remains a constant and inexorable negotiation.

Sculptor of words: James McKenna and his “book of liquid history”

James McKenna was an artist for whom the hidden injuries of class were an important theme, and perhaps also a deeply personal concern. Despite his acclaim as a sculptor, it was suggested that McKenna himself was deprived of Arts Council funding because “he [was] working class” and did “not fit in with the drawing-room atmosphere in which the Arts Council crew congregate”.¹⁴ McKenna worked in London for some years, partly with the London Underground, and would have undoubtedly witnessed the discontent from which Britain’s Angries’ writing arose. In 1959, at 26 years of age, he had written a play called *The Scatterin'* and by that time he had emigrated to England four times — an experience that looms large in the play.¹⁵

¹³ Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 138.

¹⁴ Anon., “Arts Council ignores his work”, *Sunday Independent*, 16 December 1973, p. 9. In an obituary in *The Irish Times*, McKenna’s “unapologetically combative stance” was cited as something that “may explain why it was not until 1977 before he received his first commission for a sculpture”; Anon., “James McKenna: Sculptor, playwright and poet with a total commitment to the arts”, *The Irish Times*, 21 October 2000, p. 16.

¹⁵ *The Scatterin'* was presented by Alan Simpson at the Dublin Theatre Festival of 1960 and was well received, firstly in the Abbey Lecture Hall on 14 September that year. It was also produced in the Theatre Royal, Stratford, and received some excellent reviews. Simpson’s collaboration should be seen as

The Scatterin' focuses on the bleak lives of four young Dubliners as they contemplate taking the mail boat for England. It explores their subjection to poverty, garda brutality, and the consequences for one of them when he wreaks revenge for a brutal police attack. The play is set in June 1958, in the heart of working-class Dublin, "on the north side of the river Liffey", with players dressed in the contemporary "Teddy Boy" fashion that identifies them to the authorities as "dirty dressed-up gangsters".¹⁶ Indeed, the apparel of the Teddy boy was inherently subversive, mimicking the clothes of "the upper-class Edwardian dandy, but their imitation was also an exaggeration, imprinting upon the styles of the upper-class original the signs of a different taste".¹⁷ The Teddy boys' youth, their modernity and their class alienates them from the backward, rural national culture of 1950s Ireland — a point the play repeatedly stresses.

McKenna wrote of Ireland in a poem of the same period as a place "forty years free; / Choked with ambiguity: / Surrounded by the sea", and the shabby surroundings of *The Scatterin'* emphasises the utter absence of the kind of affluence which was transforming working-class life in Britain: a house with a glassless fanlight and no door, "scooped out holes" for windows, and a street described as "a narrow little canyon of dereliction" form the background to the opening act (*SC*, 7).¹⁸ The dramaturgy follows the familiar path of working-class social realism, showing how the youths live in an impoverished ghetto, but McKenna's stylised rock interludes and extraordinarily long monologues are defamiliarising features that hint at other theatrical styles. The music emphasises the play's modernity, but also harks back to (and modernises) the music-hall and variety tradition so favoured by working-class

indicative of the radical nature of the work — his notoriety for producing *avant-garde* plays courted controversy and resulted in his arrest for "obscenity" in a controversial public spat some years earlier; see Conor Cruise O'Brien, "When the Catholic Church ruled us all", *Sunday Independent*, 5 January 2003, p. 19. The controversy contributed to Simpson's emigration in the 1960s, according to Joan FitzPatrick Dean, in "Irish stage censorship in the 1950s", *Theatre Survey*, 42.2 (November, 2001), p.159. Simpson established the New Pike in London as a venue for showcasing Irish theatre and also conducted personal academic research on O'Casey.

¹⁶ James McKenna, *The Scatterin'* (Kildare: Goldsmith, 1977), p. 7, 26. Further references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text as *SC* etc.

¹⁷ John Cook, "Culture, Class and Taste", in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 107.

¹⁸ James McKenna, "Dublin 58", in *Poems* (Dublin: Goldsmith, 1973), p. 11.

theatre-goers, though by the early 1950s in decline.¹⁹ Ultimately, *The Scatterin'* is a slice of contemporary working-class life, its final act set in the waiting room of a shipping company as its four central characters contemplate emigration, welcomed aboard their ship by a porter who represents the state — the prominent display of brass harp buttons on his coat invoking its official seal. The porter's casual nonchalance about “the usual” (SC, 51) vista of a packed emigration ship invokes the “official cynicism”, as McKenna later put it, of a country abandoning its youth, what Lar Redmond calls the “blood letting” of Ireland in *A Walk in Alien Corn* (1990).²⁰

The Scatterin''s kitchen-sink quality was noted by reviewers, like Gus Smith, for bringing “home the devastation of unemployment in the '50s” and being “relevant” socially, “particularly the brutality aspect”.²¹ McKenna himself said he had “drawn [his characters] as I see them” — “though”, in keeping with Bourdieu's analysis, “not necessarily sympathetically”; “you probably won't like them”, he cautioned.²² The young sculptor was indeed explicitly associated with similar literary developments in Britain early in his career, when critic Denis Donoghue described him as “a young Irish ‘angry’”.²³ Although McKenna initially refused the appellation, Angry Young Man was a designation that he would, on later reflection, accept.²⁴ Indeed, the play's anger speaks for itself and McKenna's later description of its milieu of political indifference and social inequality exudes a still-palpable antagonism towards the state:

¹⁹ With the leasing, in 1951, of the Queen's theatre to the Abbey, and new management at the Olympia from 1953, the joint phenomena of falling audiences for variety and management preferences for straight theatre played their part in music-hall's decline. See Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 221.

²⁰ Anon., “The ‘angry’ fifties”, *Sunday Independent*, 18 November 1973, p. 17; Lar Redmond, *A Walk in Alien Corn* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 17.

²¹ Gus Smith, “There's no getting away from violence”, *Sunday Independent*, 9 December 1973, p. 19.

²² Des Hickey, “Mr. McKenna among the Teds”, *Sunday Independent*, 6 December 1959, p. 20.

²³ Denis Donoghue, “Dublin Letter”, *The Hudson Review*, 13.4 (Winter, 1960-1961), p. 580; Donoghue dismissed the play as a “derivative piece” from “*Sweeney Agonistes*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Hostage*, *The Entertainer*, *Westside Story* or *The Connection*”; the “local jokes were locally funny,” he conceded, “and even the author's self-pity was tolerable”. Another anonymous reviewer complimented Simpson's production skills, but condemned the play as an “apologia for the cowardly sadism that Teddy Boys indulge in, led on by the herd instinct, which their ludicrous garments seem to engender in them”; Anon., “The Resurgence In Irish Drama”, *The Times*, 28 September 1960, p. 15. The latter review is perhaps indicative of the marginality of Teddy Boy culture.

²⁴ In 1959 McKenna denied he was an “angry young man”, associating the term with “cynicism”, which was “really only a frozen waste inside you”; Des Hickey, “Mr. McKenna among the Teds”, *Sunday Independent*, 6 December 1959, p. 20. Almost 15 years later, however, he accepted the accuracy of the term; Anon., “The ‘angry’ fifties”, *Sunday Independent*, 18 November 1973, p. 17.

It is hard to convey the total official non-concern for the Irish people in the fifties. [...] We were a nation of demoralised men in gaberdines. Opposition, if only in dress, was offered by an increasing number of the young [...] who could find no other way of voicing their disgust at national official arrogance.²⁵

Séamus O’Kelly, drama critic with *The Irish Times*, described *The Scatterin’* as “the most exciting Irish play since *The Plough and the Stars*”, venturing that it was “above and beyond criticism”.²⁶ Moreover, he again stressed its contemporary cultural significance, vouching that,

If I were the Culture-Commisaar for Ireland (which heaven for-fend) I’d make Mr. Blythe [Ernest Blythe, former Government minister, then Abbey Managing Director] and his directorate attend “The Scatterin’” (in the Abbey Lecture Hall) every night, waited upon by all the politicians of all the parties in Ireland, with a repatriated (by force, if necessary) Sean O’Casey as train-bearer-in-ordinary. [...] It should show the Board of the National Theatre that young people *are* concerned with national problems and can write vividly about them [...] James McKenna’s play could have been called “North-side Story”.²⁷

In his effusive praise, O’Kelly synopsis some of the main threads of the play – its counterblast to standard, Abbey-style plays, its affinity with O’Casey (despite McKenna’s reservations), its lessons for Irish politicians, and its avowedly working-class, “North-side” flavour.

“Makin’ little things seems so important”: Writing against the grain

Kelly’s wish that *The Scatterin’* would become a Shavian lesson in youth subculture for the political classes suggests something that McKenna himself was keen to convey — the Irish state’s elision of “North-side” (*read* working-class Dublin) narratives from literary and public discourse. This is a key point that links his play to the other works explored in this chapter and indeed this thesis as a whole. In *The Scatterin’*, references to the state’s marginalisation of working-class people and their experiences abound. When the jocular Tony delivers his “monologue of self recrimination” – a story of his

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Séamus O’Kelly, “Theatre Festival”, *The Irish Times*, 14 September 1960, p. 6.

²⁷ Ibid.

cheerless life of poverty and petty crime – McKenna intentionally juxtaposes suggestive, jarring references to Celtic Revivalism with the youth's own bleak memories. Tony announces himself sardonically, as

Tony Riordan, the H.P. [hire purchase] Kid; ancient Druid in modern dress; livin' an' lovin' beyond his means. Been to all the high places in the city – Guinness's Brewery, Green Street Court House, and the Artane High School of Commerce. (I was in the Band, but they threw me out 'cause I hated the G.A.A.) Got me a flashy bike – me mother paid the deposit. And for a brief period of enchantment I took off like Oisín, leavin' behind me the grim present an' went on a flight o' fancy – into the never never. (SC, 12)

"Flight o' fancy" was the standard fare of Revival theatre, and the emergence of new theatres in 1950s Dublin (the Pike and the Damer) indicated a desire to move away from it. As Christopher Morash summarises, after the mid-century "constant comparisons with a sepia-tinged past generated a growing impatience with the theatrical heritage created in the early years of the Irish Literary Theatre"; the new Abbey building unveiling of 1966 would itself provide "an opportunity of breaking with a certain tradition of writing", director Tomás Mac Anna anticipated.²⁸ Fittingly, McKenna draws a vivid contrast between Tony's playful, self-aggrandising tone and his experiences of a "certain tradition" of Irishness to illustrate the inadequacy of that tradition. The "never never" of "sepia-tinged" Ossianic legend is a far cry from the courthouse and the Artane School for Boys. The "diabolically satirical" vision infers that Ireland's heroic narratives of primitivist fantasy are anathema to the stories of a generation of working-class men whose lives are so very un-heroic. This was something McKenna expressed in a later poem that posited "the clash of past ideals and howling needs" in a country that had "paused too long before these graves".²⁹

Irish lore fails to reconcile with the reality of "Dublin's frustrated teenagers, warped by an environment which can offer them only tenements, the street-corner, and

²⁸ Christopher Morash, "Irish Theatre", in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joseph N. Cleary, Joe Cleary and Claire Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 322-338.

²⁹ Séamus O'Kelly, "Theatre Festival" in *The Irish Times*, 14 September 1960, p. 6; James McKenna, "Michael Sorohan's Notebook", in *Poems* (Dublin: Goldsmith, 1973), p. 40.

the dole”.³⁰ Tony’s monologue continues less flamboyantly but emphatically in curt, brutal syntax, to intimate how his life differs from that of the mythical Oisín:

Then one day the bogey man came knockin’ at my door. He caught me with me trousers down. I was outa work an’ hadn’t a sou. None of us had. Jaze I’ll never forget that day though. Me mother was cryin’ her eyes out; me oul fella went for me with the razor. (I had forged his signature on the docket.) Anyways, the next thing I was in jail. (SC, 12)

Oisín goes to Tír na nÓg on his horse; Tony goes to jail for his “H.P.” bike.³¹ Allusions to the young men as American Indians throughout the play are illustrative in this regard; talk of “General Custer” and “Sitting Bull”, Jemmo’s ominous stabbing and immolation of an effigy during the “portentous rhythm” of a mock tribal war dance in Act Two (an illustration of which, painted by McKenna, adorns the frontispiece of the 1977 Goldsmith edition), and apocalyptic fears that “they’ll stamp us out”, as Tony’s friend Jemmo predicts, that “one by one we’ll disappear – like the Red Indians from the Plains”, all form part of a conceit that infers the forced emigration of working-class men from their own country (SC, 45, 32, 45, 23). Such an analogy may seem exaggerated, and after talking about his problems in trying to court the interest of a girlfriend on limited means, Jemmo dismisses his worries as “makin’ little things seems so important”, but this is exactly what his creator wishes to do (SC, 54).³² Jemmo follows with an awkward simile about King Cormac, and an allusion to Brian Boru, which are not only incongruous but superfluous; it is his own life of “little things”, his hidden injuries, which take centre stage (SC, 53-54). McKenna, like Patrick Kavanagh in his 1951 poem “Epic”, made his own importance.

If the anti-hero of British Angry Young Man narratives challenged the “conformity” of “affluent modern life”, McKenna’s men challenge cultural conformity

³⁰ Anon., “Festival Playwrights”, *The Irish Times*, 17 September 1960, p. 8.

³¹ McKenna makes a similar point with Patzer’s bathetic and hyperbolic dream of owning his own giant scrap yard, which also contrasts tellingly with the grandiose tone of its articulation: “And as the gay vigour of youth leaves my bones,” he waxes, “I will make a chariot out of the fragments [of scrap], and leaving this rheumatic world behind, I’ll float away off up into the sun; and there I’ll end my days in fields of effulgent gold” (SC, 15).

³² In an obituary in *The Irish Times*, McKenna was described as “an opponent of abstraction and a committed champion of figuration. He believed art should be accessible, and function as a progressive, egalitarian force in society”; Anon., “James McKenna: Sculptor, playwright and poet with a total commitment to the arts”, *The Irish Times*, 21 October 2000, p. 16.

in a society that is failing to be either affluent or modern.³³ The national feast day, St. Patrick's Day, is "like a bleedin' funeral" with sepulchral floats like "dirty big industrial hearses streamin' along" (SC, 31). The youths mock Catholicism and peasant rurality, inventing a parodic tribute to the national saint, "the Wyatt Earp of ancient Ireland", and his "descendants, the farmers", who bathetically "exterminated the rabbit for thirty pieces of silver" (SC, 31). The tripartite analogy – to mixamyotosis culling, St. Patrick's banishment of serpents and Judas's betrayal of Christ – is a blatant and sardonic pastiche on the dominant cultural totems of rural, Catholic Ireland. Ireland embraced a particularly austere brand of Catholicism in the twentieth century, as the "blind man" character from James Plunkett's short story "A Walk Through the Summer" (1955) implies by calling "foreign Catholics" "notorious luke-warmers".³⁴ McKenna's young men lament the waning influence of this Ireland with a satiric "Ochon is Ochon o!" (parodically invoking the linguistic register of Gaelic Ireland typified by Peig Sayers), and while their continual references to ancient figures, such as "King Cormac" and "Maev of Cooley", may seem surreal in a play about modern working-class life, that, precisely, is their purpose (SC, 31, 54, 55).³⁵ McKenna emphasises the gap between different Irelands – mystical and quotidian, conceptual and real – in order to question outmoded conceptions of national culture and foreground the internally alien counter-culture of working-class Dubliners.

"This is the story of nothing at all": Habitus and crime

McKenna also shows how social inequality, which has led to this alienation, fosters dysfunctional behaviour in his protagonists. Whereas earlier writers, such as O'Casey, Robert Collis, A. P. Wilson, James Stephens and Oliver St. John Gogarty, had tended to avoid representations of crime in working-class life, McKenna follows Behan's lead in *The Quare Fellow* (1954) by charting its emergence as a serious problem. A criticism

³³ Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction: from Chartism to 'Trainspotting'* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p. 94.

³⁴ James Plunkett, "A Walk Through the Summer", in *James Plunkett, Collected Short Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2000), p. 55.

³⁵ This wailing phrase comes from the 'caoineadh', or lamenting-the-dead tradition in Irish and featured in a 1944 recording of the Irish language writer, Peig Sayers, who is often debunked as the quintessence of pastoral tedium in Irish literature. See Patricia Lysaght, "Caoineadh ós cionn coirp: The lament for the dead in Ireland", *Folklore* 108 (1997), pp. 65–82.

of such a limited focus might be that it overemphasises the untypical, lumpen elements of working-class life, but with the contemporary emergence of ghettoised working-class council estates and pockets of high unemployment – which created crime blackspots in Dublin – McKenna’s theme was pertinent and prescient indeed.³⁶

Characters in the play are trapped in a cycle of dole queues and monotony that engenders a disdain for life itself and leads to violent behaviour. The first words of the play, sung by Ould Rock – “this is the story of nothing at all” – infer both the boredom of the young men’s lives and their social invisibility (*SC*, 7). The day is drawing to a close as the action begins – a temporal indication of its dispirited milieu – and Conn explains that he “never did a curse o’ God thing [during it] but draw me money at the Labour”. He and his young friends are already world-weary, “arseing about the length o’ the day in idleness”, with yet “another day gone to waste” (*SC*, 8, 9). Conn (whose Gaelic name, recalling another Fianna warrior, forms part of McKenna’s pastiche) sings about social alienation and crime — about being “clapped in a cell”, haunted by the spectre of the “Big Black [police] Wagon”, part of a life of “crawlin’ about here in the sunlight like corpses on sick leave” (*SC*, 8, 31). For Jemmo, his idleness is now preferable to work; social welfare payments are “more than [he] used to get ridin’ a carrier bike for them greasy ould bastards down town” (*SC* 9).

Perhaps the one thing these young men share with the mythical Oisín of *Tír na nÓg* is that they too get trapped in a limbo of eternal youth. They shout “hurry, hurry” to John John as he rushes to put another vinyl on his record player while the “sun is sinking”, suggesting they live in fear of the future, of the ending of another day. Such a vista of disenchanting youth echoes decades later in Paul Mercier’s play *Wasters* (1985), in which a group of youths drink themselves to oblivion on the waste ground near their council estate. Like McKenna’s already world-weary Teddy Boys, Mercier’s Dublin

³⁶ Slum clearance was still a major priority in the 1950s, with the Housing White Paper of 1948 being followed by a period of sustained growth in local authority housing, and although output dipped in the late 1950s, the following decade would bring with it the disastrous policy of high-rise that created Ballymun flats in 1964. See Cathal O’Connell, *The State and Housing in Ireland: Ideology, Policy and Practice* (New York: Nova, 2007), pp. 38-43. The relationship between these ghettoised working-class estates and crime was plain to be seen in the coming decades. See also for example Ciaran McCullagh’s identification of the “typical Mountjoy male prisoner” of the 1990s, who fits the profile exactly of McKenna’s characters of over thirty years earlier: he is “in his early to mid-twenties, from a large family from an urban area [...] the inner city or from one or other of the poorer suburban areas such as Crumlin or Ballymun”; Ciaran McCullagh, *Crime in Ireland* (Cork: Cork UP, 1996), p. 23.

youths speak of not getting out of bed if the weather is bad, inflicting “tortures” on younger children for fun, robbing, gang membership, and living in a place where “nothing happens” and there is “fuck all to look forward to”.³⁷ Evidently McKenna’s point about the marginalisation of working-class Dublin was a far-sighted one. Roddy Doyle’s Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. encounters similarly alienated young men in *The Van* (1991), but these “Living Dead”, as he terms them, only enter his world as “zombies”, people to be avoided and pitied; “they’d be dead before they were twenty”.³⁸ Mercier’s play ends symbolically with a mock wedding, part of his youths’ fantasy of growing up and an emblem of their tragic inability to do so; in its last lines, one character enquires “when does the sun come up?” and another responds, “does it matter?”³⁹ McKenna’s use of the sun as an emblem of anxiety about the future echoes again in Joe O’Byrne’s play, *It Come Up Sun* (2000), based in a container yard in Dublin’s docks.⁴⁰ Like Mercier’s play, O’Byrne’s ends in a mock wedding — another mockery of adult happiness. O’Byrne’s Billy also fears the rising sun, symbolising the future, and the sound of the Docklands’ crane that accompanies it, symbolising the awakening of capitalist power. In *The Scatterin’*, a “children’s chorus” intermittently sings in the background — its haunting and hopeful voices echoing dispiritingly in the failed adulthood that the play foregrounds (SC, 19). McKenna’s dramatic emphasis, like Mercier’s and O’Byrne’s, is on the wistful feelings of lost youth and wasted life, the psychological indignities of poverty – its hidden injuries – and their thematic commonalities convey the enduring similarities of working-class experience.

Like Mercier, McKenna refuses to gloss over the worst effects of poverty on his characters. In Act Two they try to come up with stories to entertain each other as they drink in the rural surrounds of the Dublin Mountains, but despite the brief respite from urban decay, their depressing reminiscences show how they are psychologically trapped in the environment they have grown up in. Patzer castigates Irish moral conservatism, recalling the distraught, unloved, “poor ould Biddy the whore” (SC, 36),

³⁷ Paul Mercier, *Wasters* (1985, unpublished mss. supplied by the author), p. 15, 4, 94.

³⁸ Roddy Doyle, *The Van* (London: Vintage, 1988), p. 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 128.

⁴⁰ Joe O’Byrne, *It Come Up Sun* (unpublished mss. supplied by author and originally staged by Passion Machine Theatre Company, Dublin, in November 2000).

who had numerous children with different men and thus became a social pariah. One of her offspring died in filth, sleeping with rats, another, thrown by the crazed Bidy herself from a moving train, is a product of what Nuala O’Faoláin termed “the whole dreadful, dreadful 50s thing that there was no sex and that nobody got pregnant before marriage [which] led to so many secret lives”.⁴¹ Bidy, like the characters in the play, is worthy of both pity and loathing.

In another long monologue, Jemmo excoriates the Republic for its scandalous abuse of children born to single mothers. His tirade anticipates Mannix Flynn’s later novel *Nothing to Say* (1983) and play *James X* (2003), which fictionalised the author’s sufferings in Irish correctional institutions. Jemmo recalls that, “after a short stay with the nuns, the kids were torn from their mothers an’ sent in droves to the country” (SC, 38). These forgotten fosterlings were members of a forgotten slave class:

The property of the State – the Free State [...] Kept starved; kept naked; kept terrified – an kept at home from school as soon as they could ride a carrier bike. They were also kept ignorant – ‘cause they teach nothin’ in National Schools only Gaelic Games an’ catechism [...] They were called nurse-childer, an’ on farms especially they were tortured. (SC, 38)

Flynn would later castigate this abuse of mainly “working-class children” by “a Church that profited from the forced manual labour of 150,000 children, and a State that supplied them with these child workers”.⁴² McKenna rebukes the state, business interests, the education system and the prevailing orthodoxies of Irish life, and his claims are perhaps one reason why John Ryan heralded the play as a “theatrical landmark in Dublin”.⁴³

But it is also telling that his stories of hidden terror are only utterable on the periphery of the city, in the isolation of the mountains. In a dramatic spatial metaphor, the city’s limits speak to the city’s cultural centre in parallel ways; the alienated and

⁴¹ Red Magso, the protagonist of Magee’s play of the same name, suffered a similar fate. Magee told me he has lost this play. One may also recall the destitute women of Paul Smith’s novels in this context. Nuala O’Faoláin quoted in Máirín Johnston, *Alive, Alive O! Recollections and Visions of Dublin Women* (Dublin: Attic, 1990), p. 62.

⁴² Gerard Mannix Flynn, *James X* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003), p. 6.

⁴³ John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1987), p. 38.

underprivileged criticise their country in the play, and they also confront the mainly bourgeois audience of the Abbey, the Pike and the Olympia. Such dialogical, inter-class didacticism is a common tactic in writing on working-class Dublin, for example in Robert Collis's *Marrowbone Lane* (1943), with its stated intent of "showing one section of society how the other lived".⁴⁴ It continues to be deployed in later work, like Val Mulhern's *Very Like a Whale* (1986), with its focus on a middle-class character who comes face-to-face with working-class poverty — the "human scrap heap" of St. Domenic's school, where he teaches, the "living conditions that people this side of the river [the affluent south side] wouldn't believe".⁴⁵ A direct address across class divides recurs in Enda Walsh's *Sucking Dublin* (1997), which focuses on Dublin's heroin crisis. Addict Lep implicates the audience in his own degraded state: "What ya get is what ya deserve!! YOU DESERVE ME!! Forget me and I'll peep up and smash open your [...] you left me with nothin' cept this!!"⁴⁶ McKenna's Jemmo excoriates Irish theatre's failure to address narratives of working-class life by suggesting that the theatre has been paying too much attention to bourgeois Ireland: "I've spoke enough about the jumped-up trollops o' Grafton Street [...] an' the Garrison in black over across the wall in Blackrock College hoistin' the keys o' the kingdom", he proclaims, before relating a "little story about little white youngsters durin' the war, an' the little concentration camps where many suffered for a time before enterin' into Artane" (SC, 37-38).

These stories unearth a hidden Ireland unfamiliar in contemporary popular discourse and literature. Aligned to the brutal, unprovoked police attack on the youths, which culminates in the climactic end of Act One, the Teddy boys' litany of complaint serves to explain their later exodus to England in Act Three and to frame our understanding of Jemmo's barbarous reprisal for police violence, in which he kills a

⁴⁴ Robert Collis, *Marrowbone Lane*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Val Mulhern, *Very Like a Whale* (London: John Murray, 1986), p. 56, 19.

⁴⁶ Enda Walsh, *Disco Pigs and Sucking Dublin – Two Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 2006), p. 41. Dermot Bolger would adopt a similar pose in his 1999 play, *The Passion of Jerome*, in which the middle class Jerome suffers stigmata during illicit trips to his brother's Ballymun flat for an extra-marital affair. Jerome suffers for the working-class boy who died in the flat, the nails struck into his hands during supernatural horror scenes symbolising the return of the boy's forgotten story as an act of class vengeance. Jerome never "notice[d]" these people before – "the white sock brigade at job placement interviews" – but the boy forces himself into the businessman's life, imploring him to "suffer for me" to "share this pain". Dermot Bolger, *The Passion of Jerome* (London: Methuen, 1999), p. 41, 68, 82.

policeman. As he attests himself, “we was on the wrong side o’ the law from the start” (SC, 58). When Jemmo tries to articulate his rationale for the brutal act, it is telling that he digresses into a monologue on his life thus far, and his subjection to capitalism’s vicissitudes:

When I left school at fourteen I said I’d be a mechanic, like me brother [...] But the factory where me brother worked left off a hundred blokes, an’ he was among them [...] not long after that the man I worked for got himself a new boy. I was gettin’ too big for me bike – an’ his wallet. Since then I’ve been scrougin’ here an’ there getting’ bits o’ jobs. I’ve been goin’ around a year now without a bit o’ work. (pause) I marched with the unemployed crowd onest ... (SC, 64-65)

His explanation attempts to reach beyond the stereotypes of criminality and underclass thuggery that pervade public discourse, by invoking economic and political realities, much as Hubert’s intelligent reaction to the degradations of Parisian life in Matthieu Kassovitz’s film *La Haine* (1995) offsets the awfulness of his murder of a policeman, also in reprisal for an unwarranted police attack on a friend. Jemmo meanders on, explaining that his attack was “the only thing that I’ve ever done in my life” and that he is “not proud” but “not sorry”, finishing abruptly, “that’s it” (SC, 65). For him, this sad tale is the end of his life as he knows it, and it shows that the crime he has just committed emerges from the hopelessness of his habitus, the kind of bleak mid-century childhood Pat Larkin recalls in his collection of short stories *The Coalboat Kids and Other Stories* (2007).⁴⁷ The murderous youth in McKenna’s play is Bourdieu’s “divided self” incarnate; a character whom audiences can both pity and anathematise, a young man trapped between his confused allegiance to his friends, for whom he kills, and his hoped-for escape through emigration, in which he fails.⁴⁸ McKenna imbues his

⁴⁷ While Larkin’s children’s engagement in high-jinx and petty crime mischief in Dublin’s Dockland area furnishes fertile material for comedic vignettes, they also show how mass unemployment and limited opportunities lead all too easily into flirtations with crime, something Larkin foreshadows in the final story, “Sanctuary, Sanctuary”, which ends with a teenage dance hall fracas and a group of drunken children being lead away by gardaí. This theme recurs in Dermot Bolger’s 1980s novel, *Night Shift* (1985), in which “growing stupid on the labour” leaves idle youths with little more to do than play cards and take “the odd stolen car for a spin”. Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 31.

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 51.

actions with ambiguity, a sense of both their senselessness and their emergence from a distinct environment in which they begin to make sense.⁴⁹

“Where they don’t give a damn / Far, far away”: Going home

When the other young men of the play sail away, metaphorically they are sailing home. Irish culture is illiberal, doctrinaire, anti-urban and anti-working class. The youths can’t even have sexual relationships with women, because they are said to be “well trained in them women factories they call convents”, where “the word MAN is handled with asbestos gloves an’ holy water” (*SC*, 13).⁵⁰ By contrast, foreign cultures are portrayed as vital and uninhibited. Jemmo says he wishes he “was in Mexico or somewhere now” as he partakes in a “mock-Spanish dance” (*SC*, 23). Music and dance were depicted similarly by Maura Laverty in her 1950 play, *Tolka Row*, with its “awfully passionate” music of South American tangos and rhumbas emphasising the receptivity of working-class Dublin to outside influences.⁵¹ In *The Scatterin’*, Fats Domino himself seems to urge the youths to leave Ireland, singing “so long, I’m all tied up / An’ know my way” (*SC*, 24). Tony would love to play his Anglo-American rock music “in every town in the country”, which would make the “young fellas and youngwans” “dance till dawn” and cause the “ould fellas an’ ouldwans” to “come out and shake the dust off themselves” (*SC*, 24). The dream of going to a liberal “Happy Land / Far, far away. /

⁴⁹ Such ambiguity is central to Scottish writer James Kelman’s Booker Prize winning novel, *How Late it Was, how Late* (1994), in which protagonist and ex-convict Sammy struggles to rationalise his blindness, which is due to a police beating. He brings the beating on himself by attacking the police, but vacillates between victimhood and self-reproach, not knowing quite how to narrate his own story. “Ye never had any fucking choices”, he proclaims to himself at one point, but “it was his own fucking stupid fault anyway”, he concedes at another; James Kelman, *How Late It Was, How Late* (London: Minerva, 1995), p. 32, 99.

⁵⁰ 30 per cent of urban males and 26.5 per cent of urban females between 35-39 years of age were unmarried in Ireland in 1951. The marriage rate, both rural and urban, was “low by comparison with other countries”. See F.H.A. Aalen, “A Review of Recent Irish Population Trends”, *Population Studies*, 17.1 (July 1963), p. 76. Denis Johnston articulated a similarly sardonic attitude to the Catholic Church’s inculcation of chastity in his 1958 play, *The Scythe and the Sunset*. As with many retrospective literary treatments of the 1916 Rising, Johnston deflates Ireland’s glorious past by gesturing to its degraded present, the ever-droll doctor Myles MacCarthy remarking of an arguing young couple: “You see. They love each other, but it only embarrasses them. I often wonder how this race of ours has managed to propagate itself at all, with the age of consent at thirty-five.” Denis Johnston, *Collected Plays Volume I* (London: Cape, 1959), p. 20.

⁵¹ Maura Laverty, excerpt from *Tolka Row* (1950), in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, V: Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke et al (Cork: Cork UP, 2002), pp. 1247-1249. The play has never been published in unabridged form, despite its popularity in the 1950s and its spawning of the more well-known RTÉ soap opera of the same name.

Where they don't give a damn / Far, far away" (SC, 51), is their ideal; it also the antithesis of their surrounds, much as it is for Lar Redmond in his novel *A Walk in Alien Corn* (1990), where Lar's excitement at the prospect of girls that "were a lot more givish" and a society that hasn't been "too well brainwashed by the Church" underpins his desire to leave home.⁵² Lar's further exhilaration at "the distant roar of guns and explosions" shortly after arrival into wartime Britain is surely an ironic indictment of the boredom back in Ireland: even world war is better than stasis.⁵³ A "curious thing about Ireland's manner of life," O'Casey had noted, was that "while always standing haughtily apart from England, she has always been by her side".⁵⁴ British culture seems less foreign to these youths than that of their native country, and its world of sex, rock and hedonism, to which the mail boat sails, is the modern world that Ireland eschews. Its cultural expansiveness finds expression in one of McKenna's poems about emigration to London, in which he repeats the poem's title, "Oxford Street is Long", as a refrain that both illustrates the breadth of the new city and his own eager perambulation of its streets:

But withal I have no nation
And my only consolation is
That
Oxford Street is Long
Oxford Street is Long
Oxford Street is Long
Oxford Street is Long.⁵⁵

If Warley is a place "without memories" for John Braine's Joe Lampton in *Room at the Top* (1957), England is a place where McKenna can "have no nation".⁵⁶ For both angry young men, the possibilities of social mobility in post-war Britain present a revolutionary break with the past.

⁵² Lar Redmond, *A Walk in Alien Corn* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 15.

⁵³ Lar Redmond, *A Walk in Alien Corn* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 35.

⁵⁴ Seán O'Casey, "They Go the Irish", in *They Go, The Irish*, compiled by Leslie Daiken (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1944), p. 9.

⁵⁵ James McKenna, "Oxford Street is Long", in *Poems* (Dublin: Goldsmith, 1973), p. 21.

⁵⁶ John Braine, *Room at the Top* (London: Arrow, 2002), p. 96.

Hatchet: The monstrous mother

Like McKenna's Jemmo, Hatchet, Heno Magee's angry young man, is depicted in a battle between social pressures and individual will. Like McKenna, Magee is deeply concerned with the process of socialisation. Hatchet is forced to choose between the corrupting influences of his upbringing and the possibility of escape to a new life abroad — a choice that acts as the fulcrum for the tensions of the play. Burdened with the moniker he acquired for confronting the much-feared local "Animal Gang" with a hatchet when he was fourteen years old, he is a slave to his reputation for violence, bequeathed by his notorious late father, the maniacal Digger (the root of his sobriquet, "dig", being local parlance for "punch"). Magee also refuses to diminish the harsher aspects of working-class life by presenting likeable sorts, or heroes who somehow surmount the privations of their harsh environment. However, his play has none of the light relief that musical interludes and dances yield in *The Scatterin'*. It is, in the words of one reviewer, "a play with a serious purpose".⁵⁷

Magee exhibits an even grittier dramaturgy, in which the harshness of poverty and of those who live in it are presented with uncompromising veracity. His protagonist, Hatchet, is a liminal figure; ironically, however, he is also the quintessence of what his community expects a "man" to be. Torn between his reputation, his family and his own vacillating moral compass, he must struggle in vain to extricate himself from spiralling gang violence and, like *The Scatterin'*, *Hatchet* seeks social and political explanations for the type of gang violence that is so often conceived of in public discourse as the inexplicable and irrational domain of "fiends with hair-trigger, violent impulses and reactions".⁵⁸ Its protagonist's actions are presented as those of a conflicted and complex young man, whose environment overmasters his basically benevolent impulses.

Heno Magee was born in 1939, six years after McKenna and five years after Dunne. He grew up in the tough working-class environs of inner-city Bridgefoot Street and left school at fourteen years of age to work as a messenger boy, later pursuing a

⁵⁷ Ken Gray, "An Outstanding Play", *The Irish Times*, 10 December 1973, p. 10.

⁵⁸ Scott H. Decker and Barrik Van Winkle, *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends, and Violence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 134.

career for five years in British Royal Air Force. When Magee returned to Dublin following various international tours of duty, he returned also to a moribund economy. The plaudits for *Hatchet*, his most successful work, question its exclusion from the canon of Irish studies. *Time Out* claimed that it had “kicked life and laughter” onto the London stage in its 1975 English production. The *New Statesman* found it “tersely written and brilliantly acted”, and *The Financial Times* compared the work – in the mandatory parallel of those wishing to laud a working-class Dublin scribe – to that of Sean O’Casey.⁵⁹

First produced in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, on 27 July 1972, and a year later as a screenplay by RTÉ, *Hatchet* is set in 1970s “workingclass [sic] environs”, in the artisan dwelling that is the Baileys’ home and also in their local public house.⁶⁰ Its later production in the Embankment, Tallaght, in 1981, matched the pub background on stage to the environment beyond it. It was described in terms of proletarian authenticity, as part of a stagecraft which tried to temper the austere tone of theatre with more familiar working-class environs. “‘Hatchet’ was well attended,” a reviewer recalled:

[... in] the decidedly rough and ready facilities at the Embankment. The play is ideally suited to a pub venue such as this, with the raucous and energetic interplay of Magee’s characters occurring quite naturally amid the clink of pint glasses and the plumes of cigarette smoke. ‘Hamlet’ or ‘Death of a Salesman’ just would not have gone down the same.⁶¹

In this respect and others, Magee’s dramaturgy follows McKenna’s in its attempt to bring traditionally alien discourses into the theatre, but Magee is more strident, by 1981, in his desire to bring alien audiences in as well. As the play opens, it is “late summertime” and – just as sunset imposes a gloomy sense of foreboding in *The*

⁵⁹ Qtd. in Des Hickey, “No more begging bowls for Heno Magee”, *Sunday Independent*, 31 August 1975, p. 11.

⁶⁰ This first production in the Peacock Theatre, directed by Roland Jacquarello, was preceded by a Play Circle reading there on 12 April, 1970. At the time Magee attracted similarly phrased plaudits to those for James McKenna, with one critic describing him as “the best Dublin dramatic writer since Behan and O’Casey left us”. See Anon., “An Irishman’s Diary”, *The Irish Times*, 10 April 1970, p. 11. The play was revived a number of times and broadcast on television, by RTÉ, on 5 December 1973. Revivals include one directed by Peter Sheridan at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, in 1988. Heno Magee, *Hatchet* (Dublin: Gallery, 1978), p. 7; Further references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text as *HAT* etc.

⁶¹ Dick Ahlstrom, “‘Hatchet’ at the Embankment, Tallaght”, *The Irish Times*, 28 July 1981, p. 8.

Scatterin' – the timeline suggests that this also is also ironically the late summertime for Hatchet and his new wife Bridie's fledgling marriage (*Hat*, 7). Magee's focus centres on the complex of relationships that bind Hatchet, a docker in his mid-twenties, to his working-class surroundings: his almost Oedipal relationship with his termagant mother, Mrs Bailey, who moulds him into the role of protector and breadwinner, and his countervailing relationship with his exasperated wife, who wants him to leave home for a new life in England; he is bound by his friends, Hairoil and Freddie, who exhort him to engage in macho acts of violence, which – as in *The Scatterin'* – are partly a release from the monotony of vacant lives. Joey, a returned emigrant of about sixty years of age, and a factory chargehand in his adopted home of England, is Mrs Bailey's "fancy man", and he also unwittingly pressurises Hatchet. His relative affluence and air of comfort, as well as his offer of a job in England, suggest the benefits that might accrue from emigration.

With all of these pressures dragging at Hatchet's conflicted mindset, the play is partly a psychological drama, with its main characters performing as personifications of his choices and the anxieties they arouse. Mulally, a hard-man, has insulted Mrs Bailey in the local pub before the action of the play commences, and the story starts *in media res*, moving through Bailey's galling attempts to pressure her son into attacking Mulally, Hatchet's helpless response, and Mulally's reprisal, which closes the play. Dramatic tension centres on Hatchet's most fundamental dilemma: he must choose between the violent legacy of Digger, and the wealth, benevolence and comfort that Joey, an alternative father figure, represents.

“A man went out to find his enemies, and he found no friends”: Machismo and class

Like McKenna, Magee attempts to rationalise his chief protagonist's destructiveness by constructing his entrapment in that classically working-class, male “cross-fire” of “conflicting demands for fraternity and assertion of his own worth” (Sennett and Cobb).⁶² Even his suggestive nickname connotes Hatchet's severance from wider

⁶² Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977), p. 118.

society, but he also conforms with and excels at the expectations of male behaviour in working-class Dublin, engaging in ostentatious acts of bravado with his peers and taking a dominant role in the home. From his first appearance, he is an alpha male, “roughly” pushing the warring Angela and Mrs Bailey apart, asserting the primacy of his own needs: “Ah, shut up the lot of yis, I’m famished, where’s me dinner, where’s me dinner?” (*Hat*, 16) He spurns Angela, ordering her to “sit down you, sit down”, and asks his mother rhetorically when she is “going to get sense” (*Hat*, 16). He flexes his power in the domestic and communal spheres, and is repeatedly associated with macho role-models, stretching out in his living room “like Tarzan”, and swaggering like “Clark Hudson, the way he swings them shoulders of his” (*Hat*, 20, 12).

Beneath this posturing, however, we find a fundamentally weak and damaged individual, who merely interpellates the learned behaviour of his environment.⁶³ As Sayer notes, “class lacks a moral justification” in itself, and therefore “people of different classes are likely to feel obliged to justify their differences”.⁶⁴ This class affirmation results in what he calls “folk sociologies”: internalised prejudgements, accepted norms and behaviours, which become normative, even prestige “folk” traits.⁶⁵ Working-class men oftentimes find “moral justification” in adopting a folk sociology of “laddish” masculinity; this, in turn, justifies their putative superiority to a supposedly effete middle-class male.⁶⁶ Economic distinctions become naturalised behavioural distinctions in class mythology; imagined distinctions of virility recoup prestige in male

⁶³ Louis Althusser uses this term to explain the way in which people are “hailed” as subjects by ideology; individuals feel addressed by ideological forces in their environment, recognise themselves, and are forced into a pre-allocated self-concept; see Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp.160-161.

⁶⁴ Andrew Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ This is the kind of detrimental, “laddish” class normativity that Paul Willis identifies in his groundbreaking study *Learning to Labour* (1977). Proletarian “lads” reject the effete pursuits of other classes, Willis argues, developing a counter-culture of their own (class), but their inverse snobbery imprisons them in a laddish anti-intellectual habitus; Paul E. Willis *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1993). Becky Francis summarises the term “lad” as evoking “a young, exclusively male, group, and the hedonistic practices popularly associated with such groups (for example, ‘having a laugh’, alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviour, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine)”. See Becky Francis, “Lads, Lasses and (New) Labour: 14-16-Year-Old Students’ Responses to the ‘Laddish Behaviour and Boys’ Underachievement’ Debate”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20.3 (September 1999), p. 357.

prohess for the working-class man — prestige which has been lost in comparisons of hard currency.

In *Night Shift* (1985), Dermot Bolger describes the habitual demeanour of poor young men who “strut about the place, each terrified of betraying signs of intelligence to the other [...] like CB headers, all tuning down to the one wavelength to conduct their conversations” — “boys who refused to admit feelings”.⁶⁷ In Brendan Gleeson’s *Breaking Up* (1988), the pretence of working-class machismo is depicted as a social inhibitor. Frank takes pride in his image as a rough, tough labourer, a facile delight in being associated with manual work, as Deirdre, his girlfriend, scoffs: “you love that — wearing the working gear into the pub. Frank Bennett. The working man.”⁶⁸ But the cultivation of this image demands that he eschew things like education that might ruin his reputation. He is comically “affronted” when mistaken for a student on the building site, and the play opens with another working-class youth, Andy, kicking and upending books and study notes triumphantly as he celebrates the end of school life: “Education, lads, edu-shaggin’-cation”.⁶⁹ Such machismo is sometimes seen as an attractive trait in working-class men, Roddy Doyle shows, a mixture of protective power and sexual prowess that Paula Spencer initially finds empowering in her abusive husband Charlo: “I was with Charlo now and that made me respectable. Men kept their mouths shut when I went by. They were all scared of Charlo and I loved that.”⁷⁰ Charlo’s criminality doesn’t necessarily make him unattractive in this rough, androcentric culture; a hired thug in Conor McPherson’s *The Good Thief* (1994) claims that such “power attracts women” and in Neville Thompson’s novel, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (1997), Jackie first discovers her attraction to Johnser when she sees him in a fight, “standing over three bodies lying helpless on the ground”.⁷¹ Even in the softer working-class paterfamilias of Doyle’s Barrytown Trilogy (*The Commitments* (1987), *The Snapper* (1990) and *The Van* (1991)), there is the ingrained fear of feminisation, of exposure amongst one’s peers. In a moment of fondness, Jimmy Rabbitte Sr considers

⁶⁷ Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 42, 51.

⁶⁸ Brendan Gleeson, *Breaking Up* (Dublin: Passion Machine, 1988), p. 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 13, 1.

⁷⁰ Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 49.

⁷¹ Conor McPherson, *Four Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 1999), p. 51; Neville Thompson, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (Dublin: Pollbeg, 1998), p. 16.

kissing his wife Veronica, “but no, he decided, not with the boys there. They’d slag him”.⁷² In all of these works, however, there is a dialectic of pretence and insecurity; the act of masculine confidence is betrayed by a fear of exposure — the exposure of a softer side.

In *Hatchet*, Magee shows how this proletarian “folk sociology” of masculinity results in ruination for his central character. Hatchet is continually pressurised by his peers to the detriment of his marriage. They cajole him into attending a boxing tournament, leaving Bridie trapped with his cantankerous mother (*Hat*, 20). When Bridie chides, “tch, Hatchet, I thought ye were stronger, I really did, ye can’t go running around with them all the time”, he ignores her (*Hat*, 21). This is a culture in which women are degraded and despised. Freddie views his wife and children as a burden, rather like Christy Brown’s Father in *Down All the Days* (1970). He says they are always “moaning” and brands his kids, in rhyming slang, his “god forbids” (*Hat*, 29). Hairoil later sings a tongue-in-cheek complaint against his partner, intoning “my wife’s a cow, my wife’s a cow, / my wife’s a cowkeeper’s daughter” (*Hat*, 48). His wife and family are the reason he spends little time at home (*Hat*, 51). The relationship between Hatchet and Bridie underscores, in part, the reasons behind such negative attitudes; their lack of privacy and their failure to have children are consequences of a lack of financial means. The sexual awkwardness caused by their lack of privacy makes Hatchet violent and resentful: “I’m mad to be putting up with ye, ye hardly let me near ye ... I ought to give ye a bleedin’ dig, that’s what anyone else around here would do” (*H*, 22). Poverty denies them intimacy, as it does in Robert Collis’s *Marrowbone Lane* (1943), where – in another domestic argument in a cramped inner-city dwelling – newlyweds Mary and Jim’s relationship soon turns sour, she complaining about his devotion to the greyhound track and his mate Joe, while he complains about the lack of variety in his boring life.⁷³ How many works of Dublin working-class life depict domestic discord as the microcosmic corollary of macrocosmic inequalities?⁷⁴

⁷² Roddy Doyle, *The Snapper* (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 39.

⁷³ Robert Collis, *Marrowbone Lane: A Play in Three Acts* (Dublin: Runa Press, 1943), p. 32.

⁷⁴ In Jim Sheridan’s *Mobile Homes* (1976), Scene 2 opens with Helen and Larry bickering — their hopeful attitude in the previous scene suffocating under the weight of financial pressures and substandard living conditions after they move into a grotty caravan. Dermot Bolger’s young couple in *Night Shift* also start out in a caravan, and they too fall foul of poverty’s impediments. From A. Patrick Wilson’s *Victims*

But the ingrained culture of working-class manhood also plays its part. When Magee's Hatchet considers purchasing a present for Bridie's birthday, he reveals that he is beset by class and gender insecurities. He pathetically fears emasculation in the female domain of the clothes shop: "Ye didn't expect me to go into a woman's shop, did ye?" he protests; "I wouldn't mind but the way they stare at ye in those places, you'd think I was going to rob the bleeding shop" (*Hat*, 24). Such insecurity recurs in Sheridan's *Mobile Homes* when Larry refuses to go into a family planning clinic for contraceptives because, *pace* Behan's malapropism in *The Quare Fellow*, "they'll think I'm a sex mechanic". His wife Helen's riposte could equally refer to Hatchet: "It's the quare things you're embarrassed about".⁷⁵ This behaviour finds a parallel in Paul Mercier's 1985 play *Spacers*. Mercier's Thomas, an actor in *Mikado – The Sequel*, a play within the play, fears that "if me mates find out I'm actin' the fairy they'll shove toothpaste up me hole" and he and his fellow actors are later branded "nancies".⁷⁶ Thomas is one of the lead actors in the play, a bizarre pastiche of the original *Mikado* (1885, by Arthur S. Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert), martial arts cinema and the local tale of "a junkie and a bum" who becomes a vigilante.⁷⁷ Chas, a security guard, who writes the farcical script, fantasises vicariously through his protagonist, "Jimmy the Vigilante", about having the power to "change the world". But the revelation of his own subjection to "post traumatic stress disease", following an in-store attack on him by thieves, underscores his own social impotence and the pathetic lack of power that inspires his macho "vigilante opus".⁷⁸ Like Mercier's Chas and McKenna's youths, who are trapped in a juvenile social vacuum, the young men of *Hatchet* thrive on a childish

(1914) to Paula Meehan's *Mrs Sweeney* (1999), and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) to Enda Walsh's *Sucking Dublin* (1997), unhappy homes are an abiding emblem of a failed society and, often, of its failed men.

⁷⁵ Jim Sheridan *Mobile Homes* (Dublin: Irish Writers' Co-operative, 1978), p. 16.

⁷⁶ Paul Mercier, *Spacers* (1985, unpublished mss. provided by author), p. 6, 35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 100.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 132, 40. This interplay of vulnerability and macho gruffness is portrayed in Roddy Doyle's character George, in his play *War* (1989). George commits himself to the pursuit of excellence in pub quizzes and pitch and putt, but will "in [his] hole" go to a parent-teacher meeting. Later his rather gruff manner of proposing to his wife hints at his inability to express vulnerability and tenderness without the linguistic buffer of profanity: "Will yeh fuckin' marry me?" And while there is comedy here as well, the undercurrents of fear are also clear in Briget's worry, at the end of the play, that her husband will lose his precious quiz and return home spoiling for a fight; Roddy Doyle, *Brownbread and War* (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 119, 205.

culture of macho adventurism. Hatchet and his friends' dialogue centres on such subjects as the "great goer" (fighter) at the boxing tournament, or whether actor James Cagney, "the head crook" in *The Roaring Twenties*, who "bleedin' milled everyone", would beat Humphrey Bogart in an imaginary fight (*Hat*, 36). This theme is recalled in Doyle's 1992 play *Brownbread*, where a group of adventurist young working-class men kidnap a bishop, seemingly because they've little else to do and, like Magee's hard-chaws, because they have been paying too much attention to the exploits of their silver screen heroes. "We're on the map now lads, wha' [...] this is the business, wha'", Donkey, one of the kidnapers delightedly enthuses. Another, John, "*puts his back very dramatically to the window wall; something he's seen done loads of times on 'Miami Vice'*" and later addresses the gardaí in "a Harlem accent".⁷⁹ Violence is woven into the fabric of working-class male identity, accentuated by the influences of mass culture.⁸⁰ Beneath the farce in both of these works there is a serious criticism of working-class masculinities. Working-class Dublin clearly reveres "hard-chaw" characteristics, and Magee posits their consequences.

Despite his firm rebuttal of his mother's repeated requests that he fight Johnnyboy Mulally, Hatchet is ultimately unable to refuse the confrontation, a capitulation rendered all the more tragic by his late epiphany, in the final act, when he confides to the gentle Joey the wisdom of a former parole officer:

A man went out to find his enemies,
And he found no friends.
Now,
A man went out to find his friends,
And he found no enemies. (*Hat*, 71)

In an irony of Shakespearean proportions, the aphorism precedes Hatchet's rush into battle with Johnnyboy. His reputation and code of duty overmaster his common sense. As one reviewer wrote, "inheriting a code of blind, almost Sicilian honour, Hatchet

⁷⁹ Doyle, *Brownbread and War*, p. 9, 12.

⁸⁰ A similar scenario occurs later still in Mark O'Rowe's comic-tragic play *From Both Hips* (1997), in which the central character, Paul, has been the subject of an accidental garda shooting, during which the garda urinates uncontrollably in his trousers in a fit of fear. Paul's adventurist and "jealous" fascination with the Drugs Squad garda's glamorous job betrays his own lack of agency in society as a working-class man. Mark O'Rowe, *From Both Hips: Two Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 1999), p. 81.

himself is doomed as Anouilh, in his 'Antigone', predicted doom for so small a reason as waking up one morning wanting merely a little respect".⁸¹

Hatchet's mother knows, with cruel familiarity, the underlying codes of his habitus. It is implicit that Mrs Bailey is aware, when she takes a bottle in her hand – after Ha Ha is attacked by Johnnyboy – that Hatchet will act as expected, regardless of the consequences. Yelling "you can stay here if ye like" and "I'll do it for ye", she knows that her son will revert to type. As he eventually rushes out to face Johnnyboy, we observe the pitiable plight of a man torn between his friends, his mother, his wife, and the assertion of his own worth. His mother has "ruined everything", as Bridie yells, because Hatchet, like Digger, is incapable of being the man he aspires to be, the man "who found no enemies" (*Hat*, 75).

Like McKenna, Magee posits emigration from Dublin's working-class pressures as his angry young man's only hope of happiness, a message relayed most persuasively in the contrast drawn between Hatchet and Joey, the affluent visiting émigré. Mrs Bailey encourages her son's macho bravado, fearing that "everyone will walk over ye now" when he refuses to fight, but she lauds her new "fancy man's" passivity. Joey is "real quiet, he wouldn't hurt a fly", she counters, when Hatchet questions what the older man did to defend her in a pub melee (*Hat*, 73, 18). When Hatchet threatens Joey because he fears the older man is seducing his mother, the émigré neatly ducks out of Hatchet and his habitus's epistemic reach: "I don't know why you're picking on me, Hatchet, I'm not a hard man," he curtly retorts (*Hat*, 45).

Joey has escaped the normative masculinity of working-class Dublin, he implies. The code of the "hard man" is something he does not value now that he has wealth; indeed, since leaving home he feels a "stranger" with his "own" people (*Hat*, 58). "Civilised" by affluence, as Angela puts it, Joey acts as the voice of reason in explosive situations, warning Bridie to leave the house with her sister when Johnnyboy Mulally threatens to attack it, urging Hatchet to "take it easy" when he becomes belligerent through drink (*Hat*, 58, 65, 71). "I mind me own business, that's all I do,"

⁸¹ Kane Archer, "'Hatchet' at the Embankment", *The Irish Times*, 16 October 1975, p. 10.

he professes, and many of his other interjections serve to placate or cajole.⁸² Mrs Bailey's attraction to this wealthy, but gentle man – a contemporary of Digger, but his symbolic antithesis – is evidence of her own ingrained hypocrisy and reverse class prejudice; she is charmed by his mellow ways, but attempts to instil their opposite in her son.

Hatchet complains that his mother “keep[s] bringin’ [...] up” the tale of his infamous attack on the “Animal Gang”, lionising his exploits in having “cleared” the notorious roughians, leaving “a few skulls cracked” (*Hat*, 33). Yet, when Hatchet turns his ire on Joey, she protests that “Joe’s A.1”, admonishing, “a fine one you are, picking on me friends” (*Hat*, 46). Hatchet is trapped in a pattern of learned behaviour that Joey transcends, a theme that reaches its climax when Joey leaves the stage almost unnoticed before Hatchet’s final confrontation, ominously commenting “still the same” (*Hat*, 74). He has walked away from his background and class into middle-management in Middle England; he can leave without censure or shame, taking with him the prospect of a new life for his girlfriend’s son. While even the innocuous Ha Ha (Hatchet’s brain-injured uncle) is brutally beaten and “lacerated”, Joey is an observer always, immune to the violence of the play (*Hat*, p. 74). In contrast, Hatchet is unable to take flight, as the symbolic sub-plot of his pigeon-fancying affirms.

While Hatchet is concerned “to get a racer out of” his pregnant pigeon Bella, his own prospects of fathering children are ironically waning. His uncharacteristic tenderness with the pigeons jars with his normal persona, revealing a hidden sensitivity: “They need plenty of attention when they’re like that, Bridie, ye have to be sort of tender, and treat them gentle” (*H*, 19). But just as pigeons always come home, Hatchet – in Magee’s analogy – never leaves home. Rather in the manner that Sid Chaplin uses the metaphor of the sardine in *The Day of the Sardine* (1965), the dead pigeon becomes the leitmotif of the play.⁸³ In Chaplin’s novel of 1960s Newcastle, which also concerns gang warfare and a young working-class man’s uneasy passage into adulthood, Arthur Haggerston is told how sardines in Norway “go bang into the nets like a hundred locomotives [...] all they know is the shoal”; like Hatchet’s, Arthur’s mother’s lover

⁸² When Hatchet and his mother argue, Joey pleads that the argument “wasn’t Nellie’s fault” and when an earlier fight threatened to explode he suggested “c’mon we go for a drink” (*Hat*, 72, 32).

⁸³ Sid Chaplin, *The Day of the Sardine* (London: Panther, 1965).

advises him, “don’t be a sardine. Navigate yourself!”⁸⁴ But Hatchet, like his pigeons and Chaplin’s sardines, is predisposed to follow the path set out for him, rather than “navigate” for himself. As Mrs Bailey affirms, “Hatchet’s like meself. Never leave the place we were reared in” (*Hat*, 28). The death of his favourite pigeon – which coincides dramatically with his friends’ fateful attack on Mulally – parallels the demise of his dreams. Just as the pigeon will not leave the coup, after the Mulally’s beating, he cannot leave home.

“They are *all* losers”: Nurture over nature

In this context, Magee’s frustration with critics who branded *Hatchet* a play “about violence” is understandable. “What I’d like to point out is that it’s about the *futility* of violence – there are no heroes in this play, no winners – they are *all* losers”, he qualified.⁸⁵ Despite their various failings, Magee redeems his ensemble of proletarians with an underlying compassion, castigating their subjection to social and economic oppression. He attempts to reach beyond simplistic condemnations and vilifications, revealing the indelible marks of class injuries on human behaviour.

Despite Mrs Bailey’s manipulation of her son, she is redeemed from demonization by a series of revelations. She is presented as a spendthrift, reckless and improvident character – and narratives of the working class are littered with such Malthusian stereotypes of the improvident poor – but Magee only invokes the myth in order to dispel it.⁸⁶ Mrs Bailey could only subsist in the past by gambling effectively with the Digger’s wages: “I couldn’t have kept this place going only for it [...] your father was only casual on the docks for years now, don’t forget that, and it was me kept this place going.” (*Hat*, 32) Equally, she appears to correspond with another stereotype

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

⁸⁵ Hunter, Charles, “Heno Magee and the mean streets of ‘Hatchet’”, *The Irish Times*, 2 April 1988, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Thomas Malthus’s influential 1798 pamphlet, “An Essay on the Principle of Population”, which predicted starvation as the result of population growth among the “improvident” poor, was a foundational text in right-wing political theory, and led to the establishment of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act which buttressed paternalistic attitudes to the working class. Ian Haywood identifies such attitudes, particularly in late 19th-century fiction, as presenting a “pseudo-anthropological Other world, whose primitivist freedoms from moral restraint makes them objects of fear and desire to bourgeois culture [...] its focus on squalid brutality and dehumanized, ‘determined’ subjects detracted from the laying bare of history surrounding this graphically realized canvas of working-class experience”; see Ian Haywood, *Working Class Fiction: From Chartism to ‘Trainspotting’*, p. 13.

that pervades working-class literature: that of the lubricious and sexually reckless slut.⁸⁷ In Britain, the topos is pervasive, and was instanced at the height of the Angry Young Man era by angry young woman Shelagh Delaney's slutty materfamilias, Helen, in her "kitchen-sink" play *A Taste of Honey* (1958). A decade later the type reappears in the Barry Hines novel *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968) in the figure of Billy Casper's feckless single mother. Magee presents Mrs Bailey in this cast, as a "brasser", a woman with a propensity, in her son's words, to "act the bleedin' whore", but only to show how her lewd antics mask an inner pain (*Hat*, 18, 47).

When her son asks why she is singing, Mrs Bailey responds that "it's better than thinking, isn't it?" (*Hat*, 42). Her suggestive songs, "The Green, Green Grass", "Everyone is Beautiful" and "*Bouna Sera*", are carefully chosen for their ironic metacommentary. They speak, respectively, of the love of home, a naïve belief in the primacy of human goodness and the idyllic romance of young love. Their subject matter could not be more discordant with the reality about her; Hatchet's act, in flinging his mother's wig on the floor following her effusive kiss with Joey, is a symbolic confirmation of his own deep distrust of her artificial façade of happiness, and she admits that her antics are a mere papering over the proverbial cracks in an otherwise wearisome existence (*Hat*, 44):⁸⁸

I'm fed up in that room so I am, sitting and reading the wallpaper and counting me toe nails everyday. Brownd off with it. [To Hatchet] I can't reach you anymore. And Bridie and her sister look down their nose at me so they do ... It's better than been stuck in like a statue anyhow. (*Hat*, 47)

Mrs Bailey's boredom, her increasing alienation from her son, her feelings of social inadequacy and her plight as a widow with little stimulation are the grim underside of her bawdy behaviour. As a working-class mother, she feels spent, unable to "reach" her grown-up son. She fantasises that she, Hatchet and Bridie are "(shouts)

⁸⁷ Rosie in Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), Lily in James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969), Maire in Lee Dunne's *Does Your Mother* (1970), Rose in Paul Smith's *Annie* (1972), are all instances of women who conform to this trope of the "fallen woman" in working-class literature. Their sexual immorality is explicitly linked to poverty in each case.

⁸⁸ A similar use of song was employed later on by Roddy Doyle in his BBC-RTÉ drama *Family* (1994), when, in the fourth episode, Paula Spencer sings a love song that jars with the reality of her loveless and violent relationship.

one big happy family” (*Hat*, 43), but her motherly role – the essence of female orthodoxy in working-class life – is waning, and with it her sense of purpose. Mrs Bailey’s beseeches her son to fight Johnnyboy in a desperate effort to keep him at home. “I don’t care if he does ye,” she callously tells him, “don’t be afraid of him” (*Hat*, 74). As a woman, she is forced to rely on the men in her life for money and, lacking financial or social independence, she too is caught in an unnatural relationship with her son and society. Her charms result in Joey paying the overdue electricity bill and Hatchet calls her a “brasser” because she elicits alcohol from local men by letting them “think they’re on to a good thing” (*Hat*, 47). But it is the habitus that Magee condemns, for leaving women, both Bridie and Mrs Bailey, disempowered.

However, this explanation of dysfunction is not in any way designed to evade the actual, ugly effects of capitalism on the characters of the play. As Lar Redmond says of the inner-city Dublin of his youth, “nobody ever spent a childhood here and escaped without being branded”.⁸⁹ Magee wishes to faithfully convey the shocking “kitchen-sink” realities of working-class life and – to return to Bourdieu’s point – the worst effects of capitalism on his characters. One reviewer of the 1972 production was even prompted (wrongly, in my view) to adduce that the play “lacks the one redeeming merit of all such dark works—COMPASSION”, such is its uncompromising bleakness.⁹⁰ But the same reviewer added that “Magee writes with great honesty and, in the process, makes a desperate plea to release those trapped by their own violent environment”.⁹¹

Hatchet’s closest friends, Freddie and Hairoil, along with his mother, recklessly disregard his welfare in attempting to engage him in violent confrontations. Yet, when their nemesis, Johnnyboy, arrives at the Bailey household, Hatchet’s “friends” are reticent in his defence. When Johnnyboy asks if they are indeed Hatchet’s friends, the pair only ambiguously respond, “ye could say that” and “we hang around together”,

⁸⁹ Lar Redmond, *Show us the Moon*, (Dingle: Brandon, 1988), p. 28.

⁹⁰ Gus Smith, “Peacock premiere”, *Sunday Independent*, 7 May 1972, p. 15. Smith is accompanied somewhat in this analysis by Robert Welch, who writes that “Magee, in his vigorous demotic dialogue, creates a raw and forceful set of people, animated by sensation, and indifferent to anything remotely resembling finer feelings”. However, Welch also viewed the play as indicative of a cultural shift in the Abbey: “The play also showed that there was a new daring in evidence in the Abbey’s programme as the theatre gradually gained in confidence in the 1970s”. Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 203.

⁹¹ Gus Smith, “Peacock premiere”, *Sunday Independent*, 7 May 1972, p. 15.

before making a hasty retreat (*Hat*, 62). But their cowardice pales in comparison with Mrs Bailey's craven selfishness in the appalling crescendo of Act Three. The monstrous matriarch's gently intoned encouragements to fight – "come on love", "I'm with ye" and "c'mon chicken love" – are the only such honeyed, motherly expressions she voices in the play – and they articulate a perverse distortion of motherliness (*Hat*, 75). Hatchet suffers the burden of being an Oedipal replacement for his father in this perverse relationship. He is ultimately shown to be trapped by his past, like the hero of Sid Chaplin's novel, who objects to "being tied and knowing you were tied for life".⁹²

There is a new aesthetic confidence in this play – in its gritty naturalism, its faithful transcription of demotic – but there is insecurity too. Working-class life is depicted as something to be escaped from. Ireland is a monstrous mother. When Bridie plaintively asks her husband, "what's going to happen to us Hatchet ... All the plans we had?" his curt riposte encapsulates the desolation of the entire play: "We're here, aren't we, don't be dreaming." (*Hat*, 24) Emigration is their only, ultimately elusive, hope. Staying at home means not "dreaming". Living in working-class Dublin means giving oneself little chance in life and being brutalised by its poverty and cynicism. This, precisely, is the message of Lee Dunne's *Goodbye to the Hill*.

***Goodbye to the Hill*: "This country should be given back to the Leprechauns, with apologies!"**

Goodbye to the Hill (play, 1976) is an underappreciated Irish literary phenomenon. It perhaps illustrates more than any other work how much censorship and exclusivist attitudes have prevailed upon the canon of Irish Studies. Despite its unparalleled popularity, little scholarly criticism can be found on this play and its earlier manifestation as a novel in 1965. This may have something to do with the tenor of early reviews of both, which were not always positive.⁹³ Yet as Dunne himself notes, with no

⁹² Chaplin, *The Day of the Sardine*, p. 70.

⁹³ The play was first produced at the Eblana Theatre (Dublin) by Trio Productions, on 4 September 1976. The novel of 1965 sold over one million copies around the world and was made into a Hollywood movie. The *Irish Times* reviewer, Ken Gray, found the novel unrealistic, especially the idea, which Dunne took

degree of overconfidence, “there is a growing opinion among those who decide these things that my novel is seminal to the 1950s” (the decade in which it is based).⁹⁴ Fintan O’Toole concurs. “With its colloquial tone, first-person narrative and bare-boned prose [the novel *Goodbye to the Hill*] is the first realisation that it might be possible to place Irish literature in the melting-pot of a transatlantic mass culture and still cook up something distinctively Irish”, he argues.⁹⁵ But perhaps Mary Leland unintentionally captured something revealing in her assertion that “the Dublin of Lee Dunne is not the Ireland of anyone else”, for the state continually banned Dunne’s books as unfit for consumption in the Ireland of their time.⁹⁶

However, Dunne’s status as Ireland’s most banned author alone should mark him out as an important writer for the scrutiny of scholars — and his enormous popularity as a novelist and playwright should accentuate this importance. Banned on its publication in 1965, the novel *Goodbye to the Hill* was a bestseller in Britain and the USA, reaching sales of over one million copies worldwide. It spawned a Hollywood movie (1970) and in 1978 ran for 26 weeks as a play at the Eblana Theatre, Dublin. In a drama production at the Regency Airport Hotel, also in Dublin, from September 1989 until December 1992, it became Ireland’s longest running play ever. This record was achieved in spite of the script being rejected by the Abbey Theatre and some other theatre companies who, improvidently it seems, “didn’t think it stageable”.⁹⁷

Produced and directed by Dunne himself, the Regency success was proof perhaps of John Fiske’s assertion that bourgeois aesthetics are “naked cultural

from real events in his own youth, that a “stout full-breasted matron” in her forties would pay for sex with a “scrawny urchin [...] to satisfy her lusts”; Ken Gray, “Fiction”, *The Irish Times*, 9 October 1965, p. 8. David Nowlan equally saw a work of “creaking improbability”, “careering uncertainly from some good bawdry to the most maudlin of melodrama”; David Nowlan, “‘Goodbye to the Hill’ at the Eblana”, *The Irish Times*, 5 September 1978, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Jason O’Toole, “From the Hill to Hollywood: A conversation with Lee Dunne”, *The Dublin Quarterly* (June-August 2005) <http://www.dublinquarterly.com/04/int_ldunne.html> [accessed 17 April 2008] (para. 13 of 28)

⁹⁵ Fintan O’Toole, “Happenings on the hill”, *The Irish Times*, 5 September 1995, p. 19; O’Toole goes on to compare this “pioneer” stylistically to Ernest Hemingway and Raymond Chandler.

⁹⁶ Mary Leland, “Goodbye to the Hill”, *The Irish Times*, 6 October 1975, p. 10.

⁹⁷ Anon., “An Irishman’s Diary”, *The Irish Times*, 1 September 1978, p. 9. Dunne’s play was still refused a touring grant from the Arts Council as late as 1993.

hegemony, and popular discrimination properly rejects it".⁹⁸ At the time Dunne advertised his willingness to meet audience members personally at the theatre door after performances, and he was keen to make the production an accessible and down-to-earth experience, which would attract people who normally didn't see plays. The Regency was conducive to this. Like Magee's *Embankment*, its relaxed and breezy ambience attracted working-class people who normally steered clear of theatres. Both playwrights were consciously attempting to create the kind of conditions A.P. Wilson spoke of when he hopefully penned the first known play to depict working-class Dublin in 1912 and envisaged a "workers' theatre" that would draw "crowded audiences of workers" into an ambience that was "free from the taint of class snobbishness".⁹⁹ One reviewer captured this aspect of Dunne's setting colourfully:

Many of the audience have never been to a play before or, if they have been, it was this one. During the interval, we all talk to each other. It's not like the *Peacock* or the *Gate* where people at the bar are commenting on the interpretation or the interaction. At the Regency, we're here to enjoy ourselves. Which is why you hear the occasional bottle being knocked over as someone makes his or her way out in the middle of the show for a natural break.¹⁰⁰

Two hundred and eighty patrons a night, six nights per week, packed the theatre, with an estimated total audience of circa a quarter of a million. As one bemused critic who prudishly objected to the play's "scatological pursuit of laughter" wrote, "certainly it seemed at times that the only way to end its run might be to get a heavy stick and beat it to death".¹⁰¹

This perhaps typified the attitude taken by a number of other theatre professionals, but for such unprecedented success to be followed by such a paucity of academic interest again raises serious questions about prevalent predilections in Irish

⁹⁸ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 123.

⁹⁹ A. P. Wilson, *Liberty Hall Plays No. 1: Victims and Poached* [two plays] (Dublin: Liberty Hall Plays, n.d.), p. 1, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Russell, "'Goodbye to the Hill' and hello to a 'Mousetrap'", *The Irish Times*, 9 July 1992, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Gerry Colgan, "Return to the Hill", *The Irish Times*, 29 August 1995, p. 10.

Studies and its relationship with popular culture. For his part, Dunne heaped invective on the cultural establishment for what he perceived as naked elitism:

Of course they didn't like me. I never joined the clubs; I never played the games. I never kissed ass [...] If you look at the artistic structure in this country, it is people who went to university together who are on the same boards, people that don't even rock the boat with a statement that's one degree starboard or port, you know?¹⁰²

Dunne's enthusiasm has, nonetheless, not been stymied by this alleged partisanship. He remains one of the country's most prolific writers, having penned twenty novels, three feature films and countless plays, along with an astounding two thousand radio shows. He has also shared writing credits in the major television soaps, *Tolka Row* (1964-68) and *Fair City* (1989-present), which played a significant role in bringing working-class Dublin into the nation's living rooms.

Reared in working-class, south-side Dublin, at the Mount Pleasant Buildings flat complex in Rathmines, Dunne left school at thirteen years of age, though he had been working on a milk round since the age of seven. The fifth child of warring parents in a "very unhappy home", he suffered a difficult childhood and emigrated a number of times from his late teens to England and the Isle of Man.¹⁰³ England, for him, was a revelation. Like Magee's Joey, on his return to Ireland Dunne spoke of feeling alienated from his own people: "I took a look at the people, at the Irish, my fellow countrymen. Christ, I said to myself, we're all losers". The country he returned to was economically and culturally stagnant and, according to one journalist, Dunne was "struggling intellectually and physically to run from" his homeland.¹⁰⁴ In *Does Your Mother?* (1970) he exposed the biting poverty of his youth, the squalor of tenements and its deep proletarian distrust of the state. Dunne was particularly aggrieved by the TB epidemic in working-class Dublin, with Larry, the consumptive brother of the

¹⁰² Sandra Woolridge, "Tough as old boots", *Southern Star*, 6 March 1993, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Henry Kelly, "A Life of Writing", *The Irish Times*, 16 November 1974, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

central character in *Goodbye to the Hill*, representing “all the kids that died, who were eaten up by tuberculosis in those slums in the ’50s. The kid would get diagnosed and be dead in 10 days, cough his lungs out of his own mouth, and I was so f***** angry”.¹⁰⁵

His frustration with the Irish state is what drives Paddy Maguire.

“To make a sound, some kind of mark”: Social stagnation and working-class ambition

Goodbye to the Hill, as the title suggests, focuses on the events leading up to its protagonist’s emigration. Dunne recalls that, “in 1964, I sat down one evening with the idea of writing a short story about a 14-year-old kid who rides his bicycle down this hill six days a week for three years, vowing in his own way: ‘Someday real soon, I’m going to say goodbye to this place’”.¹⁰⁶ Based in the early 1950s, in the flat complex where Dunne was reared, the play exudes class angst. Its novel version focuses much more on that element of ribaldry that characterises much of Dunne’s work, but the play, which I explore here, shifts its attention significantly towards issues of deprivation and class. Both depict the determined efforts of an insecure but precocious young man to transcend the confines of his birthplace.

Paddy Maguire – who shares his name appropriately, but entirely coincidentally, with Patrick Kavanagh’s rural youth in *The Great Hunger* (1942) – is a protagonist who struggles against cultural, social and economic barriers to say “goodbye to the Hill”.¹⁰⁷ He is a semi-autobiographical character, the son of a revolutionary whose role in the Irish War of Independence renders his impoverished plight in the resultant political set-up all the more unpalatable. Dunne captures these potent historical resonances in the sub-plot of Maguire’s father’s offstage disillusion.

¹⁰⁵ Patricia Deevy, “Goodbye to the anger”, *Sunday Independent*, section People, 16 August 1992, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Jason O’Toole, “From the Hill to Hollywood: A conversation with Lee Dunne”, *The Dublin Quarterly* (June-August 2005) <http://www.dublinquarterly.com/04/int_ldunne.html> [accessed 17 April 2008] (para. 9 of 28)

¹⁰⁷ Dunne had not read Patrick Kavanagh’s epic poem when he wrote the original novel; email correspondence with the present author, 3 September 2008.

The absence of the *paterfamilias* symbolises also his absence from transcribed Irish history. “He was fierce. And a dreamer. Risked his neck for years,” Katy, his wife, recalls. But “when the fighting was over it was love on the dole”.¹⁰⁸ Like Roddy Doyle’s Henry Smart, Mick Maguire is used and abused by “revolutionaries”, then cast off by the country he fought for. “Pride” once kept Mick “from going to England”, when “he wouldn’t work for the Brits”, but now “he’s in Manchester”, ironically working in exile (*GH*, 58). Dunne uses the former insurgent’s expatriation to emphasise working-class Dublin’s alienation from the state. Mick’s departure “like a lunatic”, with he and his wife “screaming at each other like wild animals”, is a far cry from the romantic dreams of his radical youth (*GH*, 5, 6). The revelation that he has left “for Larry”, his son, who is about to die of tuberculosis, compounds the contrast, and the memory of Larry “coughing his lungs up and [Mick] threatening to beat him” also accentuates his personal degradation (*GH*, 11).

Mick’s family is threatened with eviction, they subsist on “buts of meat from the butcher” and seventeen-year-old Paddy is forced to “never stop working” at unrewarding odd jobs, because “Ma needs the dough” (*GH*, 17, 28). Without an education, Dunne’s alter-ego is “going nowhere fast”, but despite this he manages to become “the first white collar worker [his] family’s ever had” (*GH*, 58). His success is short-lived, however, as Paddy falls foul of an elitist boss and his own ingrained lack of self-esteem. *Goodbye to the Hill* charts his determination, despite these barriers, to defy the trammels of his habitus, “to make a sound, some kind of mark, something, anything, not just get sucked under without even trying to swim for it” (*GH*, 129).

“Between us and bullshit, we got you the job – evened things up just a little bit”:

Playing the class game

Dunne is at pains to stress the material privations of 1950s working-class Dublin, but like McKenna and Magee he places greater stress still on its hidden class injuries. Some of the play is written in a social-documentary style. When Dunne tells us in a stage direction that tuberculosis was “mostly fatal in Fifties Ireland”, and Ma interjects that it

¹⁰⁸ Lee Dunne, *Goodbye to the Hill: A Stage Play*, (manuscript supplied by author in electronic format), p. 58; further references are cited parenthetically in the text as *GH* etc.

“is killing children all over Dublin” (*GH*, 11), he evidently wishes to highlight the real conditions of working-class life. He infers, like McKenna, that Irish culture has failed to do so, when at the beginning of the play, Paddy’s confidante, Harry Redmond, parodies the romance often attached to “dear, dirty Dublin” with his satirical rendition of “Molly Malone”:

In Dublin’s fair city,
Where the girls are so pretty
And our architecture is Georgian and fine
The outlook is sunny for them that has money
But what about us livin’ on the bread line? (*GH*, 5)

Throughout the play Paddy is demeaned by the circumstances of his upbringing. The “genuinely excited” relish with which the young man greets the present of new trousers from his middle-aged mistress, Clare – “Clare! Fantastic! Thanks a mill” – pathetically underscores the extent of his humiliation (*GH*, 19, 18). Poverty is infantilising. Even as his father walks away from the Maguire household for good, Paddy appreciates the possibility of not having to sleep with him any more: “Imagine! I’ll have a bed all to myself at long last. What must it be like to have a whole room to yourself, with a bookshelf – a table to write on.” (*GH*, 37) It also affects Paddy’s capacity to develop sexual relationships and he admits that he has “never actually taken a girl out in [his] life” because he “never really had the money” (*GH*, 35). When his girlfriend, Maureen, asks “what kind of future have we got, anyway?” he can only reply “I don’t know”; he later loses her and their future child to a richer suitor (*GH*, 89).

These incidents show how hard it is to mature in circumstances that make the normal expectations of manhood seem like luxuries; they convey the “hidden injuries of class”. Paddy’s job is demeaning and unmanly, requiring little skill: “Twelve hours pushing meat deliveries around on a messenger bike” is “something I could live without”, he complains (*GH*, 16). While he longs to do something more suited to his studious nature, he is inclined – through fear – to stick to low-skilled work:

Paddy What’s wrong with construction work? Good pay and I’m not equipped for much else.

Harry Ah the poor kid! He’s underprivileged, no education.

Paddy I'm educating myself with books and I'm smart. I can write too. But I've got no certificates, no formal stuff. (*GH*, 29)

This insecurity is augmented by a sense that working-class people cannot enter the domain of white-collar jobs. Paddy's brother, Billy, dismisses his hopes that he is "going to set the world on fire cos you read books"; it is "about time you grew up", he admonishes (*GH*, 98). But The Hill's stifling atmosphere retards their development; it is a "fucking instant slum. Should have been pulled down a fortnight before they built it [...] it's a kip to me. Gets in my way every day of the week" (*GH*, 93). Harry tellingly upbraids Paddy's lack of enthusiasm when he acquires a post with an insurance company, saying that he "should be dancing after stroking a collar and tie job. Living on The Hill, that's a minor fucking miracle." (*GH*, 50) For Dunne, it is not just economic inequality that curtails the ambitions of The Hill's residents — it is also the associated social stigma, the injuries to human dignity and the lack of self-esteem that its habitus inculcates.

Dunne, like McKenna, emphasises that writing about the people of the Hill entails writing against the grain of popular literary and cultural discourse, and does so through a number of self-reflexive analogies. Paddy tries to draw a comparison between his parents' courtship and the romantic *affaires de coeur* he has seen in the cinema, for example, but the representational failure of films emphasises the failure of popular culture to approximate their lives:

Paddy Were you ever mad about him? Like they are in the pictures?

Ma Do you see a lot of pictures about the likes of me and your Da? (*GH*, 40)

When Paddy discovers that Maureen, his girlfriend, has been unfaithful with a more affluent "grocery guy from Rathgar", he immediately "takes [his sister's] paperback from [the] table" and "then in fury throws it on the floor", intimating the gap between novelistic romance and social reality (*GH*, 100, 101). Billy is also habitually engrossed in an escapist genre — *The Hotspur's* comic-book world of boys' adventures — but he enjoys it, symbolically, on the lavatory (*GH*, 14).

Dunne's implicit concern with the avoidance of reality that cultural production entails echoes that of another Dubliner, Robert Tressell. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), socialist painter Frank Owen continually complains of his

fellow Mugsborough workers' choice of reading material. For news they peruse the self-explanatory titles, the *Daily Chloroform* and *The Daily Obscurer*, and his attempts to educate his colleagues about politics fall on deaf ears. They prefer trivial diversions, like "a game of hooks and rings [...] football or cricket, horse racing or the doings of some royal personage", to his incessant didacticism, "a lot of rot about religion and politics".¹⁰⁹ In *Goodbye to the Hill*, Paddy's escapism is found in alcohol and casual sex, about which he lies continually, but this mendacity is forced upon him because such things are part of the abounding silences in Irish life, he claims: "Lies, and more fucking lies, because nobody'll take the truth, not even you [his mother] could accept me as I am. I tried hiding in the bottle, women, but there's nowhere I can escape from me." (*GH*, 125) Walter Greenwood also identified this habit of "inarticulate revolt in drunkenness" amongst working-class men in *Love on the Dole* (1933).¹¹⁰ Paddy is forced to escape from "who he is" through drink because the stultifying climate of 1950s working-class Dublin does not accommodate the "truth" of working-class life, and while 1950s and 1960s Britain saw "a golden age of working-class literature", Ireland, he suggests, was still looking askance.¹¹¹

At the heart of this concern with verisimilitude is an interrelated concern with masculinities. Harry, like so many of the men in this play, is an inscrutable character, not only because of the inability of art to represent his inner life, but because of the inability of working-class men to access their inner selves. Dunne's Paddy follows a typical Angry Young Man paradigm; that of the socially unmoored proletarian, like Osborne's Jimmy Porter or Braine's Joe Lampton, whose aspirations and abilities set him apart from his peers. Part of his coming-of-age in the play is the realisation that his conception of manhood is at odds with that common to his class, and that any emulation of its expectations – which Hatchet struggles, but fails, to relinquish – would result in the destruction of his true self, "as I am" (*GH*, 125).

Paddy's relationship with the men about him is fractious. He "won't be shedding any more tears" for his father, "now [he's] over the shock" of his departure,

¹⁰⁹ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Flamingo, 1993), pp. 267-268, 18.

¹¹⁰ Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 24.

¹¹¹ Ian Haywood, *Working Class Fiction from Chartistism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote, 1997), p. 94.

because while he acknowledges that he “is [his] father”, it is a “pity nobody told him that” (*GH*, 8). Mick was not prepared to be a father, and was “always [saying] the kids came between” him and his wife (*GH*, 8). In Paddy’s view, his father – and it seems any father he knows locally – fail to accord with the expectations of popular (and we might read here, Anglo-American) culture: “I’ve read plenty of books where the father takes his kids to football, the seaside, the pictures. Are there really fathers like that?” (*GH*, 8) He recalls the kind of paternal indifference Dominic Behan identified in his own father, who “hardly knew the difference between us and the other kids in the street”; Christy Brown’s paterfamilias also forgets the names of his children in *Down All the Days* (1970).¹¹² As he speaks, Paddy is depicted in Dunne’s stage directions in a suggestive movement that infers his willingness to take on a traditionally feminine, domestic role: “Paddy brings cups to table. Paddy brings milk, spoons, etc. Goes back to the stove.” In contrast, his brother Billy emulates their father’s generally morose temperament. His selfishness regarding the tubercular Larry’s suffering is shocking when he asks, “is there anything you can do about his coughing [...] he kept me awake half the night”? (*GH*, 17) And he is equally unmoved by his other brother’s impending emigration:

Paddy Someday, I’ll send you a postcard from the other end of the world.

Billy I’ll put that in a frame. And throw sugar at it! (Pause) Anyway, good luck! (*GH*, 121)

This unemotional male pretence is part of the cultural habitus of working-class life. It is the quotidian mien of a macho culture, which often overflows in the kind of violent brutality we see in *Hatchet*, as this folk song from *Goodbye* suggests:

There’s blood on the lino
 There’s blood on the knife
 You bastard McBirney
 You killed your poor wife
 Rasher Ryan saw you
 You knew he would tell
 You bastard McBirney

¹¹² Dominic Behan, *Tell Dublin I Miss Her* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1962), p. 42.

You killed him as well. (*GH*, 62)

The sanguinary ballad, sung by a local prostitute, is harmonised with the melody of “Red Sails in the Sunset”, a pastoral romantic lyric that depicts a young girl waiting for the sailor she is soon to marry. Like Magee, Dunne sounds a dissonant note in his choice of tunes, highlighting the contrast between Paddy’s world of domestic warfare and popular narratives of romance with which his life cannot reconcile.

Dunne’s contempt for phoney middle-class values – like that of Osborne in *Look Back in Anger* or Braine in *Room at the Top* – gives rise to some of the most comical and perceptive insights of the play. It also conveys how having to “play the game” of capitalism, in Paddy’s words, fundamentally undermines his integrity, and fuels his desire to emigrate (*GH*, 95). The youth is forced to ingratiate himself with a middle-class woman in return for much-needed funds, but, like Braine’s Joe Lampton, his acquisitive scheming ultimately corrodes his sense of self worth. Clare Kearney, a widow in her forties, with whom the teenager has a sexual relationship, pities him, which Paddy is only too keen to encourage. She would “like to look after” him, to “make sure you had underwear, shirts, pants. You deserve more than you get” (*GH*, 19). She gives him the first pair of trousers he has “ever had” and money that helps out at home, acting as a kind of surrogate mother, underscoring a certain perversity in their sexual relationship (*GH*, 18). Indeed, Clare’s dual role as replacement mother and lover also hints at Paddy’s corresponding feeling of being infantilised, getting underwear bought for him by an older woman.

In James Plunkett’s short story “The Half Crown” (1955) recent school-leaver Michael is trapped in a similar developmental rut by unemployment, not having the money to go out with friends, “to “stand a girl’s fare and buy her ice cream”, throwing tantrums at his mother because of inadequate “pocket money”.¹¹³ When he is lectured to in patronising tones by his father about not looking after a shaving blade properly, the symbolism of the borrowed razor – as an accoutrement of manhood – is clear. Michael’s progress to manhood is retarded because of poverty, and he is referred to by his parents as “child” and “baby”.¹¹⁴ Michael stands “on the threshold of life”, but

¹¹³ James Plunkett, *James Plunkett, Collected Short Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2000), p. 142, 148.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 145.

cannot step over it, feeling “defeated and chaotic”, left with “no words for anything except churlishness and anger”.¹¹⁵ In Dunne’s play, Paddy tells Clare, fallaciously, that there are “nine of us at home”, which makes it “dead tough on Ma”, in order to manipulate her sense of charity (*GH*, 21). But the exploitation works both ways: Clare’s enjoyment of Paddy’s sexual services is, she knows, dependent on their unequal economic status (*GH*, 19). When Paddy mentions that his mother is “in trouble with the back rent” and he must leave Clare’s bed to return to work, her offer to pay his mother’s arrears and suggestive prompt that he will “get plenty of chance to pay” her back equates their relationship with prostitution (*GH*, 20). When he insists that he must leave, her subtle threat to revoke the offer – “so you don’t want the fiver so?” – offsets the lewd comedy in Paddy’s double entendre regarding his job “delivering meat” (*GH*, 22). Clare urges him to “help [his] mother out” by having sex — a transaction that gains more sinister undertones in Dunne’s autobiography, *No Time for Innocence*, in which Lee is somewhere between fourteen and sixteen years old when the real events on which this is based take place.¹¹⁶ When Paddy connives with Harry’s plans for the former’s career advancement, he is also faced with the dilemma of whether to debase himself for money. Hayes, a stuffy office manager in his fifties, is deceived by Paddy’s adroitly delivered sob story during an interview — in a hilarious satire on the sentimental bourgeois sympathy for the working-class “special case” of the “deserving poor”.¹¹⁷ Harry’s interjected directions in the following dialogue are delivered as an aside, providing a mirthful commentary on Hayes’s bourgeois naivety:

Hayes (Dons glasses, makes a note) Which Christian Brothers school did you attend, Mister Maguire?

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 149, 152.

¹¹⁶ See chapters seven and eight of Lee Dunne, *No Time for Innocence* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2000), esp. pp. 72-80.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Halper writes that the notion of the “deserving poor” emerges from the Protestant ethic of individualism and is integral to bourgeois thinking, from early industrialisation into modern times. The “deserving poor” are “thought to have accepted the dominant business values, remaining poor through no real fault of their own” (Halper, 72). Halper writes: “The deserving poor’s acceptance of the system—as manifested in their apparent belief in the value of hard work, their refusal to question the larger economic and social system, their unwillingness to complain publicly about their condition, and their obvious gratitude for aid from their betters—helped to convince the nonpoor that society was just” (76); Paddy manages to use Hayes’s need for this bourgeois self-justification as an effective weapon in his own Machiavellian battle for social advancement; Thomas Halper, “The Poor as Pawns: The New ‘Deserving Poor’ & the Old Author(s)”, *Polity*, 6.1 (Autumn 1973), 71-86.

Paddy I won't lie, sir. I couldn't go to one, much to my regret.

Hayes May I ask why, Mister Maguire?

Paddy Things weren't too good at home sir.

Harry *My mother couldn't afford to send me.*

Paddy My mother couldn't afford to send me, sir.

It only cost a few shillings a week but she didn't...

Paddy pauses

Hayes Yes, I understand, Mister Maguire.

Harry *The invalid story.*

Paddy You see sir, my father's been an invalid as long as I can remember.

Hayes My goodness!

Paddy And since we lost my brother Charlie, it's been more or less up to me to look after things.

Hayes How did you brother die, Mister Maguire?

Paddy He drowned sir. Over in Manchester. Twelve months ago.

Harry *Remember Errol Flynn. Be brave.*

Paddy Things are beginning to bounce back, sir. At last.

(*GH*, 45-46)

Paddy and Harry's interview masterstroke employs class prejudice against itself, knowing that Hayes will no doubt fall for the masquerade of a part-pitied, part-patronised lower class hero who dreams of social betterment despite various melodramatic impediments. In prevalent bourgeois discourses, to become "deserving" the poor have to be "perceived as hard-working (and also as uncomplaining)" (like Hardy's Jude Fawley), contract a "clearly incapacitating malady or injury" (one recalls, perhaps, Dickens's Tiny Tim Cratchit), or just "cease being — or appearing — poor" (like Defoe's Moll Flanders), according to Thomas Halper.¹¹⁸ Paddy aspires to the latter and overturns "the presumption of immorality [...] sloth, intemperance or lack of ambition" that inheres in "deserving poor" discourse by applying his mendacity in the other two areas — mentioning an incapacitated father and being "brave" and

¹¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 73-75.

uncomplaining.¹¹⁹ But his story about the imagined drowning brother would be darkly comic if it was not undercut by the reality of his consumptive real brother.

Such themes were invoked by a much earlier writer of working-class Dublin life, Oliver St. John Gogarty, in his depiction of the interplay between tenement dwellers and a wealthy philanthropist in the play *Blight: The Tragedy of Dublin* (1917). Mrs Knox's talk about poverty giving "occasion for fortitude", and her instructions to "practice cleanliness", together with her frequent quotations from scripture, typify her as the quintessential Christian charity advocate. She patronises the poor, pities them, luxuriates in her own perceived moral superiority as a social crusader, but when she discovers the object of her charity, Mr Tully, has been drinking, Knox immediately begins to reconsider whether he is deserving or not, branding him a "debauched, deceitful wretch".¹²⁰ This middle-class hypocrisy was also ridiculed by James Stephens in his short story "The Thieves" (1920), in which a bourgeois kleptomaniac sacks servants for stealing trivial items of clothing, because "laws are not framed against the wealthy but against the necessitous class, and that which is acquisition in one becomes, by polarity, depravity in the other".¹²¹ To return to Gogarty's play, Tully knows he must tug the forelock if he is to get his nephew Jimmy a place in hospital, and so he reverts to sycophancy for effect: "Surely ye wouldn't neglect your duty to extend a helping hand to the poor and weak and the weak-minded?"¹²² He must make himself deserving by being "weak" and pitiable — and so must Paddy Maguire.

When Hayes asks the underage boy (who claims to be nineteen-years-of-age) for his birth cert, Paddy unleashes "the big one", sobbing:

I went to collect it on my way to meet you, sir. As a matter of fact, I nearly didn't come to the interview at all ... It's not an easy thing to admit, sir. I just found out today, that when I was born, sir, my mother and father, they weren't married sir. (*GH*, 48)

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹²⁰ Oliver St. John Gogarty, *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty* (Delaware: Proscenium, 1973), p. 21.

¹²¹ James Stephens, *The Uncollected Prose of James Stephens: Volume 2*, ed. Patrick McFate (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), p. 172.

¹²² Gogarty, *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty*, p. 23.

As Harry advises, “they” – the middle class – “feel sorta guilty for being born in wedlock” (*GH*, 48). Paddy manipulates the “degrading Calvinistic assumption of immorality” in poverty — the sense that the wealthy have “that the poor [are] repulsive: vulgar, crude, and [...] foul-smelling”.¹²³ Paddy transcends class loathing by using the “worthy poor” logic against itself. Hayes duly identifies a “courageous young man” whose advancement will absolve his own middle-class guilt (*GH*, 48). While Paddy has little hard currency, he realises that he can manufacture plenty of the symbolic stuff. There is even a subtle egalitarian thrust to this skulduggery, as Harry infers: “Between us and bullshit, we got you the job – evened things up just a little bit” (*GH*, 49). Harry’s class-conscious mischief making finds a salutary parallel in the ritual self-therapy that factory worker Jimmy indulges in “every six months or so when I’m a bit cheesed off” in Dermot Bolger’s novel, *Night Shift* (1985):

I take a day off and go for an interview for a really menial job that I know I’m going to get. And I sit and listen to all their shit and I answer all their questions, yes sir and no sir, and I wait until they have worked themselves up to doing me this great big favour with poxy conditions and lousy wages, and I suddenly stand up and say, ‘Excuse me, gentlemen, but would you mind taking your job and sticking it up your fucking arse.’¹²⁴

Renton, in Scottish writer Irvine Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting* (1993), achieves a similar effect by refusing the presumed cerebral superiority of his counsellor, mischievously telling lies in order to “confuse” and “wind him up” – but this backfires on Renton, and results in him being sent for more counselling. Dunne also stresses that Paddy’s victory over middle-class conceitedness is a pyrrhic and tokenistic one.¹²⁵ Hayes, Harry reminds him, is a capitalist and thus an exploiter – “Nice man me arse! He thinks he can use you or you wouldn’t have got the job” (*GH*, 49).

In the final scene, Paddy rejects Harry’s strategic acts of self-denial for money as a purging of something he perceives in himself. When the arch-charlatan manages to

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 73, 74. George Orwell identified this mixture of moral and physical class loathing as something intrinsic to bourgeois socialisation, asserting that the “middle-class child is taught almost simultaneously to wash his neck, to be ready to die for his country, and to despise the ‘lower classes’”; George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York: Berkley, 1961), p. 112, 115.

¹²⁴ Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 87.

¹²⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 184.

manipulate a female American tourist's affection for the poetic Irish type by writing poems for her and acting in a generally Behanesque manner, he makes the younger man physically sick (*GH*, 128). Paddy tells of his mother's accusation that he himself is becoming a "phoney", but Harry attempts to comfort him by saying, "it's all a big bleedin game" (*GH*, 126). Harry's philosophy is simple: "Get what you want, especially sex and money. And don't ruin it by worrying about it afterwards" (*GH*, 51). To him, "this" – spending ill-gotten gains in the pub – "is the pinnacle, really living" (*GH*, 128). But Paddy's subsequent dart to the toilet to vomit is, Dunne affirms, (in a somewhat superfluous stage direction,) "symbolic of his rejection, finally, of what Harry stands for" (*GH*, 129). The older man is a projection of Paddy himself, a man he might become if he does not realise at this crucial juncture, that "I've got to make a sound, some kind of mark" (*GH*, 128).

In rejecting Harry, his father and his environment on The Hill, Paddy echoes the agonised sense of conflicted allegiances that bedevils many such working-class males who are impelled by ambition to reject their backgrounds. Joe Lampton does so in *Room at the Top* (1957), but knows he has lost himself in doing so, observing his own dissolution in the third person: "I hated Joe Lampton, but he looked and sounded very sure of himself sitting at my desk in my skin".¹²⁶ This theme recurs repeatedly in working-class literature, such as in A.P. Wilson's *The Slough* (1914), with Jack Hanlon's social ambition severing him from the "baggage" of his family roots, or in Margot Heinemann's Welsh novel, *The Adventurers* (1960), in which Danny Owen's intelligence leads to success as a journalist — a success which allows him to escape the mines he once seemed destined for (or *doomed* to), but which also estranges him from his community and the politics it espouses.¹²⁷ Dunne lambastes the phoney sentimentality of middle-class ideology, and the fawning, cynical abasement of working-class servility that characterises Paddy's best friend, suggesting that his protagonist, like Jemmo and Hatchet, must cut himself adrift from both if he is to escape his environment.

¹²⁶ John Braine, *Room at the Top*, p. 219.

¹²⁷ A. P. Wilson, "Jack Hanlon's Part", *The Slough*, p. 3.

As with *The Scatterin'* and *Hatchet*, *Goodbye to the Hill* has only one alternative to Harry's demeaning subjugation: emigration. In Paddy's sexist vernacular, "drinking pints, telling old jokes, reciting poetry to pot wallopers and kitchen mechanics so you can screw them — there has to be more to life than that", and so he must "get away from the Hill" (*GH*, 28, 94). His final decision to leave is forced somewhat by the fact that he has been sacked for drinking during office hours, something that foreshadows future problems if he stays in Harry's thrall.¹²⁸ But despite his promise early in the play to "never run out" on his mother, Paddy says, *a la* Joyce, that he will not serve and "settle for this", his mother's home (*GH*, 13, 43). Even his cunning in tricking his employers proves futile, because "Cahill [his immediate superior] hated me from the first day in that office. He was a snob, looked down his nose because he knew I came from The Hill" (*GH*, 123). The class snobbery that A.P. Wilson's Jack Hanlon had encountered in his office job in *The Slough* (1914) — where colleagues "taunt" him about being a "gutter snipe from the slums" — is evidently still in vogue.¹²⁹ While England has its rhetoric of affluence and post-war social mobility — something Paddy refers to obliquely in his ironic comment that an "extra shilling" on his paper round is indicative of the "Fabulous Fifties" — Dunne blasts his own country's contrasting economic and social depression, fuming that it "should be given back to the Leprechauns, with apologies!" (*GH*, 9, 116) While the angry young men of Sillitoe, Osborne, Braine and others lambaste the social mobility of the British welfare state as a sham, for these Irish writers the escape to Britain offers a modicum of mobility that they cannot achieve at home.

Closer to Birmingham than Boston or Berlin

The achievement of these plays must be assessed in the context of theatrical as well as social and cultural history. Sean O'Faolain wrote in 1962 — in a retrospective survey of

¹²⁸ Dunne's own battle with alcoholism is dealt with at greater length in his autobiographies and fictionalised in the novels, *Paddy Maguire is Dead* and *Barleycorn Blues*. He wrote a number of provocative opinion pieces in newspapers during the 1970s and 1980s on the matter. Two medical directors at separate hospitals in Dublin even ventured that his "dramatic autobiographical account" of addiction should be published "in booklet form". See "Dunne on Alcoholism" (letter), *The Irish Times* (30 November 1973), p. 13.

¹²⁹ A. P. Wilson, "Jack Hanlon's Part", *The Slough*, p. 2.

the previous fifty years' writing – that there were a number of problems facing contemporary Irish theatre. On the one hand, he criticised “too much” of a “withdrawal-from-life” in the overshadowing Irish Literary Movement. Yeats, its central advocate, had: “found inspiration in the ancient mind of his people, but not in a political mind, or a social mind, but a mystical memory.”¹³⁰ But on the other hand, O’Faolain criticised those who superseded Yeats in the cultural ascendancy, the “new élite” of an “ambitious, hardfaced democracy” that “understood only ‘realistic plays’, political plays, representationalism, characterization, explanations, social comedies and tragedies”, which were written in so “feeble” a manner “as to extinguish the value of the terms” he had just used (“‘realistic’, ‘political’, ‘representational’, ‘social’”).¹³¹ “Because new audiences did not really want any of those things,” O’Faolain claimed: “they wanted those things in an *ersatz* form [...] They were not ready for plays that opposed what might be called, for short, the new synthetic orthodoxy.” He concluded that “no social-realistic drama — whether comic or tragic — can thrive in this atmosphere”, citing as his main example the plight of Brendan Behan, who had been forced to seek his fortune in London and New York, because he “could not have broken through” at home.¹³²

Dunne, Magee and McKenna managed to make that breakthrough with plays that avoided the conflict of Yeatsian “withdrawal” and Free State syntheticism, providing the kind of “socio-realistic drama” O’Faolain yearned for. In this they share a common bond as writers, but they also share far more. It is evident from my analysis in this chapter that the triumvirate of angry young men exhibit strikingly similar concerns. They articulate the emotional turmoil of a detached generation of men who struggle to cope with the expectations of masculinity and class that society foists upon them, and to escape the legacy of poverty, violence and political failure of their fathers’ generation. The three plays share a similar social function also: to ask their audiences to question social conditioning and its limitations, to question how hospitable a place

¹³⁰ Sean O’Faolain, “Fifty Years of Irish Writing”, *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, ed. David Pierce (Cork: Cork UP, 2000), pp. 740-747 (p. 743); originally published in *Studies*, 51, (1962), pp. 93-105.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.* 744.

¹³² *Ibid.*

the Republic was for its urban working-class and to what extent social exclusion contributes to delinquent and dysfunctional behaviour.

In this sense, they are political and proletarian plays; they conform to what Bourdieu terms the “anti-Kantian aesthetic” of working-class culture.¹³³ All three works were very much commented upon for their social utility, and when prisoners in Mountjoy Jail performed a production of *Hatchet*, directed by Frank Allen, in 2001, their teacher spoke of the work as “addressing issues about offending behaviour”, specifically “the issue of violence and the culture of the unemployed [...] about people trying to go against that trend”.¹³⁴ The playwrights convey their central characters’ subjection to subtle forms of oppression, through culturally inscribed symbolic domination, and depict the complexity of class struggle, in a cerebral, emotional and deeply personal manner — presenting a masculine complexity that O’Casey often denied. They, along with Paul Smith and Brendan Behan, represent a key period in proletarian cultural development and in Irish writing as a whole, a body of writing which, to borrow Sue’s words in *The Scatterin’*, did not “fear to speak of ’58, the new dead” (*SC*, 21).

¹³³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 41-42.

¹³⁴ Quote attributed to Stephen O’Connor by Victoria White, “FRONT/row”, *The Irish Times*, 18 January 2001, p. 16.

Chapter 3: From Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the System

Fiction about working-class Dublin women is plentiful, but fiction by them is not. With the notable exception of Paula Meehan, the vast bulk of writers within the scope of this thesis are male. Yet for most of these male writers, the predicament of working-class women is a significant preoccupation of their work. There is ample evidence in writing from James Plunkett to Roddy Doyle that, for these authors, working-class women's experience is a significant concern. In Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969) there is the neglected housekeeper, Miss Gilchrist, whose years of dedication to her wealthy employers is rewarded by a horrifying death in a workhouse, and Mary, a younger servant, who is forced to choose between her job and her lover because her employers will not let her have both. In Christy Brown's *Down All the Days* (1970) there is contempt for his own mother's subjection to his father's bullying (which is dealt with further in Chapter 6). For Paul Smith, in *Summer Sang in Me* (1972, part of the focus of Chapter 4), *Esther's Altar* (1959, later republished as *Come Trailing Blood*, 1977) and one of the works I have chosen for analysis in this chapter, *The Countrywoman* (1961), there is an abiding current of anger about women's sufferings in working-class life. Dermot Bolger, in *The Woman's Daughter* (1978), Peter Sheridan in *Big Fat Love* (2003, the other book I analyse in this chapter), Roddy Doyle, most particularly in *The Snapper* (1990), *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996), and *Paula Spencer* (2006), all deal with female subjection to moral conservatism and male aggression. And these works are joined by some lesser known ones, like *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007) by Sebastian Barry, and *Sucking Dublin* (1997), by Enda Walsh, which dramatise domestic violence and sexual abuse in working-class settings. This plethora of male-authored texts forms a particular preoccupation in the literature, and correlates with the rejection of androcentrism that inhered in my last chapter.

This chapter discusses two novels that exhibit this frustration by exploring the harrowing experiences of abused women. Both share, with the bulk of writing on working-class Dublin women, a characteristic challenge to totemic social orthodoxies, and a typical, attendant use of irreverent imagery to make their point. They portray

urban, working-class communities whose experiences have been marginalised in Irish culture, but for working-class women this marginalisation is depicted in particularly acute terms. In Smith and Sheridan's accounts, women suffer from multiple social and economic impediments: as part of a disadvantaged economic class, as women in a male-dominated society, but also as women living in an extremely androcentric working-class culture.

A century of change: Gender and Irish society

Big Fat Love and *The Countrywoman* were published over four decades apart, and are separated by over seven decades in terms of setting. They explore a broad and fertile field of historic transformation, and in approaching them it is important to outline the changing social and historical contexts they emerge from. Both invoke major political and social upheavals in Dublin's inner city life – the violent foundation of the Free State in one, and the demolition of Sheriff Street flats in the other – and in doing so they follow O'Casey's technique of interlacing historical and personal narratives to better illustrate both. There are telling contrasts between them, which illustrate how life has changed for working-class women since the foundation of the state, but in some instances there are depressing comparisons as well, which convey how women's subjection to male power has endured.

As the subtitle of a recently published study propounds, the twentieth century was "A Century of Change", generally, for Irish women.¹ Since the foundation of the Free State, divorce was banned and then reintroduced, and women's work outside the home was curtailed by legislation, then encouraged as a vital economic precept. A whole raft of official and unofficial impediments to gender equality have been created, then diminished or removed. Irish women have moved, in the words of a former Irish President, from "rocking the cradle" to "rocking the system"; they have emerged from

¹ Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003).

the domestic role assigned to them by the 1937 constitution to play a vital role in challenging conservatism in public life.²

However, like all historic generalisations, such a broad analysis assumes a common experience that may not obtain in particular circumstances — as my analysis of industrialisation, for instance, has shown. In suturing the many socio-economic fissures in Irish society within the thread of homogeneous experience, regardless of distinctions of class, location or demography, history can fail to acknowledge, in particular, the experience of proletarian life. It may be true that Irish women have secured key advancements as an undifferentiated mass, but the extent and pace of change differs according to socio-economic context. While it is by now axiomatic to observe what Eavan Boland terms the “disproportionate silence of women” in Irish literature, for instance, the disproportionate silence surrounding working-class women is less discussed in critical inquiry.³ In recent decades, the issue of women’s history and literature has been the focus of vibrant academic and, indeed, public debate. The publication of the three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991 was exemplary in this regard. Greeted with critical acclaim, but also assailed for its gender bias, the anthology was slighted by many commentators for its inattention to women writers. This criticism duly prompted the publication of two extra volumes eleven years later that attempted to redress *Field Day’s* gender imbalance. But if *Field Day* generated much public and academic debate about the inattention to women in Irish studies, it is noteworthy that there has been no call for more writing on or from *working-class* women about *their* history of silence.

An obvious explanation for this particular imbalance is the lack of literary output from working-class women themselves, due, in no small part, to the general conditions that the class system imposes on their lives, such as leisure time constraints and a lack of educational attainment, as Kevin C. Kearns notes:

Can one imagine any figure in Irish society with *less* time and opportunity to write letters and keep diaries than Ma’s from the Liberties or northside — past or

² Mary Robinson, when elected in 1990, congratulated “mná na hÉireann, who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system.” Quoted in *Ibid.* 235.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

present – burdened with large families, financial problems, domestic chores, outside job duties and emotional strains?⁴

Nonetheless, this strain does not explain the fact that “Irish mothers have been woefully neglected by historians,” Kearns observes, “especially so the lower-income, working-class ‘mammies’ in Dublin’s long-deprived, inner-city communities”.⁵ Such neglect is by no means confined to academia or literature. It is telling that even the women’s movement in Ireland has been criticised for its failure to explicitly include working-class women in feminist conferences and events.⁶ The fact that most literary depictions of Dublin’s working-class women have been penned by men conveys the utter lack of self-expression afforded to these women in the artistic realm.

It is fitting therefore that both Smith and Sheridan exemplify a compelling sense in their novels of historic retrieval, of unearthing submerged narratives of working-class women. In particular, the novels show how state power has combined with an androcentric, local, proletarian machismo to compound and sanction the oppression of women in working-class life. In general terms, the Republic of Ireland has been unlike many other European states of the twentieth century, in that it has treated women badly. Maryann Valiulis identifies the oppression of women in the Republic as the result of a typically post-colonial “gender ideology”, and it is well documented that the post-independence era saw women’s rights increasingly eroded.⁷ Suffragette and republican Hanna Sheehy Skeffington criticised the gradual demise of gender equality in the Free State, observing that, “what was given at first with gladness has been gradually filched away”; from her perspective, “equality [had] ceased to be accorded to us, save on paper”.⁸ Legislative change was key in this regard. A bill of 1927 proposed that women be exempted from jury service, undermining their sense of citizenship, and the “filching away” of equality that Skeffington lamented was particularly acute in the introduction of sexist labour laws. In 1935, the Conditions of Employment Act restricted the

⁴ Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin’s Lost Heroines: Mammies and Grannies in a Vanished City* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. xxii.

⁵ *Ibid.* xiii-xiv.

⁶ See *Ibid.*, p. xxi, xxvii.

⁷ See Maryann Valiulis, “Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State”, *Journal of Women’s History*, 6/7 (Winter/Spring 1994-5), 117-136.

⁸ Margaret Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: A Life* (Cork: Attic Press, 1997), p. 304.

participation of women in paid employment, curtailing their access to factory work and also effectively excluding all married women from white-collar public service work, including national-school teaching.⁹ This had a “demoralising” effect, “sending out a clear message about the preferred role of women in Irish society”.¹⁰ In particular, it affected those women who needed money most. Correspondingly, between the inception of the Free State and the 1960s, a falling number of women were consistently registered in censuses as “gainfully” employed (a fall of 16 per cent occurred between 1926 and 1961).¹¹

Equally, women were disadvantaged by family law. For many, marriage became a trap, with divorce banned from 1937 right through to November 1995. It was only after a bitterly divisive referendum campaign that divorce legislation was passed, and at that, by the smallest of margins. Article 41.2 of the 1937 constitution notoriously identified women’s roles as confined to domesticity and motherhood and it was not until 1956 that the Married Women’s Status Act gave women equal legal status with their husbands. Women’s disempowerment in the domestic sphere was compounded by the state’s tolerance for domestic violence, as evidenced by the fact that its victims had “relatively few rights until the mid 1970s”.¹² The high number of female emigrants from the mid-1940s, would suggest that women were increasingly, if quietly, uneasy about the direction of Irish society. For Jenny Beale, the half-century since independence from the British Empire amounted to “fifty years of inequality”.¹³

To be sure, this inequality was compounded for less affluent women. The neglect of working-class women’s health, grinding poverty and slum living continued and even intensified in the Free State. Poor women in Dublin often gave birth to many children and suffered sickness and death as a result. Nevertheless, the state’s advice was consistently in sync with that of the Catholic Church; in 1956 the Emigration Commission saw the downward trend in family size as “unwelcome”, arguing that

⁹ Hill, *Women in Ireland*, p. 100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Caitríona Clear, *Women of the House: Women’s Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 13.

¹² Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams, “Women, Religion and Violence in the Family”, in *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, ed. Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997), pp. 327-341 (p. 327).

¹³ Jenny Beale, *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan 1986), p. 140.

“every effort should be made to arrest it”.¹⁴ Bishop Cornelius Lucey even advised, in his submission to the commission, that such prodigious child bearing had a “salutary rather than deleterious” effect on women’s mental health.¹⁵

Working-class women were also more likely to be entirely reliant on their husband’s income, thus making them particularly vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. As oral testimony in Kevin Kearns revelatory work, *Dublin’s Lost Heroines: Mammies and Grannies in a Vanished City* (2003), confirms, these women had less control over sexual, reproductive and economic issues in their homes than wealthier counterparts, and were more likely to suffer the scourge of alcoholic, macho, abusive husbands. They were also more predisposed to edicts from Catholic Church – which urged them to remain with such husbands – than their wealthier contemporaries were, and less likely to be equipped with the (financial and social) resources necessary to secure a marriage annulment.

Smith’s realism in mid-century Dublin: “This is not a nice book”

The *Spectator* thought Paul Smith “possibly the finest writer that Ireland has produced”, and Anthony Burgess was “sorely tempted” to use the term “genius” to describe him, but refrained only because he claimed that it was too liberally ascribed to Irish writers.¹⁶ He was compared by critics to O’Casey, Joyce, Dickens and Dostoyevsky.¹⁷ His novel *Annie* (1972) won the American Book of the Month Club Choice and was lauded as a “masterpiece” by Kate O’Brien, a personal friend.¹⁸ John Jordan, in a review in *The Irish Times*, compared *The Countrywoman* with the work of Emile Zola.¹⁹ Its social realist style and political overtones even met with Soviet state approval, securing it a Russian translation and an inclusion in Volume Three of the

¹⁴ Caitríona Clear, *Women of the House*, p. 58.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Anthony Burgess, “In the twilight zone”, *The Observer*, 18 November 1962, p.25.

¹⁷ See Moira Verschoyle, “Shining Offbeat”, *The Irish Times*, 1 December 1962, p. 9.

¹⁸ See Aosdána biography of Smith: <[http://aosdana.arts council.ie/Members/Literature/Smith-\(2\).aspx](http://aosdana.arts council.ie/Members/Literature/Smith-(2).aspx)> [accessed 24 June 2008]. Smith’s mother’s maiden name was also, coincidentally, Kate O’Brien.

¹⁹ John Jordan, “Slumlands Tragedy”, *The Irish Times*, 3 March 1962, p. 9. Jordan was also friendly with Smith. According to Eibhear Walshe, both, with John Broderick, were part of a “gay men’s sub culture [in Dublin] where writing and alcohol was the primary driving forces and Kate O’Brien fitted right into this”; Eibhear Walshe, “Invisible Irelands: Kate O’Brien’s Lesbian and Gay Social Formations in London and Ireland in the Twentieth Century” in *SQS*, January 2006, p. 45.

Soviet *Concise Literary Encyclopaedia* as a notable work of “social protest”.²⁰ In 1978, Smith received the American-Irish Cultural Institute Literary Award and he was also later awarded membership of Aosdána. However, that little remains in either academic record or public memory of this enigmatic writer from the Dublin slums would seem to speak volumes of mid-twentieth century Irish society and Paul Smith’s uncomfortable place within it.

His own experiences of deprivation, and marginalisation as a writer, would prove inspirational. Born in Dublin on 4 October, 1920, Smith was the son of rural parents, on whom Pat and Molly Baines in *The Countrywoman* are believed to be based.²¹ He grew up in two rooms off Charlemont Street in Dublin’s south inner city and though he could read at pre-school age, Smith suffered the educational deprivation common to slum children. He claimed not to have read any books in childhood because “there were no library books available to people like me. You had to be a householder, or know a householder, to get a ticket. And we didn’t know any householders. Everybody like us lived in [rented tenement] rooms”.²² His mother’s bad sight, however, had a silver lining, as, with no money for spectacles, she required him to read newspapers to her. This was his closest brush with *belles-lettres* for some time.²³

Such was the poverty of Smith’s upbringing that he would ask “what’s working class?” because, “as far as I was concerned anybody who stayed at school till they were 14 was wealthy. I never knew anybody who did. I certainly didn’t. At the age of eight I was driving a donkey cart for coal to Ringsend.”²⁴ But just as O’Casey would hone his

²⁰ See Alla Sarukhanyan, “Irish Literature in Russia”, *The Irish Times*, 4 July 1968, p. 13; see also Seamus Ó Coigligh, “Irish writing a la Russe”, *The Irish Times*, 21 July 1966, p. 8.

²¹ James Stern indicated this to be the case in his review; James Stern, “The Ordeal of Molly Baines”, *New York Times*, 17 September 1961, p. 4. See also the International Association for the Study of Irish Literature newsletter of July 1997, People section, which states that the novel “tells the story of [Smith’s] mother”; <http://www.iasil.org/newsletter/archive/newsletter1997/07_peopl.html> [accessed 10 March 2008] (para. 11 of 16).

²² Des Hickey, “Success for the boy who ran away at eight”, *Sunday Independent*, 14 September 1975, p. 8.

²³ With a “do-it-yourself” education, he admitted even as an accomplished novelist to some basic educational gaps, including not being able to recite the alphabet or the multiplication tables. This may of course, to the sceptical, recall the kind of myth-making O’Casey indulged in with his inventive autobiographies, but it is surely true that Smith suffered severe poverty. See Paul Smith, “A Dublin Memoir”, *The Irish Times*, 5 November 1975, p. 10.

²⁴ Des Hickey, “Success for the boy who ran away at eight”, *Sunday Independent*, 14 September 1975, p. 8.

empirical knowledge of working-class life labouring on the railways, Smith's premature entry into the workforce, in a job in which "all life centre[d] round the roads", would provide him with rich material for much of his later work.²⁵ The poverty he would encounter, and the righteous indignation it inspired, would stay with him too:

'Why', [his boss] would ask, 'did coal-dealers like us never have a summer lay-off?' 'And why did the poor have to buy coal all the year round?' 'And why in stones and halves?' 'Because they can't afford hundred weights', [Smith would] tell him. I would then remind him how every kettle, every bit cooked in every room in Rock Street was done over an open fire.²⁶

This sense of materialism, of the subjection of the working class to basic but powerful economic forces, is integral to Smith's work, which is grounded in the realities of economic inequality he experienced. His first novel, *Esther's Altar* (1959, later republished as *Come Trailing Blood*), is an epic study of the 1916 Easter Rising from the vantage point of a poor tenement. Although the novel was banned in Ireland, it gained him fame in the USA and he was soon billed in England (in that hackneyed parallel) as yet another "new O'Casey".²⁷ But this and all of his subsequent endeavours – of which *The Countrywoman* (1961) was generally considered his masterpiece – were banned in Ireland until 1975, despite their translation into a number of languages and successful worldwide sales.²⁸

His was a curious predicament that illustrates the extent of Ireland's isolationism, and internal silencing, in literary matters: "Nobody knows me here in Ireland," he complained in 1975; "I'm like a dark stranger here because I don't know many people

²⁵ Paul Smith, "A Dublin Memoir", *The Irish Times*, 5 November 1975, p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ He received high praise indeed from some of his contemporaries outside of Ireland. "Dorothy Parker compared him to O'Casey; Cecil Day Lewis claimed he left most of his English contemporaries groping on the ropes; Carson McCullers said he was to be 'praised and wondered at'", Des Hickey recalled; Des Hickey, "Success for the boy who ran away at eight", *Sunday Independent*, 14 September 1975, p. 8.

²⁸ Eveleen Coyle, book editor and publicist, named *The Countrywoman* as her Book of the Century in 1999. See "Books of the Year", *The Irish Times*, 4 December 1999, p. 2. Smith's novels include *Esther's Altar* (1959), *The Countrywoman* (1962), *The Stubborn Season* (1962), *Stravaganza* (1963), *Annie* (1972) and *Come Trailing Blood* (a revised version of *Esther's Altar*, 1977). He also wrote plays, including an adaptation of the *Esther's Altar* for BBC Television, and a stage version, *Totem Pole* (1985), for the Los Angeles Actors' Theatre. He wrote *Miss Lemon* (New York, Shelter West Company) in 1986 and *Trudy on Sunday* (New York, Upstate Repertory Company) the following year. Neither of these were published. An adaptation of *The Countrywoman* was commissioned for Siobhán McKenna to act in, but she died shortly afterwards. Smith himself died in January 1996.

— a lot of those I did know have gone away”.²⁹ This was a tragic effect of censorship, which drove talent abroad—and in particular acted as a bulwark against the gritty kitchen-sink style realism of writers like Smith which was sure to be banned. Such blind isolationism could be noted, for example, in RTÉ’s decision to ban the Dubliners’ rather trivial song, “Seven Drunken Nights”, in 1967, despite its success in Europe and America, and its achievement of a number five spot in the British singles’ charts. While these working-class Dubliners could achieve unprecedented success in Britain, the USA, and even Russia, they were denied access to their community at home. But Smith, unlike the Dubliners, “was ever the outsider”, and his feeling of isolation within his own country resonates in his depiction of working-class women’s isolation in *The Countrywoman*.³⁰

A “searing bitter picture”

The Countrywoman is a novel about domestic violence, poverty, familial disintegration and the tenacity and courage with which one woman endures all of these. It is set in the Dublin slums during and after the First World War, a period of growing social disenchantment and division. Robert Collis described this era in the preface to his 1943 slum play, *Marrowbone Lane*, in terms of vivid social inequalities:

Here in Dublin lived two societies, one of which did not know how the other lived—did not know that 90,000 people lived in one-roomed tenements and 10,000 in dwellings condemned as medically unfit for human habitation. Still less did they realise what this meant in pain, disease, cold and hunger.³¹

Sculpted in such a despondent social cast, Smith’s book valiantly refused to efface its worst effects, and as one reviewer assessed, “this is not a nice book”; that the novel was “as coarse and shocking as its background”, however, was meant as a commendation.

The naturalism of the work, its authenticity as a “searing, bitter picture of Dublin slums”, was its triumph.³² Set in Kelly’s Lane, a tenement district in the south inner-city, it charts the desperate travails of Molly Baines, a woman from rural County

²⁹ Des Hickey, “Success for the boy who ran away at eight”, p. 8.

³⁰ Eileen Battersby, “Death of a realist”, *The Irish Times*, 18 January 1997, p. 9.

³¹ Robert Collis, *Marrowbone Lane: A Play in Three Acts* (Dublin: Runa Press, 1943), p. 9.

³² P.T. Hughes, “Slum life in the troubled twenties”, *Sunday Independent*, 18 February 1962, p. 15.

Wicklow, who comes to settle there with her husband. Married to Pat, she follows him around the country in his search for work as a wheelwright, eventually ending up in the slums, where they have a family, but he becomes increasingly violent and abusive, and his enlistment as a British soldier in World War I ironically comes as a respite for the family. Their greatest fear thereafter is the “return of the brute”, to borrow the title of Liam O’Flaherty’s 1929 novel of the First World War, and while Pat at first seems to have gone missing after the 1918 Armistice, his inevitable homecoming signals a renewed “war” on family life. Molly is prevented from leaving him by her adherence to the dictums of the Catholic Church on obedience within marriage and her son Danny, who stands up to Pat and voices Smith’s own radical views, is soon forced to flee to England. His two older brothers have already emigrated to America, never to be seen again, and the story centres on Molly’s suffering, that of her daughter Babby, and sons Tucker Tommy and Neddo, as the family gradually disintegrates.

War and national political upheaval provide a historical context to their private agonies, but as with O’Casey it is the latter that Smith prioritises. As James Stern observed:

It is a measure of the novel’s agony that however terrifying and sinister the horrors caused by Ireland’s civil war, they come into this story as a relief compared not only with the inhuman brutality of one man toward his wife and family, but with the monstrously callous indifference to suffering of those whose Christian duty it was to assist the only practicing Christian [the ever altruistic Molly Baines] in their midst.³³

Smith’s sympathy with the women of working-class Dublin, and his stress on quotidian social and domestic life, distinguishes him as a realist of the proletariat and as a feminist. His novel is most fundamentally about patriarchy in Ireland and its disempowerment of women, and about the domestic and familial horrors that lie behind the jingo of history and hagiography. His gritty realism was a direct attack on the failures of decolonized Ireland and is perhaps why the book was banned in June 1962 as “indecent or obscene”, along with Tennessee Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Edna O’Brien’s *The Lonely Girl* and Aaron Bell’s *The Abortionist*, amongst others.

³³ James Stern, “The Ordeal of Molly Baines”, p. 4.

Felicitously enough, the Censorship Board also banned a book innocuously titled *The Way to Happy Marriage*, by Ruth Martin, that same month.³⁴

Rewriting women's history: "Voiceless because they would have been useless"

Molly Baines's unhappy marriage and her uneasy integration into the slums provides Smith with a number of contrasts that prove useful in illustrating the position of women in working-class Dublin. Molly's constant association with nature and traditional imagery of femininity clashes with the depiction of some of her more liberated, earthy, urban-born female neighbours, rather in the manner that rural ingénue Mary does in Robert Collis's *Marrowbone Lane* (1943), "like a caged bird in this [slum ridden] place".³⁵ Molly comes to the Dublin slums of the 1910s with "great innocence", as a "breath of country air", and her naivety acts as a foil for the Gissingesque world of the tenements that she fears might "all fall down on top of her" (*CW*, 2, 1, 259). When she dies, it is noted that her window box is left "without the small splash of color for the first time for as long as [locals] could remember", the only splash of colour amidst the dreary "green darkness" (*CW*, 259, 272, 4) of Kelly's Lane. She is an embodiment of the rustic innocence that Irish culture elevated to an obsession, and for most of the novel she typifies the archetypal, submissive Victorian woman.

But this depiction provides for a contrast between the idealised Irish woman Molly at first personifies and the dystopian degradation of working-class life she must endure. Internally, Molly rails against her husband's brutality, but "the fear in her mind reflected on [her children's] faces" stops her from speaking out (*CW*, 101). Her protests are "voiceless because they would have been useless" and towards the end of the book, when she is wrongly imprisoned in a mental institution, the countrywoman's young son Tucker Tommy tellingly takes "vague relief" from copying her "ritual" of taking off Pat's boots, even though the boy longs to "smash and beat the black malice-wreathed face [of his father] into sensibility" (*CW*, 122, 269, 268). He retains "some sense of her" (*CW*, 269) by ritualistically enacting her degraded submission; his mother's compassion and self-effacement are ever her quintessential traits. Molly observes

³⁴ Anon. "Williams' play banned", *The Irish Times*, 14 June 1962, p. 11.

³⁵ Robert Collis, *Marrowbone Lane*, p. 15

subservience to supposedly divine rights; it isn't "her place to question the ways of God and His Church or His workings through a man like her husband" (CW, 34); the capitalised "His" might just as well refer to either. Man, for Molly, regardless of his sin, is a funnel through which God's authority flows and her embodiment of the "Angel in the House" ideal of female self-effacement is a point of anxiety for Smith, as it is for Tucker Tommy — both a source of nostalgic affection and an exemplar of subservience he cannot abide. This subservience is challenged throughout the novel.³⁶

While Molly adheres with "patience and humility" to the tellingly nick-named Father Rex Aurealis's (otherwise known, equally suggestively, as Fr Tithe) advice that she should "stay with her husband", there are those in "the Lane" and locally, in similar circumstances, openly "defying the teachings of the church" (CW, 2).³⁷ Molly's relationship with Pat is defined by male terror and control. When the swaggering, vainglorious soldier drunkenly returns after having "bollixed the whole Kaiser's army", he immediately strikes "fear" and "trembling" (CW, 23, 27) into even his grown-up children. He is, as Eileen Battersby describes him, "one of the most menacing figures in literature", exerting, like Frankenstein's monster, a kind of primal dread, even while he is away.³⁸ Pat graphically assumes a phallocentric dominance over the household on his return from war, ordering his wife to "wrap yourself around this" (his penis) (CW, 26), but Smith counterpoints Pat's domestic supremacy with the destabilisation of male power in other scenes.

In a juxtaposed scene at the beginning of Chapter 3, it is Mrs Slattery and Mrs Kinsella who assume dominance over a male aggressor, in an uproarious female rebellion. Mr Bedell, a "relief man" (CW, 28), whose job it is to decide who deserves special allowances for the poor, is forced to flee from the women's verbal assaults and

³⁶ Typified by Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem, "Angel in the House", the phrase has been extrapolated to represent a wider phenomenon of Victorian views on women's roles in society. Virginia Woolf famously invoked the term when she opined that "killing the Angel in the House" is part of the proper mission of the woman writer; see Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women", in *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 285.

³⁷ Rex is Latin for "king", while aurealis is the Latin for "gold", an ironic comment on the priest's revered status, and perhaps his wealth. "Tithe" would seem to infer the latter, as it refers to the voluntary contributions or "tithes" levied historically by the Christian churches.

³⁸ Eileen Battersby, "Death of a realist", p. 9.

threatened violence.³⁹ Cowed and emasculated, he shouts “feeble abuse” as a belligerent Kinsella advises him to “go an’ stick your lousy seven-an’-six up your la-la!” (CW, 28). There is an implicit parallel between Pat’s recent threat of female penetration and Kinsella’s ribald counsel on where Bedell might deposit his rent; the juxtaposed bodily violation is reversed. Bedell’s miserly refusal to grant relief to Kinsella is based on his sighting of a baby’s cot in her flat, an alleged sign of “full and plenty” and of course a symbol of fecundity (CW, 29). His complaint is a metaphor for the barren humanity he represents, the whingeing of a “dyin’ lookin’ puke” who has no “nature in him” (CW, 29). Kinsella and Slattery’s vibrant Rabelaisian “energy” contrasts with his calculating embodiment of capitalist power; the personification of a social disease, he is a “filthy Locke Hospital leavin’s” (CW, 28, 29). But it also contrasts with Molly’s submission. The female duo takes great pleasure at having made “short work of that pox bottle!” (CW, 28), providing an obvious counterblast to Molly’s terrifying subjection to her domestic god.

Just as Seán O’Casey’s feminist outlook is intertwined with his disdain for theocracy in plays like *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949), Smith’s feminism is inextricable from his views on religious oppression. As Brian Fallon notes, “it was on women [in the mid-century] that the clergy chiefly relied to maintain religious morale and to carry out most of the small, regular rituals (e.g. the family Rosary) which kept Catholicism an active force in the home”.⁴⁰ This empowered women in one way – as the cultivators of moral values in the domestic sphere – but disempowered them in another; as Smith shows, it is they who suffered most from the severities of religious dictates. Molly’s devotion to the Catholic Church mirrors her devotion to Pat. In both relationships, she suffers the tragedy of being wedded to something that abuses her. While Molly builds a shrine in her tenement room to the Virgin Mary, it is around a statue with a “lowered indifferent face hovering eternally in chalk-eyed blindness” (CW, 116). The icon is a symbol of religious remoteness, unsympathetic and unresponsive to her travails; it

³⁹ Social historian Kevin C. Kearns’s writes of how women were constantly required to “negotiate with, and sometimes bodily confront, various authorities” like Bedell. This “was a perpetual worry for mothers”; Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin’s Lost Heroines: Mammies and Grannies in a Vanished City* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. 9.

⁴⁰ Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998), p. 186.

harks back to Eeada, Dympna and Finoola's childish idolatry in O'Casey's *Red Roses for Me* (1942), or further still, to A. P. Wilson's *The Slough* (1914), in which Mrs. Kelly opines that praying is "the only thing left for poor people like us to do".⁴¹ It anticipates too the pathetic, unanswered prayers of ageing factory worker Dan, in Dermot Bolger's *Night Shift* (1985), to a statue of the Virgin whose silence accompanies his life's "slow drop into emptiness".⁴² While Molly is loving and compassionate, her idol is "impassive" and "pitiless to all appeals" (CW, 207).

It is ironic then that the tyrant Pat, by contrast, can find real succour in Christianity. After one particularly brutal scene, in which his "drunken savaging flailed the room, crowding it with pain as he smashed his strength against his children and his wife" (CW, 136), leaving them "like statues barely whispered into life in order that they might bleed", he reaches for his rosary beads and declares, without a trace of irony, and "in a deeply solemn voice", "The Joyful Mysteries" of the Rosary (CW, 137). Having left his wife with a "hacked body" (CW, 139), his solemn reverence for maternal holiness is darkly ironic: "Holy Queen! Mother of Mercy, hail our life, our sweetness and our hope" (CW, 137). Molly pleads silently to the statue "in bewilderment", descending into "gradual disbelief" and "bitter resignation", as her futile prayers issue through "a new gap where teeth had been" (CW, 137). But Pat's prayers and their responses are narcissistically self-affirming, punctuated by such megalomaniacal moments as "the Presentation of the Crucifixion, when he might stop to liken his own travail to Christ's" (CW, 138). As Monica Mc Williams and Joan McKiernan write, "Christian women have been inundated with models which encourage submissiveness, modesty and suffering as Christian virtues", while organised Christianity has worked in "collusion with [their] abuse".⁴³ This religious hypocrisy is vividly realised in the contrast between the abused family Pat treats as "statues" and the statue symbol of female benevolence which he treats as a deity.

⁴¹ A. P. Wilson, "Mrs. Kelly's Part Act III", *The Slough* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Papers, 1914; National Library of Ireland Mss. Dept.), p. 11.

⁴² Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 65, 126. It harks forwards too to the blind worship of a statue of the Virgin Mary in Smith's BBC television play, *Esther's Altar* (1965).

⁴³ Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams, "Women Religion and Violence in the Family", in *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, ed. Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997), p. 328, 338.

The Church's abuse of women also obtains at a more official and institutional level in the novel. Most perceived offences against religion in the Lane are blamed on women by the clergy. Local woman Nancy O'Byrne becomes the victim of a veritable witch-hunt because of her sexual activities. Her father has died at war in France, leaving her mother madly distraught and Nancy without parental care. Because she has an abortion at sixteen, and a baby outside marriage at eighteen, she becomes, "in that district where neither incest nor rape caused any but a passing commotion [...] chased from hallway to hallway by endless relays of little men" (CW, 177). These men are the enforcers of a frighteningly pervasive and Orwellian religious theocracy, for behind them, "at a discreet distance" (CW, 177), is Fr Tithe. Nancy is "shadowed" by something akin to a Catholic police force, in a van "that resembled the Black Maria" (CW, 178), and while such aggressive social monitoring may seem the product of fictive hyperbole, Thomas J. O'Hanlon noted how such a "block surveillance system" operated in Dublin under the auspices of the infamous Archbishop John Charles McQuaid.⁴⁴ As Tony Fahey notes, the Catholic hierarchy was "preoccupied with the sinfulness of sex [and] with its dangers outside marriage".⁴⁵

Eventually Nancy is captured by Tithe's sinister "hoor's ghosts" and taken surreptitiously to "Christ alone knows what sort of a place" (CW, 181, 182). It is no coincidence that the priest suddenly appears just as Nancy is "kidnapped": "One minute that slieven bastard wasn't there, an' the next he was" (CW, 181-182). Mrs Baines is even "chastised" by a young nun, "a mere slip of a girl" (CW, 183) for asking where her friend is being held. Working-class women's subjection to such religious control was excoriated by James Stephens in his gripping short story "Sawdust" (1918), in which a woman, who has lost her husband and children to war and premature death, is denounced for drinking in a public house by a priest who storms its snug. She defies the

⁴⁴ Thomas J. O'Hanlon, *The Irish: Portrait of a People* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 150; Like Fr Tithe's abductors, McQuaid even had "a squad of ambulatory censors under his direction [who] patrolled the streets to ensure that displays [in shop windows] of ladies' underwear conformed to some mysterious clerical standard". McQuaid, who wielded considerable influence in Dublin during his tenure, from 1940 to 1972 (during which *The Countrywoman* was written), let "no aspect of sexual life" escape his scrutiny; *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Pat O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998). Kevin C. Kearns argues that within marriage the Church even condoned marital rape; Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin's Lost Heroines* pp. 78-79.

clergyman, who predicts that she will “die roaring”; but his words are prophetic, and the woman does die, at her own hand — another “Mrs So and So” who is “fished out of the canal”.⁴⁶ McQuaid operated as bishop from 1940-1972, and Smith’s comments from the fictional vantage point of the 1920s bear testimony to the pervasive religiosity of the 1960s, which is undoubtedly partly the reason his book was banned. Stressing this contemporary relevance, Mrs Kinsella even ominously predicts of the new Free State that “England’s going to be in the halfpenny place compared to the way the priests an’ the chapels are going to be running us before long” — without “Rome’s and the sanction of the priests, ya won’t be able to blow ya nose” (CW, 182).⁴⁷

Nancy’s shocking abduction may also partly explain why most young Irish women who had children outside marriage in the 1960s opted for adoption and why so many of Smith’s female characters are so belligerently opposed to Catholic values.⁴⁸ When Father Tithe denounces Nancy’s supposed moral transgressions from the altar, likening her to the “Scarlet Hoor a Babylon”, the response from Tessa Doyle is one of outrage, incredulous at “how he compares Nancy O’Byrne with that wan in Babylon [...] since she was an out-an’-outer”; the priest is a “dirty bad-minded oul’ thing” for urging locals to “hunt out the fallen among us” (CW, 72). Doyle’s rebelliousness is accompanied by the heretical opinions of other women, such as young Queenie. Her blasphemous thoughts regarding being “saddled with a baby” and the matter of getting the “five quid down and another five quid when it’s over” (CW, 167) for an abortion, or Mrs Slattery’s sacrilegious opinion on Molly’s miscarriage being the “hand of God, and wasn’t she saved the expense of going to Mrs Ennis to get rid of it” are provocative attacks on Catholic dogma (CW, 31).⁴⁹ It must be remembered that — even in

⁴⁶ James Stephens, “Sawdust”, in *The Uncollected Prose of James Stephens: Volume 2*, ed. Patrick McFate (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), pp: 152-153.

⁴⁷ Many years later this contention would still be true according to Thomas Kinsella. In his 1990 poem, “Social Work”, there is a palpable sense of vexation as an unnamed community campaign finds little favour with Dublin Corporation officials. A priest is present but silent at a community meeting, but is shown to control the officials’ actions later on when they are depicted “nodding” to his commands; Thomas Kinsella, “Social Work”, in *Collected Poems 1956-2001* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001), p. 295.

⁴⁸ According to Myrtle Hill, 56 per cent of lone mothers opted for adoption in 1961, as compared to only 6.7 per cent thirty years later; Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change*, p. 194.

⁴⁹ Even the religious Mrs Baines briefly considers an abortion of a late child, but rejects the idea because it is “against the canons of the church that said you failed in your duty to God by not having as many children as he saw fit to bless you with” (CW, 153). Mrs Kinsella, by contrast, dismisses this edict as folly; she surmises that Baines would “never have an abortion, the poor fool!” (CW, 31).

(comparatively) liberal 1950s-60s England – the treatment of similar issues in Nell Dunn’s *Up The Junction* (1963) and Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1958) provoked huge public controversy.⁵⁰ In Ireland, such issues didn’t even feature in (heavily censored) fiction, let alone open public discourse.⁵¹

In a similar vein, the institution of marriage is questioned through disenchanting portrayals of married life. As Kearns’s study attests, “religious duties and a lack of life options” meant that many working-class women felt “trapped under the glass of [their] wedding photo frame[s]” — more so than their middle-class counterparts.⁵² Notwithstanding the cruelty of domestic violence, “bad marriages” in the inner-city “didn’t justify ‘broken homes’”, and without “money, solicitors and contacts within the Church”, annulments, or separating in a “civil and socially acceptable manner” were unlikely options.⁵³ Molly’s daughter, Babby, is naturally apprehensive about marriage to Nick, the man she loves. Babby knows “there was no reason why they could not get married”, but “even in her need for him, she turned her mouth from his” (CW, 104). She feels “released from her own body” in Nick’s presence, but tellingly fears being “imprisoned in his”, with his “fire”, his “dictatorial stream [...] like darkness pressing down” (CW, 104, 105). Marriage, she infers, is about male control, its oppressiveness diminishing a woman just as Vinny’s battered mother, in Catherine Dunne’s *A Name for Himself* (1999), figuratively seems to be “beginning to disappear” as her husband’s violence intensifies.⁵⁴ When Queenie becomes pregnant, Molly urges her to marry Danny (the baby’s father) explaining that “it’s right the man that fathered your child should marry you” because “what other decent man is going to look you straight in the eye if he knows you’ve had a child by somebody else?” (CW, 168) Here, marriage is

⁵⁰ *Up the Junction* was published in 1963, then screened as a Ken Loach television drama for the BBC’s *Wednesday Play* in 1965; *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* was first published in 1958, then made a film, directed by Karel Reisz, in 1960. Both works were to the forefront of a movement in British writing and film towards working-class, “slice-of-life” representation. This incorporated the “Angry Young Man” writing of Sillitoe himself, Kingsley Amis, John Osborne and John Braine, and other works falling under various genre-terms like “Kitchen Sink” and “British New Wave”. Issues of sex, unwanted pregnancy and abortion were dealt with in a serious and often controversial manner by these writers.

⁵¹ It might be noted in this regard that while official censorship lasted from 1929 to 1967 in the Irish Republic, advertisements for abortion clinics were still being erased from Irish editions of English magazines in the 1980s.

⁵² Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin’s Lost Heroines*, p. 83; *Ibid.* 81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.* 82.

⁵⁴ Catherine Dunne, *A Name for Himself* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 23.

about sexual ownership and social shame, the fear of ending up “any man’s fancy, an’ the leavin’s of all” (CW, 168).⁵⁵

Sacrilegiously, for Mrs Kinsella, marriage is about unadulterated sexual lust. “Sacrament, my arse”, she blasts; “what’s sacred about two people wantin’ to go to bed with each other?” Marriage is what happens when:

we like the way the other fiddles, or when we see in them, or they in us, the shape of the thing we want [...] It’s got hundreds of names [...] It’s just not so good on a windy hill of a wet night [...] so they rush us to a priest or parson and have them say a few words over us, then head for bed (CW, 35).

A license for sex, her version of the holy union is an agreement between two men (husband and priest) in which a woman is ceremonially disempowered. This attack on religious oppression is crystallised in the words of Mrs Baines’s eldest son, Danny, who, thinking about how his worry for his mother keeps him in Ireland, protests that “somebody ought to be able to abolish the power of the priests over the minds of the people” (CW, 112). They “teach people to accept” such things as “rule from England”, “poverty as a way of life” and “the way things always have been instead of the way they might be [...] To accept and endure brutality in the name of God [...] submit like animals.” (CW, 112-113) Comparable to colonial power, the priests refuse “to face reality”, he claims, “to deal with the reality of *our* lives” (CW, 113). It is ironic that while an oppressive male clergy enjoys a monopoly on moral virtue, women like Mrs Cogan, known locally as a “witch” – who is employed generally to meet “the [caring] demands of births and the laying out of bodies for wakes” – are vilified (CW, 153). Conventional religious morality is skewed in favour of androcentrism and serves to demonise women like Cogan or O’Byrne, but perhaps more significantly, Smith shows that some working-class women have the temerity to question it.

Stigma and stigmata: Iconoclasm as social criticism

⁵⁵ It is a way out of the poverty trap in James Stephens’ *The Charwoman’s Daughter* (1912), in which Mrs Makebelieve tells her daughter that “some one going along the street may take a fancy to you and marry you”, leading to her “ease” and the “enlargement of her own dignity”. James Stephens, *James Stephens: A Selection* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 16.

Smith's most subversive imagery of women is in his depictions of female sexuality, which follow O'Casey's lead in plays like *Within the Gates* (1931), *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949) and *Bedtime Story* (1958), by provocatively antagonising social conservatism. Sexual desire is more often attributed to women than men in *The Countrywoman*, confuting prevailing constructions of gender. Indeed, many of the women in the Lane openly parade their sexual feelings. Cocky O'Byrne, whose very name infers role reversal, perhaps also hints at O'Casey's masque figure, the Cock, in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, and represents a new dawn of sorts. In that play, the Cock is exorcised by a priest in order to rid his village of sexual influences, and like O'Casey's symbolic interloper, Smith's Cocky upsets established moral boundaries.

When visited by the devoutly religious Mr Pughe, who attempts in vain to win her affections, Cocky rebuffs him by graphically illustrating her posthumous enjoyment of her dead husband's sexual prowess. The imagery is astoundingly iconoclastic. Spontaneously taking off her clothes, she tells Pughe that she wishes him "to see the marks that came when she just *thought* of Peewee" (CW, 42) — the marks of a sexualised "stigmata":

When Cocky took off her blouse you could see on her arms and on her breasts the kind of new-dinge marks a man's fingers'd make ... An' then she began to tell him how Peewee made love to her an' how he ... well, you know, an' all. (CW, 42-43)

The explicit association of her intensely felt sexual memory with a hallowed Christian phenomenon is outrageously suggestive. "Peewee" may indeed even be a pun on Padre Pio, the famous stigmatic Italian priest who died in 1968 and had attained cult status by the time Smith wrote this novel.⁵⁶

But if Cocky is an extreme, she is by no means an exception. Her theatrics typify a general "brazen vitality" (CW, 74) amongst local women. As Smyth observes, in a pointed authorial intervention:

Apart from [the women's] enjoyment of sex, there was also pride in being able to brag about a husband's virility as well as one's own. And there was a continual

⁵⁶ Pio was to be made a saint by the Catholic Church in 2002. He first claimed to have experienced stigmata in 1918.

race amongst themselves as to which of them could be pregnant in the shortest time and the most often (CW, 73).

Florry Conors, for instance, explicitly contrasts her vital sensuality with religious morbidity. Having visited a wake, she inauspiciously declares that, "when I grow up I'm going to commit every sin in the calendar" and then proceeds to steal the black bow adorning the mourning household, turning it into a sexualised part of her attire (CW, 128). "Under the skimpy dress, she contorted vigorously as she draped the black length of stuff around her head and across her shoulders. She laughed and began to strut, imitating the gyratings of grown women" (CW, 128). After previous scenes in which life is portrayed (*a la* O'Casey's Mrs Gogan) as a "trouble an' worry", and death as a "happy release" celebrated with lavishness that "was never given to the business of living" (CW, 16, 125, 124), Florry's antics are a jarring, comic relief; she trails "the crumpled symbol of death like a pennant, triumphant after battle" (CW, 128).

Aggie Chance, who comically veers between extremes of Puritanism and sexual voraciousness, is also illustrative in this regard. When she is "called again" (every "four or five weeks") to her intermittent "vocation" as a nun, the appearance of her navy blue serge dress and coat on Mrs Chance's washing line signals peace of mind for the women of the area, because "for another while the girls' fellows were safe" while Aggie is in the convent. When she returns again to the Lane, however, "what she's got she's offering with two hands" (CW, 186, 41). Mrs Slattery and Mrs Kinsella are equally irreverent as they goad the religiosity of Aggie's mother, Mrs Chance, with iconoclastic remarks about the "ram" rebel hero Robert Emmet, who "ran that Sarah Curran bowlegged" (CW, 189). Even a local nun, Sister Eustace, is forced to "excessive self-imposed penances" by private thoughts of Pat Baines and Nurse Foley's "goings-on", struggling to avert her thoughts from Pat's "hard dark voluptuousness which turned her mind from God and her hoped-for near promotion to the post of the Union's Reverend Mother" (CW, 105, 94). As provocative affronts to orthodox morality, these instances of female sexuality are powerfully subversive, and are made more so by Smith's narrative insistence that they *represent* working-class norms.

Cocky's untrammelled sensuality fails to make her a pariah and indeed parallels that of local women and the very architecture of the tenement world, which "held

nothing back [...] exposing its great steel of a self" (CW, 74). When she again defies convention by exposing her nudity to the street, "big and buxom, doing a wild lament of a dance in the middle of the road", local women even applaud her, beginning "to clap their hands in unison and sing the song they always sang when they saw her coming". When the gyrating Cocky stops a tram, a symbol of the masculine, mechanised world, in its tracks, the "pale dirty remarks" of its "pale runt" driver elicit only laughter from the female observers. And when the tram driver attacks Cocky with a hail of tomatoes, there is a jocose but again sacrilegious invocation of the stoning of an adulteress in the Bible's *Pericope Adulterae*.⁵⁷ The normally reserved Mrs Baines takes on Christ's parabolic role, venting her "fury" against this "mean cur" latter-day Pharisee, which, "blinding her normal reticence", prompts her to her fling herself in his direction. The scene depicts not only the conflict between real Christianity and false moral scruple, but also the clash between stagnant male authority and vital female sexuality. Cocky dances as if "by so doing she could still a hurt" (CW, 75), the death of her husband at war, and her graphic pleasure is her answer to war's man-made pain. She stands in marked contrast to the austere reserve of would-be suitor Mr Pughe, for whom (like the nun) pain is the answer to sex. He "studiously" avoids the word love "as wicked and somehow lewd" and welcomes "the discomfort" of his shoes "as a private penance for doing something" – one presumes sexual – which "he secretly felt guilty about" (CW, 77). Cocky embodies the feminine *jouissance*.⁵⁸ Her orgasmic capacity for autoeroticism, without need for male validation, is a challenge to prevailing orthodoxies of sexual behaviour and Smith's vignettes of subversive, sexually provocative female antics throughout the novel confirm Cocky's place in literature as an unlikely agitator for women's liberation.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The *Pericope Adulterae* is the New Testament passage, John 7:53-8:11, which describes the confrontation between Christ and the Pharisees over whether an adulteress should be stoned, from which the aphorism "to cast the first stone" is derived.

⁵⁸ "Analogous to music and chanting, rather than a language of rational analysis", *jouissance*, associated with the feminist theories of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, "thus connects the woman's body and language, by rendering audible and visible the underbelly of consciousness as a different language, one that reflects emotional, visionary, and fragmentary aspects of existence. The language of subconsciousness, [*jouissance* is] akin to music on the one hand and madness on the other"; Paula M. Cooley, *Religious Imagination and the Body: A Feminist Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), p. 23.

⁵⁹ Irigaray uses the term "autoeroticism" to describe women's desire as something that "does not speak the same language as man's desire", for while man requires, sexually, "an instrument in order to touch

By contrast, Molly Baines' tragedy is that she never rebels, and that in meekly accepting the strictures of normative behaviour she is marginalised, but she too is an unlikely conduit for a feminist message. Molly suffers Pat's attacks to save her children, enduring "her own physical destruction in sanctified duress at the hands of a drunk" (CW, 271). Her life is sublimated in acts of giving, such as handing "over her own portion of food to the two boys" or working to buy Babby a new shift, which she fetishises with "roseate thoughts", as if it were "a relic endowed with miraculous benefits" (CW, 106-107, 98). She is "consumed with a desire to reach out protectively towards her child, to hold her forever in an impregnable armor against the butts and roughages of life" (CW, 97). But this self-effacement is tragically thankless. Like most of Molly's children, Babby is taken from her, this time by death. Her two eldest sons, then Teasey, Kitty and Danny all emigrate, while Neddo is sent to an orphanage. All Molly's letters to her children are "returned unclaimed and unopened" (CW, 176).

The ultimate irony of this "sanctified" martyrdom to family life is realised when the state gives Molly's neglectful and violent husband recognition as Neddo's authoritative guardian. When Neddo stops attending school and is threatened with institutionalisation, Pat has complete control over his young son's future. Neddo has "our hearts broke", he fallaciously claims to an official; "he's a liar and a cheat and a thief, an' not a day or night passes without him doing some harm" (CW, 222). While Molly gives an undertaking to ensure that her son attends school, Pat's refusal to acquiesce leaves her powerless, because "if the child's father is alive, he is the person responsible" (CW, 224). Neddo's very reason for avoiding school is the shame caused by bruises that Pat habitually leaves on his face, yet Molly must witness "the passing of yet another of her children" as Pat "swear[s] his son's life away for six years [...] a son he had always, with no sense of it, hated" (CW, 226, 229).

Molly's dedication and compassion in motherhood means little to the state and, in a sardonic crescendo, she too is institutionalised, in a "madhouse" (CW, 263),

himself: his hand, woman's genitals, language", a woman is autoerotic by virtue of her sexuality "without mediation". In a manner, Cocky's "stigmata" is such an experience, for Pewee is present only in her thoughts. Her autoerotic sexual self-fulfilment is graphically demonstrative of a feminine language beyond men; Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One", trans. C. Reeder, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 100-101.

anathematised by society as insane. Poignantly, Molly's position in her deathbed is reflective of the piteous self-abnegation that has been her lot in life. She makes "room for another",

Tucker Tommy, perhaps, or one of the many children she had brought into the world, now scattered across a good part of it, leaving her to make her way from it alone, unhelped, unwatched. She lay slantwise across the bed as if to make a place in it beside her for one of them. Her arm crooked to hold a head. (CW, 270)

The pathos of Smith's imagery of the deserted and devalued mother in a mental institution to which a local alcoholic doctor has recommended her (despite her perfect sanity), is the apogee of Smith's tirade against sexist tyranny. Despite her "obedience, humility, [and] acceptance" (CW, 231), Molly is marginalized and rejected, emblematic of her society's hypocritical treatment of women, but she is not merely a foil for comparison with the more ostensibly subversive women of the Lane. Molly embodies what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar identify as the role of the mad woman in female literature, as the "author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage"; her madness is employed as a metaphor for suppressed female revolt.⁶⁰ As "sanctified" martyr, the countrywoman personifies Smith's counterblast to male domination.

Sheridan's Philo Darcy: The madwoman in the convent

Philo Darcy, the protagonist of Peter Sheridan's first novel, *Big Fat Love* (2003), is also a projection of authorial dissatisfaction with a patriarchal society. Sheridan, like Smith, has exhibited an enduring desire to articulate the hidden narratives of working-class women. His play *Mother of All the Behans* (1987) is a dramatic adaptation from Brian Behan's (brother of Brendan's) biographical tribute to his mother. In *Women at Work* (1976, sub-titled "Same Sweat Different Pay"), Peter, along with his co-author and brother, Jim Sheridan, produced a play, for post-primary students, about the campaign for equal pay for women. *The Illusion* (1993) is a dramatic adaptation of seventeenth-century playwright Pierre Corneille's *L'illusion Comique* (1636), which explores men's

⁶⁰ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), p. 78.

attempts to control women's sexual desires. *Big Fat Love*, as we shall see, shares a radical treatment of similar issues.

A sense of social responsibility defines Sheridan's work. He identifies with Seán O'Casey's legacy in fighting "a certain orthodoxy" and believes "very definitely" in the power of the class system in Ireland, describing his background as "extremely working class".⁶¹ His aesthetic vision is informed by a belief that his community's history and welfare has been denigrated in Irish cultural life. For him, "there isn't a great sense of the importance of preserving that kind of working-class culture that came out of the Docks". There was a "form of apartheid that operated in this city", which imposed a cultural "stigma" on "lots of working class areas". But Sheridan reserves some of his most damning criticism for sexism *within* these areas. Working-class Dublin was "bad for men", he argues, but "how much worse was it for women?" Physical force "somehow gave you stature" in working-class life, where "it was almost tolerated that a man could beat his wife". "I saw unbelievable violence against women in Sheriff Street growing up," he recalls.

This violence and its relationship with institutional discrimination is just one of the issues encountered by Sheridan's gregarious, but deeply troubled Philo, who discovers her own power (and that of women generally) in a male dominated society. Like Smith's Aggie Chance, Philo finds sanctuary among nuns after she escapes from her violent husband, but for her the local convent provides a new lease of life and an "escape" from domestic and social pressures, "in out of the world" (*BFL*, 3). Between the convent and her home in the North Wall, "the contrast couldn't have been more profound" (*BFL*, 17), and this conflict between cloistered idealism and kitchen-sink realities resolves itself in a feminist message from below. Philo emerges transformed by her experiences in the novel, but Sheridan's tentative optimism is tempered by slippage and ambiguity about the position of working-class women in modern Dublin.

Philo's hatred of the "bucket of shit" (*BFL*, 165) society she has grown up in is rooted in her experiences as a disadvantaged woman in a violent, male-dominated environment. Patriarchal society "manages to convince itself that its cultural constructions are somehow 'natural'" and the world Sheridan depicts has a strong

⁶¹ Interview conducted with Peter Sheridan on Friday, 9 September, 2005.

purchase on naturalised gender constructions.⁶² Dublin's inner-city has long been "famed for brawny dockers, hard-drinking pubmen, and rough and ready fellas of every ilk".⁶³ As Lar Redmond puts it, "the iron rule of this place had been forced on me: 'Never say your mother reared a gibber'".⁶⁴ Such stereotypes pertain to the hard men of Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969), or Magee's *Hatchet*, just as they do to those who engage in a "riot of lootin' an' roguery" in O'Casey's *Plough* (1926).⁶⁵ This recurrence of "hard chaws" echoes throughout Dublin's working-class writing, instantly recognisable in Doyle's Charlo Spencer, of *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996), or Paula Meehan's domestic despots, Franco and Benito, in *Mrs Sweeney* (1997). They are there too, more comically, in Flann O'Brien's inner-city cowboys, in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939). This working-class manhood is typified by the father who is never seen "kissing" or "holding hands", but always engaged in "fights, shouts, police and partings", in Gerard Mannix Flynn's *James X*.⁶⁶

In British working-class literature, there is a proliferation of similar rough-and-ready male types. Richard Hoggart described how the man in the working-class England of his youth was "the boss", who, "if something goes amiss [...] may 'bash' you, especially if he has had a couple of pints on the way home from work".⁶⁷ When Harry Hardcastle, of Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933), opts for a manual job at the local factory over his stable employment at Price and Jones's pawn shop, it is because he and his working-class peers view rough, physical work as more masculine than that of a "mere pusher of pens".⁶⁸ The writing of Nell Dunn, Pat Barker and Alan Sillitoe reiterates this distinctly physical, and often violent aspect of working-class male identity.⁶⁹ As John Benyon notes, "for economically marginalized men or those in manual settings the threat of violence is the major vehicle for both [sic] establishing,

⁶² Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist thought: a more comprehensive introduction* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), p. 49.

⁶³ Kevin Kearns, *Dublin's Lost Heroines*, p. xviii.

⁶⁴ Lar Redmond, *Show us the Moon* (Dingle: Brandon, 1988), p. 33.

⁶⁵ Sean O'Casey, *Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 131.

⁶⁶ Gerard Mannix Flynn, *James X* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2003), p. 19.

⁶⁷ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 48.

⁶⁸ Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 21.

⁶⁹ Dunn's depictions of domestic violence in *Up the Junction* (1963) were particularly shocking in their brutality. In Barker's *Union Street* (1982) and *Blow Your House Down* (1984), male violence is a common occurrence; for Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton, violence is part of the fabric of social life, indeed even fun, in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1958).

retaining and asserting masculinity by placing other men on the defensive”.⁷⁰ In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes argues that since the working class has provided the physical man-power underpinning industrialization since the nineteenth century, its identity has been subsequently associated with the physical realm.⁷¹

Sheridan conveys Philo’s subjection to class expectations of manhood through the dynamics of sexual attraction and the hailing power of habitus. Though she later suggests that she might have been better off marrying a woman (even possibly Sr Rosaleen, she jokes), Philo, like Roddy Doyle’s Paula Spencer, is initially attracted to these “rough men” (*BFL*, 167). Her husband, Tommo Nolan, is “good looking”, but only “in the way boxers sometimes are”, “well built, square as the lorry he drove” (*BFL*, 58). His job (like that of the tram driver in *The Countrywoman*) identifies him with the industrial male power. Tommo’s proclivity for violence is also curiously alluring; his “flat nose” and “cauliflower ear that made him look like a man who’d been to war” are described as “manly” attributes, which Tommo uses “all his life to devastating effect” (*BFL*, 58). Philo is socialised to find such attributes attractive, like Nell Dunn’s Joy in *Poor Cow* (1967), who, after her violent husband has been sent to jail, finds love with Dave, another hard man, who soon also gets imprisoned for violent robbery. It is inferred in *Big Fat Love* that Philo has seen little else of men. When she enters the San Francisco Boys’ Home after her son’s move there, she is surprised to see a man in an apron for the first time. The benign Father Felix is a revelation, nick-named ET because he is so very alien in the north inner city. Male violence is something to be expected, even revered. In Aidan Parkinson’s *Going Places* (1991), female bus conductor Lena Mitchell finds that her retired trade unionist father’s reputation for violence and belligerence is a subject of awe for her Dublin Bus colleagues. A legendary tough man whose mantra was “I’m right [...] and anyone says I’m wrong [...] needs a face lift”, he is recalled with respect by men who talk of him “beating the shite” out of a man who disagreed with him. “He’s off his head now, so I’m glad yis

⁷⁰ John Benyon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), p. 82.

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993).

have nice memories,” Lena retorts, suggesting the new generation of women share no such sense of awe.⁷²

In Sheridan’s novel, after Philo and Tommo marry she takes her “dose of digs” (*BFL*, 96), implying a normative measure of domestic violence, a medicinal “dose”, as though femininity itself were a condition requiring male correction. This mindset recalls Roddy Doyle’s Angela, in the play *War* (1989), who ruminates that if her estranged boyfriend was to return, “I’d have let him hit me nearly”; she takes her submissive attitude from her mother, who suffers her husband’s bullying, his constant propensity to “put [her] down”.⁷³ In Sheridan’s book, Tommo’s terms for his wife and children are filled with venom – “fuckers, little fuckers, bastards, big bastards, pigs, dirty pigs, swine, elephants, big fat cows and fat cunts” (*BFL*, 109) – recalling Pat Baines’ similarly unpaternal vitriol, or the language with which Freddie and Hairoil dismiss their wives and “god forbids” in *Hatchet*.⁷⁴ The utter contempt Steve, in Enda Walsh’s *Sucking Dublin* (1997), shows for his “dosey cow” partner and her dreams of having children makes the same point.⁷⁵ Sheridan emphasises that Philo’s predicament is no anomaly, but part of a cyclical trend in working-class life. She has escaped from an abusive father only to meet “herself coming back wearing a different set of manacles” (*BFL*, 115, 277). Philo has been conditioned to expect to be manacled by men.

Class, superstructure, sexism

Such revelations are partly what the novel is about — looking anew at how male orthodoxy is maintained in working-class life. Philo’s particular problem is broadened into a societal phenomenon, analogous, she infers, to the Catholic practice of the Eucharist. A priest she nicknames Buddy Holly is depicted as having “stuffed the host [of the transubstantiated Christ] into his mouth”, then chewing on it “like he was eating a packet of crisps”, which is “vulgar and cannibalistic” (*BFL* 4). “She’d entered the convent to escape tribal warfare,” but is “surprised to be reminded of it, watching

⁷² Aidan Parkinson, *Going Places* (Dublin: Passion Machine, 1991), p. 9-10.

⁷³ Roddy Doyle, *Brownbread and War* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 147, 191.

⁷⁴ Heno Magee, *Hatchet* (Dublin: Gallery, 1978), p. 23.

⁷⁵ Enda Walsh, *Disco Pigs and Sucking Dublin: Two Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 2006), pp. 51-52.

Buddy Holly munch his way through the Body of Christ” (*BFL* 5). The Catholic ritual becomes a metaphor for Darwinistic male thinking, for which “life was a jungle and the Eucharist was part of it” (*BFL*, 4). Ann Wilson Schaef has written that in a “gynocentric”, or female-centred society, relationships are prioritised over competition (which the Eucharist represents), but in Philo’s world sexual relationships are characterised by adversarial behaviour.⁷⁶

Women are subjected to male surveillance and control at both a domestic and statutory level, Sheridan conveys. In Chapter Ten, when Philo faces an official “evaluation to establish the parenting needs of [her] children”, as she relates her litany of “physical and verbal abuse” a state official takes “extensive notes [...] without emotion, like she was writing an important shopping list” (*BFL*, 170). The official goes on to argue that she doesn’t see “any physical evidence of abuse” on Philo’s body, that “it’s very hard to gauge” “mental abuse and torture”, “not like a black eye or a broken arm” (*BFL*, 170-171). The state’s insistence on proof makes Philo the suspect of the “interview, or rather the interrogation” (*BFL*, 170), the product again of an adversarial male culture. Moreover, it accentuates her suffering, forcing her to devise ways in which she might elicit a “good hiding” (*BFL*, 171) from Tommo.

When Philo first attempts to escape from Tommo’s violence, she thinks her only power is to deprive him of her domestic services, that “he wouldn’t be so quick to criticise and point the finger at dirty dishes and unwashed clothes” when she flees from home (*BFL*, 6). But she is soon apprised of her own powerlessness when Tommo nonchalantly dumps the children in Goldenbridge Orphanage, getting “rid of them because he had to play a darts match” (*BFL*, 6). It is ironic that, when Philo attempts to get her children back, the Department of Social Welfare declares her “an unfit mother due to her abandonment of them”, just as Molly Baines is declared mad after her husband sends his own son to an orphanage (*BFL*, 6). Indeed, not only is Philo branded “unfit”, but also “deranged” (*BFL*, 6). For her, “the only deranged thing was having to ‘re-establish the family unit’”, as the state instructs her to do — to return to Tommo’s abuse. She suffers “as the price of getting her children back – having to live with

⁷⁶ Ann Wilson Schaef, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

Tommo, wash his clothes, cook his dinner and smile every time he called her a big fat cow, or worse” (*BFL*, 6). Like Molly, she is ostracised by society when she can no longer function in the maternal role the state has prescribed for her. She is subject to both the disapproval of the androcentric state and that of her misogynistic husband, which it supports.

There is also a class element here. Kearns speaks of the Dublin working-class woman’s fear of institutions and forms, the “real feeling of interrogation” elicited by “degrading questions”, asked by “men who surely never knew a day’s deprivation in their lives”.⁷⁷ In Brendan O’Carroll’s *The Mammy* (1994), accessing benefit from the state is preceded by what amounts to another “interrogation” for Agnes Browne — “an exam of some kind”.⁷⁸ Equally, in Neville Thompson’s *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (1997), a newly separated wife finds accessing state accommodation a degrading experience: “some snotty fucking bitch sitting behind her desk asked all sorts of personal questions. Interrogated me like I was a fucking criminal.”⁷⁹ When confronted with a form from Sister Monica, it is revealed that Philo “hated providing information” (*BFL*, 8), and later we learn that it is “impossible” for her to “answer questions truthfully on a form” due to the “welfare system, where the simplest questions came fully loaded”. Every answer is a “potential bomb” (*BFL*, 41). At Dublin Corporation offices, an official warns her “that false or misleading information would result in permanent exclusion from the housing list and/or a fine”, leaving Philo wanting “to scream” (*BFL*, 123). For her, every official document is another “black and white obstacle course” and she feels they have inscribed state domination on her being; she has “filled in so many forms that they owned her, lock, stock and barrel. She was leasing her body from the State until she died” (*BFL*, 164).

Philo’s habit of wearing “everything on the outside – her heart, her soul, her guts, her tattoos” is good for “playing games and going on outings”, but a “bad way to be for filling in forms and getting out of institutions” (*BFL*, 224). She fears emotional disclosure in male-dominated realms, and because of this refrains from telling a

⁷⁷ Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin’s Lost Heroines*, p. 61.

⁷⁸ Brendan O’Carroll, *The Mammy* (Dublin: O’Brien, 1999), p. 13.

⁷⁹ Neville Thompson, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1998), p. 188.

psychiatrist of her subjection to childhood sexual abuse.⁸⁰ As a “man with a beard,” she thinks he “might presume she’d led [her abuser] on”. “It had to be some evil inside her that had precipitated what had happened. She had to keep that part of herself hidden so that it would never raise its ugly head again” (*BFL*, 228). Sheridan conveys that the male domain of official power has silenced women, through violence, disadvantage, suspicion and the threat of economic sanction — but also that this silencing is modulated by class. As Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran note, access to privacy is granted in Irish society in relation to personal wealth: “There is a sharp contrast between the lack of basic privacy accorded to recipients of state benefits (for example, queuing for the dole) and the privacy demanded by the wealthy and powerful when tribunals of inquiry of the Revenue Commissioners are attempting to investigate their financial affairs”.⁸¹ The male state colludes in Philo’s physical abuse in the present and the repression of her sexual abuse in the past, mediated through texts and means that systematically exclude poor women. The state, like her husband, assumes ownership of Philo’s “body”.

Reification and patriarchy

In very graphic and disturbing scenes, Sheridan symbolises Philo’s parallel appropriation by capitalist exchange. Her past is marred by the seminal actions of the man she calls “the devil”, “Uncle Sam Harris” (*BFL*, 225). A local moneylender, Harris is not actually Philo’s uncle, but the associations of his misnomer (Uncle Sam) with masculinity, violence, and capitalist power are indeed appropriate. He embodies the worst abuses of a sexist and capitalist society, and causes Philo to make her memories “small” by piling on excessive weight. Philo is one of her father’s “angels” (*BFL*, 225)

⁸⁰ The dichotomy between empirical female experience and textual record that Sheridan draws on in these references is also instructive. Poststructuralist theory has drawn attention to the gendered development of language, and for Dorothy Smith this has placed a new stress in feminist studies on moving beyond language itself into the realm of “bodily and material existence”. Empiricism is an alternative site of struggle against dominant paradigms of inquiry for some, as women’s experience usually falls “outside textually mediated discourses in the actualities of our everyday lives”. In short, women have been elided in “the making of cultural and intellectual discourse” — a traditionally male domain; Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1987), p. 107.

⁸¹ Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), p. 189.

until he falls into debt with Harris and begins to dispatch her with money owed to the loan shark every week. Harris molests her during these visits, preying perversely on her childish innocence, using her love for “expensive lollipops” (*BFL*, 225) as an enticement, and intoning deformed children’s rhymes as he abuses her:

*Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was black as charcoal
And every time that Mary stooped
The lamb looked up her arsehole* (*BFL*, 225-226).

The infantile resonance jars with the grotesque imagery, and Philo’s conception of sex is defiled by her darkly ironic memories of how “he stretched it so that she would grow up to be a proper woman and when the time came she would deliver her babies without any pain” (*BFL*, 225).

But this abuse is also Philo’s symbolic initiation into a society where women are traded as commodities, as metonyms for money and sex. When she refused to visit Harris, we are told that her father, Jack, “clattered her”, terming her “a lazy pig, like her mother” (*BFL*, 226). Even though she eventually told Jack that Harris taught her “to say bad words like arsehole and cunt”, he was strangely oblivious, and did “not want to hear it” (*BFL*, 229). She surmises that “he must have suspected what was going on”, but nevertheless “sent her there, week after week [...] just so that he could appease his blood-sucking moneylender” (*BFL*, 229). Economic and sexual exploitation are thus literally and symbolically intertwined. Jack’s paternal betrayal reduces his daughter, and sexuality itself, to a commodity between men, and a means of mediation between classes; she repays “the loan with her flesh” (*BFL*, 229). Luce Irigaray has written of how phallogentrism constitutes a male economy of sexual desire in which women become reified objects of exchange, and Philo’s narrative of abuse is a synecdoche for this system.⁸²

Sheridan also correlates female reification with Philo’s obesity and self-abuse through gluttony, and suggests a wider context for that abuse in linguistic and epistemic discourse. The “rocks” she covers with her “blubber” (*BFL*, 103, 196) are the memories

⁸² See Luce Irigaray, “Commodities Amongst Themselves”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, p. 574.

of her abuse, which literally and metaphorically weigh her down. “Her body had been perfect before Sam Harris put his finger in and started poking around”, she remembers, but since then “she’d put on the fat to protect her secret”, to “make herself an island” (*BFL*, 230, 231, 260). This uglification-as-therapy recalls Kelly Brown’s actions in Pat Barker’s *Union Street* (1982), in which the sexually abused eleven-year-old rejects the trappings of normative femininity, symbolically desecrating “a woman’s room, a temple of femininity” in a house she breaks in to.⁸³ Kelly, like Philo, is taught through male violation to reject the female form, thinking the word “CUNT” is the “worst word she knew”; the rapist defines her — “she *was* what had just happened to her”.⁸⁴ Just as Philo’s body “belongs” to the appropriating state, it is also appropriated by Harris’s sexual and financial avarice. Food is “her password to sleep” (*BFL*, 4) and the kitchen is “manna and heaven rolled into one” (*BFL*, 10), because “the fat [may] protect her secret” (*BFL*, 231).

However, Philo eventually finds “redemption” – to use Sheridan’s term – by forging a liberating and affirmative epistemology of self.⁸⁵ Ironically, her desire to step “in out of the world”, “to make herself an island” is undermined by the convent’s links with the community and Philo’s whirlwind immersion in community activities, which finds her a positive role in social action. A “banjaxed”, “urban wasteland”, the “dying world of the North Wall” has suffered the “devastation” of economic decline, and the convent’s Day Care Centre is filled with “heads bowed, in silent reverie” (*BFL*, 25, 17, 26). This inner-city world of economic stagnation and social despair was captured in Val Mulhern’s *Very Like a Whale* (1986), in which teacher Ben is posted in the Docklands, where “weeds [are] growing around and over the warehouses where the St Domenic’s parents used to work”. He is introduced to a school where “the futility of education” reigns — local children are “doomed anyhow”.⁸⁶

Initially Philo views the Sheriff Street area “old folks” as “worse than vampires [...] fucking monsters”, but she soon finds herself reviving their spirits, leading the way in sing songs, leaving even the nuns with “arms above their heads swaying

⁸³ Pat Barker, *Union Street* (London: Virago, 1982), p. 53.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 57, 32.

⁸⁵ Interview conducted with Peter Sheridan on Friday, 9 September, 2005.

⁸⁶ Val Mulherns, *Very Like a Whale* (London: John Murray, 1986), p. 64, 56.

disobediently to the insistent rhythm" (*BFL*, 13, 29). She engenders a "spirit reminiscent of the old days, when they'd had a village at their doorsteps, before progress had made rubble of their homes" (*BFL*, 47) and replaces the waning religious values of the past with a new ideology of collectivism, reminiscent of Jimmy Rabbitte and Joey the Lips' brother-/sister-hood of soul in *The Commitments*: "We bring the music to the people," Joey says when his band decides to stage their first gig locally: "We go to them. We go to their community centre. That's soul".⁸⁷ Such restoration of old working-class values in a contemporary, post-industrial setting was also the focus of British films of the 1990s, such as *Brassed Off* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997), in which hope and community triumph over social and economic crises. In an overtly religious lexicon, Philo nurses the ill Dina, becoming her "saviour", and her welcome-home party for the ailing woman turns her home into a "grotto" (*BFL*, 210, 203). Philo's obliquely revives Jim Larkin's hallowed memory, for she too has "come to preach the divine mission of discontent" (*BFL*, 203). And if Larkin is remembered locally for his combative stance in the titanic Lockout battle, she also strikes out against social and economic norms, refusing passivity.

Sex and sensibility

In suggestive imagery that parallels feminist empowerment with sexual discovery, Philo's liberating journey dovetails with the narrative of Cap and Dina's rapprochement and its provocatively sexual theme to show how epistemology and linguistic violence are central to women's liberation. Having initially become friends, even potential partners, Cap and Dina later "devoted their lives to mutual hatred" (*BFL*, 31). Dina's estranged husband, Gerry, had once been "best friends" (*BFL*, 33) with Cap, but the two dockers became enemies following an acrimonious industrial dispute in 1951. When stevedores brought in blackleg labour, or "scabs" known as "aquanauts", "the docks erupted into full-scale war" and, as with the 1913 Lockout, violence again became a feature of working-class politics (*BFL*, 35). "Men had their arms and jaws broken", but "Cap hated violence", and when he refused to go along with Gerry's plans to attack a "scab", the pair fell out (*BFL*, 35). By the time Cap and Dina inadvertently

⁸⁷ Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 78.

win a date with each other at a Day Care Centre competition, Gerry has abandoned Dina, and while her antipathy for Cap persists for a time, the pair soon find that they are falling in love.

At one stage of their blossoming relationship, Cap likens himself to “Ulysses on the stormy Mediterranean, chasing after Helen of Troy” (*BFL*, 216), and his ensuing exploration of Dina’s and his own sexuality is indeed of epic proportions for the Irish male. Negative images and perceptions of sexuality have heretofore pervaded the novel. Philo must “endure Tommo, forever wanting to get up on her and put his thing inside her”, and hopes “her growing weight would put him off” (*BFL*, 41). Dina too has a distorted view of sex. “Despite three children, she’d never had an orgasm” and she “still carried huge guilt about taking pleasure from sex” (*BFL*, 235, 251). This guilt is associated with the kind of phallogentric sexual ideology Sister Monica naively repeats: “As a species, [men] had a stronger sexual drive than women – she’d been taught that as a novice. She had also learned that there were men who were roused by the thought that under every habit lurked a virgin waiting to be conquered.” Her knowledge of sex, “in the abstract” (*BFL*, 79), illustrates how women in patriarchal societies are “taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view” and thereby “legitimate a male system of values”.⁸⁸ Catholic (and thus conventional) dogma constructs sex in terms of opposition and control, as it had for Babby and Mrs Kinsella in *The Countrywoman*. Woman becomes “defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject” as Irigaray sees it, capable of fulfilling sexual desires, but deficient in terms of actually feeling them.⁸⁹ When Gerry speaks of Dina “like he’d won her in a raffle” (*BFL*, 37), he speaks for this phallogentric view of woman as a sexual commodity, as Other.⁹⁰

For Eve Ensler, author of the hugely successful and influential *The Vagina Monologues* (1998), such misogyny results in women “saying contemptuous things

⁸⁸ Judith Fetterly, “On the Politics of Literature”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, pp. 561-569.

⁸⁹ Luce Irigaray, “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, p. 571.

⁹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir has used this terminology in assessing patriarchal cultures in which “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being [...] is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being [...] He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other”; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), p. xix.

about [their] genitals” and this contempt, and its dissolution, is integral to *Big Fat Love*.⁹¹ Tommo repeatedly uses pejorative slang terms for female genitalia when bullying his wife: she is a “fat cunt” and a “stupid cunt” (*BFL*, 6, 102). Philo introjects this sense of shame, thinking, for example, that her abuser’s (Sam’s) “hairy hand had something to do with the blood” (*BFL*, 226) of menstruation. Likewise, Dina has assimilated misogynist perceptions, viewing “down below” as “something ugly, something that bled, something that should be hidden away”.

But the transformative epiphanies of both women ultimately confute this view (*BFL*, 251).⁹² For Philo, the word “gee” is significantly her “favourite word in the whole English language” (*BFL*, 18). It is a “slang term for vagina”, and, rather like Eve Ensler’s use of V Day “outrageous events” to destigmatise terms like “vagina” and “cunt”, Philo uses gee “mostly when she [wants] to shock people [...] especially hypocrites like her father, her husband and the clergy” (*BFL*, 18).⁹³ Her enlightenment in this regard is initially retarded by ambivalence. When Sister Rosaleen unthinkingly parrots Philo’s idiom, thinking gee means “stomach” and agreeing that “I’ve a pain in my gee, too”, it simply doesn’t “sound right” to Philo, “like a corruption coming from her lips” (*BFL*, 18). She euphemistically explains the term to the erring nun, using revealing terminology: “it’s your womanhood” (*BFL*, 18). However, when asked if she thinks it a “bad word”, she doesn’t quite know “what to think” (*BFL*, 19): Is gee – and by metonymic extension womanhood – a “bad word”?

This tentative ambiguity is gradually replaced as Philo’s self-confidence develops. In order to get to sleep, she suggestively tries to “imagine all the wombs of all the different women she knew” (*BFL*, 117). She puts “a fruit in each one”, to pleasing, soporific effect: “Josie Cullen was skinny so she got a banana. Dina was small so she got a grape. Red-faced women got peaches and fat-arsed ones got pears [...] The combinations went on and on and brought Philo to the deepest, fruitiest sleep she’d had

⁹¹ Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition* (New York: Villard, 2001), p. xxiv.

⁹² Gloria Steinem, in her foreword to *The Vagina Monologues*, talks of coming from the “‘down there’ generation” in which women’s sexual organs were spoken of only “rarely and in a hushed voice”. *Ibid.* ix.

⁹³ *Ibid.* xxxii. Ensler recalls the twenty-five hundred people in a New York City event chanting “vagina” in unison in 1997 (the year in which *Big Fat Love* is set), and notes the repossession of formerly negative terms for progressive ends by feminists; for instance, there is now a “Cunt Workshop” at Wesleyan University; *Ibid.* p. xxviii.

in years" (*BFL*, 117).⁹⁴ According to Ensler, misogyny destroys "the essential life energy on the planet" forcing "what is meant to be open, trusting, nurturing, creative, and alive to be bent, infertile, and broken".⁹⁵ Philo's dreamy gynocentrism correlates her emerging "open, trusting, nurturing, creative" life energy with positive imagery of female fecundity, or "fruitiness", as Philo might put it.

Her decision to rebel against her father by having the letters "M-A-M-M-Y" (*BFL*, 82) tattooed on her knuckles symbolises the beginnings of a feminist awareness and female linguistic power, of a valorisation of maternity; "it should have been motherhood that was honoured" (*BFL*, 252). Some feminists might see negative connotations in such essentialist imagery. Elisabeth Badinter sees the focus on biological difference amongst differentialist feminists as a dangerous reductivism that "necessarily ends in separation and worse: oppression", and Bourdieu warns that "this feminism forgets that the 'difference' only appears when one adopts the point of view of the dominant on the dominated [... which] is the product of a historical relation of differentiation".⁹⁶ This pernicious differentiation is something they might identify in Philo's fruit-filled wombs. However, Sheridan wishes to frame Philo's imagery of the female body in contrast to the misogyny of Tommo's hatred of "cunts" and society's vulgarisation of female physicality. He seeks the kind of linguistic intervention that many French feminists advocate: "a revolutionary linguism, an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech".⁹⁷

Compounding this message, Philo's thoughts are mirrored by Dina's discovery of clitoral power. Heretofore, Cap (whose name itself suggests repression) has "learned to live with his paralysis" in sexual matters, rising "to the occasional wank", but now, in his seventies, he resolves to explore uncharted waters. Purchasing "*The Joy of Sex by Alex Comfort*" (*BFL*, 213, 214), he proceeds to follow its instructions with Dina and, if the original Ulysses had discovered unknown islands, this virgin seventy-one-year old

⁹⁴ It is noteworthy here that this abstract exercise parallels some of the chapters in *The Vagina Monologues*, in which women are asked "if your vagina got dressed, what would it wear?" and "what does your vagina smell like?" Ibid. 15, 93.

⁹⁵ Ibid. xxxii.

⁹⁶ Elisabeth Badinter, *XY: On Masculine Identity*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), p. 45; Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), p. 63.

⁹⁷ Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (Winter 1981), p. 191.

has “discovered” Dina’s clitoris; she too “couldn’t believe how beautiful it was to be looked at” (*BFL*, 251). There is an attendant sense of renewed spirituality for Dina, for “when he found it, she thought her soul was leaving her body and going home to heaven” and “when it came”, she “felt like she’d been touched on the shoulder by God Himself” (*BFL*, 235). No longer is “down below” “something ugly”. Now she feels that “her vagina *belonged* to her, that she *owned* it” (*BFL*, 251, emphasis in original). Her sexuality is repossessed from male vulgarisation, and becomes a new symbolic mouth: “She ran her finger all around and poked inside like a child with a new toy. She opened it out and displayed it. *She even put a circle of lipstick around it* as a surprise for Cap.” (*BFL*, 251, emphasis added) If her sexuality becomes a mouth, her lovemaking becomes a vagina monologue, a narrative of liberation that takes its place alongside Ensler’s “outrageous voices”, and the symbolism of epistemic reappropriation that Sheridan parallels in Dina’s and Philo’s explorations of self points to a new confidence in working-class women.⁹⁸

Emerging from silence

In a self-consciously farcical ending, Philo misappropriates the money collected by the recently deceased Tommo’s friends, to pay homage to him by way of a phallic “tombstone” (*BFL*, 281), using it instead for liposuction treatment. The operation brings up “a lot of issues around her abuse at the hands of Sam Harris” (*BFL*, 300), but also affords a symbolic retort to her former tormentor. Armed with “two plastic containers of her fat”, she resolves to “deal with her past” and, confronting Harris in his own home, Philo accuses him of being the reason she has been carrying the fat “around for twenty years” (*BFL*, 301, 305, 306). She proceeds to release the content of her “two bouncing babies” (*BFL*, 301) on Harris’s lap, leaving him to scream “a desperate cry of pain, like someone drowning in a sea of his own vomit”. There is a salutary parallel here in how Hélène Cixous defines the truly “feminine” text as “an outpouring [...] a fantasy of blood, vomiting, throwing up, ‘disgorging’”.⁹⁹ Philo literally disgorges her horrid secret of abuse in the manner of a cathartic fantasy.

⁹⁸ Gloria Stein, “Foreword”, in Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*, p. xix.

⁹⁹ Hélène Cixous, “Castration of Decapitation?”, *Signs* 7.1, trans. Annette Kuhn (1981), p. 54.

Confronting this abuse is also an epochal departure from the enforced silence of sufferers that Smith refers to obliquely when Mrs Baines's daughter, Kitty, imagines a "little green boy disappear into the wall" of a tenement where "children had been raped" (CW, 118). In Roddy Doyle *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996), Paula Spencer posits the problem of taking control of language in narrating her subjection to her husband's abuse: "I'm messing around here. Making things up; a story. I'm beginning to enjoy it. Hair rips. Why don't I just say He pulled my hair? *Someone is crying. Someone is vomiting.* I cried, *I fuckin' well vomited.*"¹⁰⁰ In recovering her own story through the text, Paula can move beyond being "the woman who wasn't there", and Philo too refuses to follow the spectre of abuse into oblivion.¹⁰¹

Part of her achievement is in regaining narrative control, articulating the "unsayable" (BFL, 231). Harris had silenced Philo through social taboo, but having "broken the silence" her "prison sentence [is] over", his "just beginning" (BFL, 307).¹⁰² Her symbolic act of "disgorging" does what her father would not allow her to do in the male "phallogocentric" order of language, and Sheridan compounds this message by showing how Philo has found her "voice" in other aspects of her life.¹⁰³ She states towards the end of the book that she will not "kow-tow to any authority – not God, her father, Dublin Corporation, the Eastern Health Board", that she won't "give any of them her allegiance, because they [are not] worthy of it", and this new intractability finds social expression when she confronts and embarrasses two Health Board officials whose care for Dina is inadequate (BFL, 226). After recalling those who have "looked down" on her "all her life" – "the faceless ones who read forms and decided people's fates [...] the brain-dead ones who invented all the inane questions [...] All of these were embodied by the genius from the Health Board standing before her" – she proceeds to remonstrate with state power in a way that would have been unimaginable

¹⁰⁰ Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 184.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 187.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ As Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield usefully note: "Although there are differences, both [H el ene] Cixous and [Luce] Irigaray are primarily concerned with developing a language system that will allow women to express their subjectivity, as well as exposing the inadequacies of masculinised discourses. The initial premise is that a phallogocentric language will always restrict those outside of its identifying practices the capacity to 'speak' and be heard, and so deny subjectivity"; Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p 125.

for the silenced, repressed Philo who had sought refuge in a convent. Sheridan intertwines her battle with sexual and societal abuse, paralleling women's oppression on macro and micro scales.

Speaking with a woman's voice?

Both Smith and Sheridan tentatively suggest new possibilities for gender relations. Sylvia's death, along with Tomo's, marks the passing of an era in inner-city, working-class life and the emergence of new discursive possibilities. With this comes the kind of mix of inevitability and nostalgia that Pat Barker's octogenarian Liza Jarrett expresses for the wastelands of a once-thriving industrial Teeside, in *A Century's Daughter* (1986): "In her mind's eye she saw this place as it had been [...] 'There's nothing left,' she said, and, although she'd known that it must be so, her voice was raw with loss".¹⁰⁴ In Sheridan's terminus novel, Sheriff Street's notoriously disadvantaged flat complex is faced with a "wrecking ball" as Sylvia, the matriarch, is simultaneously buried — their mutual demise symbolically paralleled (*BFL*, 261).

The bulldozer's "*danse macabre*" turns the locals' "past [...] to powder" as it overshadows Sylvia's funeral, "pounding" "the heart, liver and lights out of" the flats (*BFL*, 262, 272). The smell of the conveyor belt moving under Sylvia as she is cremated is compared to that of Sheriff Street after a "bad Saturday night" of joyriding (*BFL*, 272). Her passing, in which the coffin that contains her corpse accidentally bursts open, is as ugly as the wrecking ball smashing through people's memories — yet it is somewhat liberating too. In her life, Sylvia has been a mere number, an unremarkable woman whose ashes are marked "Sylvia Darcy, 102793", but as her remains are cast upon the wind, they seem to take the "shape of a wing" in Philo's mind (*BFL*, 279, 282). Sylvia can now "take flight [...] with total and complete abandonment". Philo equally finds freedom in the death of her husband, darkly "delighted with her new status" as a widow — "the sight, sound and smell of it appealed to her" (*BFL*, 283). With the passing of one generation of women, comes possibilities for another, Sheridan infers, but his optimism is also fraught with uncertainty. It is, after all, only through

¹⁰⁴ Pat Barker, *A Century's Daughter* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 215.

death that Sylvia's mother can escape the cruelty of life, and through Tommo's demise that Philo can achieve her "new status".

Paul Smith uses the war to suggest how women might live in a society less dominated by men – a temporarily gynocentric society – but he also infers that it is only in men's absence that women can be happy. The ending of the First World War results in anarchy in the Lane, as men return brutalised by their experiences in Europe. Mrs Thrail's returned husband takes to "wearing a carnation in his buttonhole and, on Saturdays, setting fire to his wife" (CW, 5). The wife of another returned soldier awakes one night to see him horrifically "devouring [their] baby" (CW, 69). Pubs ring "in a moithered orgy of fights and brawls and wild hooleys" and it is little wonder that Mrs Baines' children even sing songs in support of their father's enemies, advocating "Death to the Queen, an' her oul' tambourine," and a "hoorah for Billy Kruger!" (CW, 5, 17). Women ironically enjoy their greatest period of peace during the war; as in O'Casey's *Silver Tassie*, it is a time of relative freedom.

Like *Big Fat Love*, however, this glimpse of women's liberation is tentative indeed. The process of exhuming women from the historical graveyard is self-reflexively depicted by both writers as a struggle against-the-grain of powerful discursive forces that, in the final analysis, they fail to surmount. Smith makes a reflexive meta-commentary on the elision of female histories "from below" when Tucker Tommy frantically searches for Molly's grave, the location of which evades him. Analogously, Smith is grappling despairingly to recover the lost memory of his own mother and by extension the many women like her who are, as Sheila Rowbotham's famous study put it, "hidden from history".¹⁰⁵ There is "nothing to remember now" and Tommy "wouldn't be able to come and worry her, and neither would anyone else. She had gone. She had escaped" (CW, 281). When Tommy recalls that "she had given him the slip, given them all the slip" (CW, 280), Smith is talking about history as much as the Baines family. Now an "empty city", a "vacancy" lies ahead of Tommy, a place whose forgotten women seem to cry out for recognition, one that is "ingrained with the sights and sounds of her destruction superimposing

¹⁰⁵ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 years of women's oppression and the fight against it* (London: Pluto, 1973).

themselves over everything else by way of a sigh [...] echoing again her trials, tribulations and the emptiness of her going”, like Philo’s mother beneath Sheriff Street’s wrecking ball (CW, 281). Tommy touches his only remnant of her, the patch on his shirt “near the collar that she had put there” and “fingering the patch, he walked into the coming night” (CW, 282). The patch is Molly’s faded maternal trace, a creative fragment that, like the novel, only covers a gaping hole. The lost Mrs Baines is excluded from historical discourse forever: “And the earth was cold, all brown and empty,” about her grave, Tommy recalls, “its face scarred with headstones stunted in dejection, and their weight held nothing beneath them, and so – they were meaningless” (CW, 281). Women’s history is “meaningless” in the male world, because male textuality (the headstone) elides their existence — just as the male graveyard keeper’s missing receipt, with “the number of the grave on it”, leaves Molly’s location “somewheres ... could be anywheres” (CW, 280).

In both novels there is a sense of over-reaching; their visions of women’s freedom are enabled only in the artificial circumstances of war, or the unlikely *deus ex machina* of a contrived death, which Sheridan himself describes as a “fairytale ending” — “you kind of know ‘this is not true’.”¹⁰⁶ Sheridan continually infers that male control of the linguistic realm problematises his transcription of female history. Philo remarks that “it wasn’t [Tommo’s] fists she feared, it was his tongue” (BFL, 112). Tomo wields the phallogocentrism of language, for instance, to persuade the nuns that Philo is lying. “She abandoned them and she abandoned me”, he tells the nuns of Philo’s flight from home, just as he later likens Philo to “animals who abandoned their young” (BFL, 59, 95).¹⁰⁷ Philo, in contrast to her husband, struggles to articulate herself. Her frustration with language is repeatedly stressed, in her indecision about “a quiet noise – if there was such a thing”, her inability to think of a word “offhand”, or her failure to “remember the exact words” (BFL, 4, 249, 152). She doesn’t understand the term

¹⁰⁶ Interview conducted with Peter Sheridan on Friday, 9 September, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ The emotive term “abandon” clearly carries potent resonance as the anathema of whatever women are supposed to do, part of the pathologised vilification of bad mothers Valerie Walkerdine notes in *Schoolgirl Fictions* (1990). In Paul Mercier’s play, *Drowning* (1984), this point is also made when Ma Burns, the victim of domestic violence, disavows her family altogether, and seemingly rejects also the stigma of the runaway mother: “This isn’t my house [...] These aren’t my family”. But Ma Burns ends up the subject of another social stigma, as a “mentler” “pop[ping] pills like they were smarties” in a mental asylum”; Paul Mercier, *Drowning* (1984, unpublished mss. provided by author), p. 35, 37.

“circa”, has “never written a letter in [her] life”, and has never received a letter with the word “regards” before (*BFL*, 297, 113, 168). Her longing for self-expression manifests itself symbolically in the “bits of paper” containing secret messages that she stuffs “inside the pillows and the eiderdowns” in Pownall’s factory; a potent image of poor women’s frustrated efforts to communicate in society (*BFL*, 87). Like Molly Baines, Philo’s mother is also reduced to a number in the crematorium, a symbol of her absence from written history. Her individuality is elided from discourse, reflecting the kind of ontological anxieties Paula Meehan expresses in her poetic tribute to her own mother, “The Pattern”, in which she wonders if, while waxing a floor, “did she catch her own face coming clear? / Did she net a glimmer of her true self? Did her mirror tell her what mine tells me?”¹⁰⁸ Sylvia’s life of suffering is distorted by male linguistic appropriation in another headstone, which transcribes her husband’s “hypocrisy”. Its curt legend, “deeply regretted by her loving husband”, would read “much better” as “*sadly forgotten by the one who never had a good word to say about you*” (*BFL*, 265). But he has the power to write Sylvia’s history.

Both Sheridan and Smith depict the end of women’s stories in graveyards, where their voices have been lost (the lost grave) or warped (the misleading epigraph). Their attempts to ventriloquise the female voice is fraught with anxieties, they suggest. Xavière Gauthier writes that if women “begin to speak and write as men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt”.¹⁰⁹ This is what Smith and Sheridan try to do – to disrupt the bias of history – but they are conscious that they do so inadequately as men. Smith’s memory of his mother, like Tucker’s plaintive search, is a longing for retrieval where there is only the memory of love, a longing for speech where there is only the trace of care. Sheridan’s Philo is a woman who cannot write herself into history, whose speech is marked by evasion and struggle, whose own articulation is best in the symbolic mode, as a tattoo voicing maternal love on a hand that struggles to write, as trauma projected into disgorged fat, or as messages stuffed in frustration into eiderdowns, on which society sleeps, but which it may never receive. Both authors are painfully aware of the

¹⁰⁸ Paula Meehan, *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter*, ed. Peter Fallon (Meath: Gallery, 1991), p. 17.

¹⁰⁹ Xavière Gauthier, “Is There Such a Thing as Women’s Writing?” in *New French Feminisms* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 162.

lack in working-class culture of an *écriture féminine* and that, if their words can “disrupt” history, they cannot change it.

Chapter 4: Industry and the City – Workers in Struggle

In this chapter I will focus on two novels that depict the role of industry in working-class Dublin and on how they engage the overarching themes of alienation, counter-cultural radicalism and class oppression, which this thesis holds to be integral to the city's proletarian writing. Firstly, I will briefly consider their periods of historical reference, and I will then examine James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969) and Paul Smith's *Summer Sang in Me* (1972) as a means of exploring Dublin's development of proletarian consciousness. This examination will show that Plunkett and Smith manipulate a theoretically "national" and "bourgeois" form, the novel, in order to subvert its association with both the national and the bourgeois.

Unlike Belfast, and the great cities of Britain, Dublin never experienced an industrial "revolution" of any comparative significance. In the early 1900s, it lagged behind many of its European counterparts in that it was "a commercial, distributive and shipping centre rather than an industrial city".¹ As Desmond Harding notes, whereas the Europe of the nineteenth century "symbolised an age of capital and an age when imperial cities as metropoli underwent rapid urbanisation under the aegis of unprecedented industrial expansion", Dublin, "in contrast [...] progressively declined in the wake of its widely acknowledged and envied former Georgian splendour".² Perhaps the most tawdry of tributes to that diminished splendour was Dublin's populous Georgian tenement — its edifice harking back to a golden era of relative grandeur, its submersion within the teeming human suffering of the slums a register of just how much the city had deteriorated. Both of the novels I have chosen to examine in this chapter concern the inhabitants of these graphic symbols of Dublin's decline.

As Harding and Joseph V. O'Brien point out, Dublin's moribund economy and severe poverty in this period accentuate its interest to students of modernisation.³

¹ Peter Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (Dublin: Pluto, 1985), p. 184.

² Desmond Harding, *Writing the City: Urban Visions & Literary Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 42.

³ *Ibid.*; Joseph V. O'Brien, *'Dear, Dirty Dublin': A City in Distress, 1899-1916* (London: University of California Press, 1982), p. xii.

Harding argues that the capital's "deficient material progress", "lack of population expansion, endemic unemployment, and depressed housing" make it of "both singular and of vital historical importance in the pantheon of contemporary European cities".⁴ If its experience of industrialisation differed greatly from that of economically dynamic British cities, it is consequently unsurprising that Dublin's literature differs sharply, in subject and volume, from the industrial writing of its urban neighbours in Britain. Few writers of Dublin's working class set their action in workplaces, or explore, specifically, issues that arise from the world of work, even after Dublin's later period of industrial development from the 1950s. Andrew P. Wilson's *Victims* (1912) and *The Slough* (1914), Oliver St. John Gogarty's *Blight: The Tragedy of Dublin* (1917), a number of O'Casey's plays, especially *Red Roses for Me* (1942), concern the Lockout milieu. Dermot Bolger's *Night Shift* (1985, especially) and *The Journey Home* (1989), Aidan Parkinson's *Going Places* (1987), Jimmy Murphy's *Brothers of the Brush* (1995) and Joe O'Byrne's *It Come Up Sun* (2000), are amongst the very few works to represent issues of labour in working-class Dublin from the 1950s onwards. Indeed, the *absence* of work has framed many depictions of Dublin's working-class.

Some engage this absence explicitly, like Roddy Doyle, with his comic-tragic portrayals of unemployment in *The Barrytown Trilogy*, or Philip Casey, with his fantasising lovers in *The Fabulists* (1994), whose tiresome lives on the dole causes them to create an alternative world in their imaginations. Many have chosen to write about domestic and communal relations outside of the workplace, perhaps in part due to the inheritance of O'Casey's paradigmatic focus on domestic and community spaces. Indeed, it is fascinating, considering his decade of manual work on the railways and many years of frenetic agitation on Labour issues that O'Casey chose to situate most of his works *away* from work. More curiously still, it took a Dubliner, Robert Tressell, to write what many consider to be the classic British novel of proletarian labour, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), but his towering "Painter's Bible" is set in England's "Mugsborough". What might Tressell have penned had he stayed in his native city? It seems, from its modicum of work-focussed texts, that the divergent

⁴ Harding, *Writing the City*, p. 42.

evolution of Irish and British cities in industrial matters is the underlying factor in how Ireland's capital has been depicted in relation to labour.

Nevertheless, as Harding argues, Dublin's economic stasis until the 1960s bears its own peculiar fruit. Both Plunkett and Smith portray a city where capitalism is teetering on the brink of collapse, and where those subject to its "deficient material progress" develop an acute sense of estrangement from its underlying ideology. For both writers, themselves children of the slums, this estrangement fosters a radical political consciousness. Working-class Dublin is depicted at the forefront of modernisation and broad ideological change in twentieth-century Ireland, and since both novels were written during later decades of unprecedented industrialisation in Ireland, they can also be seen as timely political works that seek to shed light on the fundamental nature of capitalism as their city became increasingly proletarianised. Anthony Cronin would later write that "Big Jim" Larkin could not be counted among the "makers of modern Ireland": "And if his ghost stalks – as in one sense or another it will always continue to stalk – the streets of Dublin, it must be at least as much a disconsolate and forlorn as a triumphant or a happy spirit."⁵ In both Smith and Plunkett's novels, the ghost of past neglect is resurrected in order to reassert the socialist vision Larkin personified, and the working-class hegemony that he played an enormous role in forming.

Strumpet City and the making of Dublin's working class: "The word of the modern, and the word en masse"

In marking the historic acme of class warfare in Ireland, the 1913 Lockout provides fruitful substance for any study of Dublin's working class. If E.P. Thompson situated the "making" of the English working class in the tumult of nineteenth-century Chartist emergence, the Lockout – as the culmination of a period of momentous political development for Dublin's proletariat – is surely the progenitor of Dublin's equivalent. It emerged from an acute sense of material and ideological alienation from both the colonial centre and the nation's home-grown captains of industry; in turn, it inculcated

⁵ Anthony Cronin, *An Irish Eye* (Dingle: Brandon, 1985), p. 27.

a radical emergence of class solidarity and socialist alterity — something that can be adduced, for instance, from the title of Terry McCarthy's pamphlet on the period, *Outcast Dublin, 1900-1914* (1980).⁶

By 1913 average Irish incomes were only 60 per cent of those in Britain.⁷ Dublin suffered far higher infant mortality rates and worse slum conditions in the first two decades of the twentieth century than those recorded in any British city.⁸ That year, a decision by Dublin's biggest employers would plunge the city into industrial crisis for a period of over six months. Led by that most infamous plunderer of greasy tills, business tycoon William Martin Murphy, the employers chose to "lock out" any employees who subscribed to James Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU). 20,000 trade unionists (and their families) were involved in the infamous dispute, in which 1.7 million working days were lost and much hardship was endured.

Larkin, who is variously described as an inspirational and effective leader, an egomaniacal malcontent, or some combination of both, was vilified by the media, employers and the church, leading to a pronounced polarisation of opinion in the city.⁹ For the working class, he was something of a messiah figure; O'Casey portrayed him in biblical tones, as the herald of a new age, "the unfolding of the final word from the evolving words of the ages, the word of the modern, and the word *en masse* and a mighty cheer gave it welcome".¹⁰ His depiction of Larkin as a champion of modernity and mass (read *working-class*) culture is apt, for in *Strumpet City* Larkinism represents the *avant garde* of modernisation in Ireland, and his brand of syndicalism was itself integral to the making of Dublin's working-class consciousness. It focussed on a belief in the power of workers, collectively, through sympathetic action, to take the economic and political life of the city into their own hands. Indeed, Ferriter notes that "trade union leaders [at this time] were keen to engender a sense of working-class

⁶ Terry McCarthy, *Outcast Dublin, 1900-1914* (London: Labour History Museum Pamphlets, 1980).

⁷ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900-2000*, p. 173.

⁸ Beresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, p. 184.

⁹ F.S.L. Lyons perhaps best summates Larkin's controversial, polarising personality by describing him as "the archetypal bull in a china shop and it was a moot point whether irate industrialists or staid trade unionists were more alarmed by his irruption onto the Irish scene"; F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 277.

¹⁰ Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p. 166.

hegemony”.¹¹ Syndicalism and cultural class consciousness were mutually reinforcing. Syndicalism relied on workers’ willingness to partake in strikes that were not their immediate concern. It therefore asked workers to think of themselves as part of a collective. It also transgressed national barriers, arriving like cargo onto the Dublin docks as part of an international solidarity of the working classes.¹² At its heart, therefore, the syndicalist project was cultural as well as economic, corresponding with Antonio Gramsci’s contention that “the concrete meaning of politics” is “its role in enlisting mass energies in the struggle for ideological hegemony”, in establishing a new sense of “community”.¹³

Emergence

In its panoptic fictionalisation of class warfare, *Strumpet City* is also an originary tale of the emergence of a new community from capitalist subjection, through to a hegemonic class consciousness of its own. This epic rebellion is all the more dramatic and surprising in the context of Plunkett’s depiction of a placid Dublin in Book One of the novel, running from the period of 1907 to 1909, but its genesis is nonetheless implicit in his ominous hints of epochal change. E.P. Thompson cites the wizened phrase of a London costermonger, that “it’s when all’s quiet that the seed’s a-growing”, to explain how the ostensible political stagnation of 1820s England preceded momentous developments for its working class, and Plunkett likewise shows how the conditions for working-class rebellion germinate even in times of outward political harmony.¹⁴ He conveys how Dublin’s working-class hegemony emerges from political, social and cultural alienation, and that this alienation itself becomes a virtue, the defining feature of an avant garde that defies the powerful in Irish society.

He locates, in colonialism and capitalism’s complacent celebration of hegemonic power, the seeds of a proletarian emergence. The spectacular arrival of King

¹¹ Ibid. 31.

¹² Indeed, because of their interaction with foreign workers and its importation of radical ideas, trade unionism found particular sympathy among dockworkers, not only in Dublin, but throughout Europe; See Dick Geary, “Working-Class Identities in Europe, 1850s-1930s”, *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45.1 (1999), p. 20.

¹³ Carl Boggs, *Gramsci’s Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 108.

¹⁴ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 781.

Edward to a largely loyal and rapturous public reception (not unlike that fawning cacophony Henry Smart singularly attacks in *A Star Called Henry* (1999)) would seem, ostensibly, to affirm the city's unwavering subjection to the prevailing social order at the beginning of the twentieth century. The monarch's confidence in the steadfast power of Dublin's ruling classes and the subjugation of its working class is registered when he commends the "determination" of bourgeois Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire) in providing small cottages "for the labouring classes"; such concessions to the poor are essential to capitalism's and colonialism's joint hegemonic success through consent, he implies: "the health and efficiency of the labourer depended to a great extent [...] on a happy home life".¹⁵

This implicit strain of Gramscian logic is again illuminated by the visit organisers' decision to dock a boardable prison ship, with "lifelike wax figures" (SC 14) of prisoners, close to Dublin's city centre. The floating museum symbolises the underlying dynamics of colonial and capitalist dominance, of a hegemonic order in which coercive violence must be celebrated, but need not always be enacted. The vessel is neither on land nor at sea; a portentous symbol of colonialism's demise, it is docking temporarily amidst Dublin's royalists, but, like the power it represents, it will soon be sailing away. It is also a spectral reminder of historic resonances. Its representation of a brutal, museumised past, in which patriot rebels – and often people convicted of petty crimes – were shipped to the other end of the world, carries with it the implicit suggestion that this past is no longer relevant. Mary – the domestic servant whose budding romance with dock worker Fitz takes up a great part of the beginning of the novel – seems to think so. She is initially unperturbed, and while she does "not care much" for its advertised attractions, she "might chance a visit" (SC 14). The boat, like the king's sojourn, is "only a bit of excitement", and she finds it "hard" to fathom Miss Gilchrist, an older servant's, "bitterness against the King" (SC 16, 28). Mary explicitly consents to colonialism's power, reasoning that the patriot heroes Gilchrist reveres, who are "put in gaol or banished to penal servitude", deserved what they got; one could "not expect a king or a queen to do nothing to people who openly threatened to take

¹⁵ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 19; all subsequent citations of this edition are indicated in the text in parentheses by SC etc.

over a country themselves" (SC 28). Her acceptance, Plunkett stresses, is intertwined with her lack of class consciousness. Just as she fails to question the quasi-feudal social stratification of "aristocrats and gentry and after them business people and then shopkeepers and then tradesmen and then poor people like Fitz and herself", she also accepts the imposition of social snobbery at a more basic, cultural level, suffering Mrs Bradshaw's patronising and pedantic grammatical corrections (SC 28-29):

'I think it's me, ma'am.'

"'I', dear.'

'I, ma'am.'" (SC 15)

For her, national, social, cultural and economic gradations of power have been naturalised.

But in Mary, as in the compliant city, there also are subtle signs of the potential for cultural and political change. When Plunkett's impoverished beggar, Rashers Tierney, falls victim to a pickpocket and the ridicule of a city centre crowd celebrating the King, he brands them "laughing loyalists" (SC 29) and is arrested for breach of the peace. But when a policeman assaults him, Mary tellingly changes her mind about the prison ship visit, because "the old man who sold me the ribbons was hit on the mouth by a policeman and his arm twisted until it was nearly broken. I don't want to see anything today that would remind me of that" (SC 32). Plunkett suggests that while the abstract concept of colonial and capitalist power may seem completely rational, its concrete reality and brutality lead even the most indoctrinated to question its ideology.

Similarly, though Kingstown's wealthy may organise much fanfare for the arrival of the King, when his arrival is announced with a "thundering salvo" (SC 18) from the royal party's ship, Mrs Bradshaw, the wife of a landlord, pours tea over her tablecloth "for some seconds" in her "efforts to stifle a scream" (SC 18). The violence that prompts Mrs Bradshaw's anxiety is an integral part of the symbolism that accompanies the King's visit, and it is violence, both epistemic (in the museum) and physical (the arrest and salvo), that facilitates his power. The King's government, in turn, facilitates capitalist power, allowing Mr Bradshaw to subject his slum tenants, for many years, to a building that is on the verge of collapse. However, the reality of this power, as it is palpably felt in these instances, ironically disrupts that relationship. With

the sounding of the salvo, the link between reality and ideology is crystallised; privately, Mr Bradshaw fears “what would happen to these five infirm shells of tottering brick and their swarms of poverty-stricken humanity when His Majesty’s Navy blasted off a battery of heavy guns” (SC 17). These symbolic parallels suggest the vulnerability of hegemony to a battery of another kind — that in the need for capitalism and colonialism to assert themselves violently, as the policeman asserts himself against Rashers, its epistemic cracks will begin to emerge.

The alienation of the working class: “*We live and die like animals*”

These early, symbolic suggestions of the working class’s alienation from both the Empire and its proponents in the bourgeois world of the Bradshaws, is developed into a narrative of industrial failure and counter-cultural revolt. Yeats’s characterisation of the malleable social milieu of late-colonial Ireland as “soft wax” correlates with Plunkett’s depiction of a city ravaged by capitalism and primed for revolt.¹⁶ The “world of industry”, Plunkett asserts, “so long stable, so entrenched in its authority, was sliding on its foundations”. The consequent “indiscipline of the working class” after “years of docility”, which leaves Dublin capitalists “frightened” and “confused” (SC 329), leads to the development of a radicalised sense of class solidarity.

Capitalism is portrayed in the novel as a counter-productive force whose internal logic – apropos Marx’s dialectical materialism – sows the seeds of its own demise. For the worker, it creates a bleak sense of precariousness. “You stand at the gate every morning and at eight o’clock the foreman comes out and says ‘I want you, you, you and you’” (SC 27), is how Fitz describes his time as a casual labourer. Those who obtain temporary employment in *Strumpet City* for more than a week are considered to be “having the life of Reilly” (SC 21). Security in capitalism is a cruel illusion. Ailing domestic servant, Miss Gilchrist, declares that she has the “height of comfort” in her infirmity, convinced that her thirty years’ service to the Bradshaws will secure her care at their home in her twilight years. She is “highly thought of”, she believes, but her peremptory “removal to the workhouse” (SC, 65 72) – an event only curtly and

¹⁶ W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 199.

shockingly announced at the very end of Chapter 4 – exemplifies capitalism's disregard for the working class.

In one particularly polemical paragraph, this economic system is portrayed as a failed process of “cast offs”. “Pinched and wiry” “ashbin children” (like Smith's in *Summer Sang in Me*) live on “cast offs” (SC 73). They come “each morning from the crowded rooms in the cast-off houses of the rich” (SC 73), “discarded” Georgian tenements, attired in clothes “cast-off by their parents, who had bought them as cast offs”. As Plunkett observes, in a direct authorial intervention, “if the well-to-do stopped casting off for even a little while the children would have gone homeless and fireless and naked. But nobody really thought about that. These things Were.” (SC 73) His capitalisation here points again to the power of hegemony, its cultural hailing and naturalised logic, but his depiction of the “cast off” system points to its vulnerability too. Fitz's livelihood is susceptible to economic vicissitudes and individualistic caprices, rather like the inhabitants of George Gissing's bleak Clerkenwell, in *The Netherworld* (1889). He feels “people he did not know and would never meet decided its extent and continuance for reasons that suited only themselves” (SC 171). When a number of pigeons break open a sack of the grain, unwittingly causing an imbalance in a pyramid of sacks above them, they are left “crushed and dead”, leaving Rashers in “shock”, and “curs[ing] the pigeon, for its thievery, its unnecessary death” (SC 317). The event emphasises the impersonal cruelty of “cold Sergeant Death”, the “sad smiling tyrant” (SC 318), but it also foreshadows the later climactic collapse of Bradshaw's tenement on its benighted inhabitants. Furthermore, this scene occurs immediately prior to Yearling's encounter with a workman's “mangled and unrecognisable body” (SC 328) in his works yard.

Slippages and transgressions: The king and the beggarman

Imagery connoting slippage and transgression in the prevailing hegemony pervades the novel. Rashers, who represents the lowest rung on *Strumpet City*'s socio-economic ladder, is continually and hyperbolically compared with his social superiors. Near the beginning of the book, we are told of an unlikely parallel between him and King Edward, who “rose that morning about the same time” (SC, 20). Later, death is said to

“do it with us all [...] you and the sergeant before you, King Edward and Rashers Tierney” (SC, 34). Rashers reiterates the comparison during a bout of illness, ruminating that “if [he] was Edward VII he would be surrounded by doctors” (SC, 267). The humble rummager of bins is even imbued with an ethereal hint of holiness. While considering Rashers’ affection for his dog, Fr Giffley opines that he and St. Francis “would get on well together” (SC, 217). The priest then associates Rashers with a “religious picture which had hung somewhere, of a saint who wept for his ox” (SC, 217), but presently and tellingly realises that he may be mistaken as to whether the man depicted in the painting was indeed a saint; its title might have been, “after all [...] ‘The Peasant Weeps Over His Ox’” (SC, 217). Rashers is even associated with Jesus Christ while working as advertiser for a shop, a job which involves carrying advertising boards on his torso. “Take up your cross right,” he orders himself; “Here I come, Jesus, one front and back” (SC, 477). Such hinted transgressions of human boundaries become part of a broader motif for proletarian emergence from social and cultural domination.

Statutory and religious bodies conspire to suppress the working class by social demarcation in the book. Fr O’Connor marshals the divide between his former parish, the affluent Kingstown, and his new parish and chosen focus of religious fervour in inner-city Dublin. He cannot countenance Mrs Bradshaw’s trip to see her former servant, Mary, who lives in a tenement, arguing that they may be “part of our city, but not necessarily fitting places to visit” (SC, 234). Equally, he is “irritated” (SC, 240) when Rashers meets Mrs Bradshaw and angered that the dishevelled boiler man should have been allowed to ring his church bell in public. Rashers must be kept in his boiler house *under* the church because he is, “not very clean”, a “bundle of galvanised rags”, and it is not “seemly” to have such a man engaged in official church duties *above* ground (SC, 246, 254, 246).

But the “small, smoothly enamelled world” (SC, 192) the Bradshaws inhabit, with perimeters policed so assiduously by the cleric, is eventually shattered when the ramifications of Ralph Bradshaw’s profiteering and corruption irrupt in the novel’s dramatic crescendo. When the slum landlord’s tenements (which were condemned but for Bradshaw’s nefarious dealings with local councillors) collapse on their inhabitants,

there is a shocking, parallel collapse of social boundaries.¹⁷ While some tenement dwellers in *Strumpet City's* collapse fail to escape with their lives, the criminal Bradshaw escapes justice and guilt by travelling abroad with his wife. As Yearling tells an incredulous Fr O'Connor, the tenements "were condemned long ago—and then reprieved because Ralph knew the right people" (SC, 447). While O'Connor "refuse[s] to believe" (SC, 447) this claim, trade union hero Mulhall's assertion shortly afterwards, that "there's a lot of ways of murdering people" (SC, 460), is damning. Furthermore, Plunkett inserts a report absolving Bradshaw in the ironically named *Freeman's Journal* (SC, 448), which compounds the implicit accusation of hegemony's role in supporting bourgeois exploitation. Mr and Mrs Bradshaw go "abroad for an indefinite period" (SC, 448), but while Plunkett invokes the novelistic convention of a restored social order in their escape, he undercuts it with a sardonic inflection.¹⁸

Ordinarily the "dialogic novel", as part of its concealed ideological unconscious, depicts a social order that is threatened but ultimately prevails as part of a dialectical modulation between individual and society, which supports "the liberal goals of social reform": "the protagonist's character responds to the demands of their society while the society itself remains relatively unchanged, resulting in an uneven distribution of compromise".¹⁹ Novels normally resolve social problems and reassert

¹⁷ Interestingly, the real tenement collapse, on which Plunkett based this event, caused the deaths of Christy Brown's grandparents and his mother's siblings. On 2 September 1913, two tenements that housed more than forty people between them collapsed in Dublin's Church Street. City authorities had inspected and declared the same buildings safe only a fortnight before the collapse. Many were injured and seven died. Christy Brown's mother, who lived there, was among the survivors, but her parents and all her siblings were killed; See Georgina Louise Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, (London: Mainstream, 2007), pp. 18-19. How poetic and auspicious that Brown would release his own great tribute to working-class Dublin, *Down All the Days*, in 1970, a year after Plunkett published his. In another curious association, Christy Brown's beloved doctor, Robert Collis, released a play in 1943 which would infer similar corrupt dealings between local authorities and slum landlords, this time in the 1920s Free State. His characters in *Marrowbone Lane* reside in a tenement that Dublin Corporation had "condemned two years ago", but the local authority maintains the studied unconcern for the poor of its imperial antecedents. Robert Collis, *Marrowbone Lane: A Play in Three Acts* (Dublin: Runa Press, 1943), p. 21.

¹⁸ See Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press Ltd., 1962), p. 36.

¹⁹ Timothy Paul Roberts, "Little terrors: the child's threat to social order in the Victorian bildungsroman" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of New South Wales, 2005) <<http://www.library.unsw.edu.au/~thesis/adt-NUN/uploads/approved/adt-NUN20060310.114803/public/01front.pdf>>, p. 23.

the authority of a prevailing social order. But this narrative teleology is invoked only sardonically by Plunkett, in a self-conscious formulaic ironisation.

Capitalism has been threatened by social slippage and transgression throughout the novel, but the re-establishment of bourgeois power – the Bradshaws' public vindication, which parallels the failure of the strike – is all the more emphatically subverted in its own sordid undermining of moral authority. This undercutting of moral authority and novelistic orthodoxy is accentuated by the resolution of another of the novel's sub-plots — the tempestuous love story between trade union vigilante Pat and prostitute Lily, both social pariahs. Pat, in newly Fabian mode following his union's defeat, now believes that “expropriating the expropriators [is] a lifetime's work”, or “the work, maybe, of many lifetimes”, and he turns to the domestic sphere. In resolving his relationship problems with former prostitute Lily, however, he represents his class's epistemic break with conventional mores. Lily and Pat had encountered various problems on their way to domestic bliss, including his imprisonment and her contraction of venereal disease. They are an unlikely pair for a love story, and when they settle down a portrait of Queen Victoria – the quintessence of Victorian convention and privilege – consequently stares “down at [them] with longstanding disapproval” (*SC* 553). Earlier in the novel, Pat had “dreamed fitfully” of “knocking on door after door in search of Lily”, but found that “each in turn was opened by Queen Victoria” (*SC* 302). Symbolically and psychologically, the queen – and the conservative values associated with her – problematised their relationship. But the success of their love, under the Queen's disapproving gaze, confirms the success of the new counter-hegemony.

Moreover, it again represents a subversion of the novel's archetypal ending in the restoration of normality and, quite often, marriage. Stressing this, Pat takes as a positive portent the success of his bet on a horse, “Revolution”, which defeats, by a length, “Duke of Leinster” and “Prince Danzel” in a race; “The collapse of the aristocracy,” he thinks, “was a good omen” (*SC* 556). Although the working class fails in the short-term political battle against Dublin's capitalists, it succeeds in shedding the burden of conventional values, Plunkett conveys. Larkin's achievement in cultural terms progresses towards what Jonathan Joseph terms “the task of revolutionary

socialists”: to “break the alliances with the bourgeoisie and the state [...] part of a general process in which the ruling class suffers a crisis of hegemony while the working class strengthens its counter-hegemony”.²⁰ This “new partisanship” enables new social possibilities; if living is “sin” is “immoral” according to convention, for Pat such dictums are the fabrications of “capitalists who invented marriage in order to protect the laws of inheritance” (SC 145, 102, 103).

Challenging religion and capitalism: “A visitation from the locusts”

Dublin’s working class is depicted in a cultural battle to replace the hegemony of the rich with a new hegemony of the proletariat, and a key element of this battle is its struggle to defy the alliance of religion with capitalist power. Religion’s implicit assumption of an inherent, naturalised, universal order is indispensable to capitalism. For O’Connor believes that socialism is “the worst enemy of the working man” because it “uproots his confidence in hierarchical order” and “it preaches discontent”, making the worker “covetous of the property of his social superiors” (SC, 444, emphasis added). Throughout the novel, he acts as an advocate for capitalist norms, just as the Priest Figure does in *Talbot’s Box* (1973), when he prays for the beatification of Dublin worker-saint Matt Talbot because “in these troubled times the people might have a model of Christian loyalty and obedience, to fight off the false doctrines” of “subversive influences”.²¹

In one passage from *Strumpet City*, which resonates with the famous, climactic scene of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855), O’Connor again shows that his faith is strongly allied to capitalist thought, but now it is affronted by a new confidence in proletarian culture.²² When the priest’s tram is attacked during a strike, by rioters intent on discouraging “scab” employees from usurping their jobs, his exhortation to the crowd to “behave” emerges explicitly from a belief in the pseudo-religious rights of property over those of the workers. Those in “rough clothes that smelled of dirt and poverty” about him “have been taught by scoundrels to covet what is not theirs”, he

²⁰ Jonathan Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 47.

²¹ Thomas Kilroy, *Talbot’s Box* (Dublin: Gallery, 1979), p. 18.

²² See chapter 22 of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*, ed. Dorothy Collin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

avers, conflating scriptural archaism (God's command not to "covet") with the beliefs of the propertied class (SC 390, 391, emphasis added). In a moment of climactic rebellion, which mirrors Gaskell's iconic riot scene, a brick grazes the pontificating O'Connor's head, leaving blood on the "stiff, white ring of his collar" (SC 390). A pebble thrown by rioters in *North and South* leaves them "ashamed" and "watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed," as "the thread of dark-red blood" has "wakened them up from their trance of passion", in one of the classic scenes of British fiction. The blood on Margaret's white skin symbolises the strikers' transgression of a social taboo through violence; the attack (albeit unwitting) by working-class men on a middle-class woman is enough to dissolve the "passion" of their protest.²³

The taint of blood on O'Connor's collar symbolises a parallel desecration of the priest's transcending role as spiritual advisor, but by contrast he finds himself pilloried by the "hooligans" about him, who emit an "angry roar of agreement" with the offending stone-thrower (SC 390). Plunkett infers that the taboos of Gaskell's world are no longer enough to mollify the rabble. Rashers posits this diminished sway of social distinction in working-class Dublin rather crudely some time later, by informing the "Reverend Gentleman", "God's holy anointed", that should he wish to find directions to the Fitzpatricks' abode he can "ask my proletarian arse" (SC 488). His bawdy rebuttal parallels the imagery of the tram riot scene, conveying the extent to which the proletariat is beginning to reject the established social order of "the Clergy and the Castle" (SC 512).

But Rashers' blasphemy not only reflects the waning influence of religion, but also the growth of another, alternative "religion". Socialism becomes the new ideology of the awakened masses. Larkin's brand of socialist organisation brings with it a new belief system, a new brand of faith, a new teleology and a new messianism which pointedly usurps Christianity's traditional role. Something akin to religious fervour possesses workers who march Dublin's streets, with "empty pockets", "bread and tea to kill hunger" and "no assurance of strike pay", when they cheer as their leader offers "nothing but hardship" (SC 166). A sense of teleology, with religious undertones, engulfs them as they feel that "somewhere at the end of the road there was a better

²³ Ibid. 235.

world waiting”, “a feeling of movement that remained, a journey beginning, a vague but certain purpose” (SC 166, emphasis added). Larkin inspires this “new, slightly incredulous hope” and, in a vividly suggestive episode, Rashers, again, and Hennessy imply the clash of faiths Larkin personifies (SC 97). With child-like wonder, Rashers asks his companion if he thinks “Jesus Christ is up there”, comically surmising that it may be difficult for him to see “through the rain” (SC 100). Just as he doubts Christ’s vision from afar, however, a new messiah approaches from nearby — a mystical “tall figure” (Larkin) who pauses to pet Rashers’ dog (SC 100). This earthly god is possessed of a “magnetism” and resolve that is Christ-like — as a “popular martyr” and “the most dangerous man of our time” (SC 165, 188). Fr Giffley even enjoins his new, socialist leader to “*lead Thou to God and His Presence—lead, through / Christ’s Merit / Not to His Feet, but Their Print in the dewes of His Meadow*” (SC 226). Although he eviscerates Larkin’s “evil doctrine”, even Fr O’Connor realises that it is an “extraordinary thing” (SC 208) when he forgetfully thinks he’ll see the union leader about Dublin, even though the man is jailed. Larkin, like a god, is omnipresent.

Fitz equally feels “the inward drag of compassion and responsibility, linking him with the others below”, when union activity begins to take hold on his imagination. “Some part of him had become theirs,” Plunkett writes (SC 122). Fitz’s powerful, almost visceral sense of solidarity typifies the moral imperative created by trade union activism. While pondering the nature of his attachment to the union, he ruminates on the links Larkin’s social upheaval has forged in his mind, and counterpoints them with religion:

There were Farrell and the dockers and thousands of others throughout the city, some long resigned to perpetual squalor as the Will of God, others rebelling with recurring desperation whenever there was a leader to lead them. Never before had they stood so solidly together. (SC 415-416)

This emergence of the masses lends extraordinary power to the worker. When Mulhall returns from jail to his old employer, Doggett, the wealthy distributor is loath to refuse Mulhall his old job, because he is “face to face with a movement” (SC 286), not just one man. The fear of the “movement” resonates with British bourgeois fears of working class combination, which were themselves rooted in a sense that the “growth

of the anarchic towns” that had “shattered the controls on the working classes”.²⁴ Such fears of an anarchic rabble are expressed in O’Connor’s horror as he observes a trade union march, “a tightly-packed array that had generated a soul and a mind of its own”. For him it is an animalistic, monolithic, menacing beast, “capable of response only to simple impulses, able to move itself, to emit a cry, to swing right or left, to stop altogether”. It moves as one long, serpentine “unit driving the respectable off the sidewalks” (SC, 204). The priest senses the “near presence of evil” in these “agitators”, a mere “mob” of “hooligans” (SC, 293). He is even “violently and repeatedly sick”, because of the attendant sense “of infirmity, of uncleanness, of corruption” (SC 212, 213).

However, there is again an ironic biblical resonance to the empowerment of the working class in Yearling’s foreboding that “they may yet come out of their hovels in search of a better living — all together, a visitation from the locusts” (SC 202). In Revelations, apocalyptic locusts are instructed to punish “those of mankind who have not the seal of God”.²⁵ Yearling recognises the capitalist order he has benefited from is being “bitterly assailed” by avengers who are in “search of a better living” (SC 441):

They were ignorant, uncouth, deplorably unwashed. They were also miserably poor and downtrodden, despised by the articulate city. Yet they had minds to judge injustice and hearts to be broken by the contempt of their fellows. Yearling did not waste pity on them. But he could see their point. (SC 293)

Cultural power – “the articulate city”, the “respectable” – has condemned the mobilised working classes, as an “evil” “mob”, but the mob has begun to create a hegemony of its own. Although the strike is eventually defeated, Plunkett shows that this galvanised solidarity of workers, and most importantly its creation of an alternative culture, is the Lockout’s abiding achievement. Those who were locked out by bourgeois society now lock out the oppressive ideologies of that society. Mulhall’s funeral, precipitated by a work accident in which he loses a leg, signals the creation of a radically alienated sub-culture. Despite his status and reputation as an ardent union

²⁴ Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 168.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Locusts are symbols of God’s wrath in the Bible. He instructs Moses to punish the Egyptians by summoning a swarm of locusts, and he also tells Solomon that he will punish his people with a locust plague; Revelations 9. 1–11.

agitator – and the god-like imagery with which Plunkett imbues his ruminations of the enablements of trade union power earlier in the novel – Mulhall is one of many working-class men whom society has made dispensable. His demise therefore finds meaning in the cultural and political legacy it leaves behind. Mulhall's coffin is flanked by a new organisation of men carrying hurling sticks, “defensive weapons against police interference”, “who called themselves soldiers of the Irish Citizen Army” (SC 468). Fitz watches on and is heartened by the “flaming torches” some mourners carry, believing that they “were telling the city that the people of his class would not be starved for ever”, but if they are part of an “Irish” army, Plunkett locates in this emergent counter-hegemony a rift with national sentiment in favour of class solidarity (SC 469).

Earlier Pat pithily quipped that “charity begins with my own class” (SC 103), and late in the novel one of his fellow union activists, Joe, remarks to his ironically named, vigilante friend, Harmless, that “Home Rule or no Home Rule [...] you and me won't notice any great difference” (SC 546). When Lily's disdain for monarchism leaves her mistaken for a “Sinn Feiner”, she stresses that she is not a nationalist and that she favours the “Workers' Republic” (SC 555). Equally “Arthur Griffith's [the Sinn Féin leader's] mob” is, as Pat tells Joe, “against you and against Larkin!” (SC 313). As Plunkett conveys, the “lowest elements in the city” are now prepared to “challenge the law and social order” (SC 303), whether it be nationalist, capitalist or colonialist. Socialism is their new metanarrative, and it is through its ideological severance from established modes of thought and behaviour that Dublin's radicalised working class is made.

Child labour and the bildungsroman: “When have they had time to be childer?”

Tracing the development of a counter-hegemonic working-class culture is also a central preoccupation of the other novel of industrialisation I have chosen for this chapter. As with Plunkett's revolutionary slums of the 1910s, Smith portrays 1920s proletarian Dublin as a liminal and alienated social space, radically opposed to the dominant

orthodoxies of its time. In *Summer Sang in Me*, he also utilises formulaic subversion to make his point, deploying the classic form of the *bildungsroman* ironically in order to criticise capitalism and the Irish Republic.

Smith's tale is intimate and lyrical, centring on two children and their failed attempts to make sense of the adult world, making it an unusual example of the *bildungsroman* genre. Kari E. Lokke describes the traditional *bildungsroman* as "a fundamentally conservative form, narrating, as it does, the growth of the middle-class young man from callow and idealistic youth to his integration into the societal *status quo* through bourgeois marriage and proper professional placement".²⁶ But Smith parodies this classic narrative trajectory. David Trotter notes how working class writers, who "moved out of that class", have often "tended to write novels which justified their own displacement by devising voyages of self-discovery", utilising the *bildungsroman* to convey a protagonist's identity emerging "through [to] the rejection of allegiance" — through the rejection of their former (erring) working-class selves.²⁷ But the *rejection* of her dreams of embourgeoisification by Smith's protagonist, Annie, results in her *acceptance* of the conventions imposed upon her by society and her working-class family, and in that acceptance Smith locates both tragedy and a *reversal* of "self discovery". Capitalism suppresses the individuality of the working class subject, he conveys, in a twist on the coming-of-age novel's characteristic form.

Annie is also a countervailing challenge to the *bildungsroman*'s archetypal humanist child, whose progression dovetails neatly with the positivist, linear narrative of capitalism and opportunity. Judith Plotz identifies just such a counterdiscourse in working-class writing, which transgresses "the [archetypal literary] Child, who is unmarked by time, place, class, or gender but is represented as in all places and all times the same". By contrast, in working-class writing one often finds a child that "declassifies and erases certain kinds of merely literal children by stripping them of that honorific label" (of the generic "Child"). Lives of "urban laboring children" are "clearly shaped and deformed by their environments", becoming "embedded in a thick

²⁶ Kari E. Lokke, *Tracing Women's Romanticism: Gender, History and Transcendence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

²⁷ David Trotter, *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 34.

social context from which they cannot be extricated”.²⁸ Loss of childhood innocence in lives “deformed” by a difficult upbringing is a theme that is employed continually by writers of Dublin’s working-class to emblematised more general social decay. Christy Browne’s *Down All the Days*, Lee Dunne’s *Goodbye to the Hill*, Roddy Doyle’s *Paddy Clarke, Ha Ha Ha* (1993), Mannix Flynn’s *Nothing to Say* (1983) and *James X* (2003), Dermot Bolger’s *The Woman’s Daughter* and *The Journey Home* (1990), all invoke this loss of childhood innocence to indicate an equivalent loss of social “innocence”. Dangers inhere in such a narratives, as Carolyn Steedman notes: “The children of the poor are only a measure of what they lack as children: they are a falling short of a more complicated and richly endowed ‘real’ child”.²⁹ Yet it is also true that what working-class children “lack” has been used as a powerful metonym for the dispossession of their class by countless authors.

Smith’s Annie attempts to escape from the social context by which she is defined, to stay in the “summer” of youth, but ultimately capitalism steals it away. Her fantasy of escape from her mother’s proposed path of factory work, by buying a street dealer’s cart and becoming self-sufficient, provides the novel’s chief complication: as her interview draws close, she must endeavour to make the dream a reality by earning enough money to start her own business. This device is common in writing on working-class children, as Diane Reay observes, for “fantasies of escape are important tactics” in their “desperate efforts to separate out a worthwhile estimable self from a degraded, harshly judged context in which you are implicated as ‘no better than where you come from’”.³⁰ The trend is reconfirmed in the recent Dublin-based film *Kisses* (2008), for instance, in which two working-class children from dysfunctional homes enjoy a fairy-tale escape from home into a world of ice-rinks, canal-boat adventures and a chance meeting with Bob Dylan (or at least that is what they believe), only to be plunged back into the realities of child abuse and poverty that blight their lives. The refusal of a happy ending in Lance Daly’s film echoes the essential message of Smith’s earlier

²⁸ Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 5; *Ibid.*

³⁰ [Emphasis in original.]

²⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 127-128.

³⁰ Diane Reay, “Children’s Urban Landscapes: Configurations of Class and Place”, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 156.

novel. Annie is ultimately trapped by her environment, but it is in Smith's enthralling depiction of her *joie de vivre* as she attempts to escape it in various escapades and schemes that the tragedy of her dashed potential is most powerfully evoked.

“Her childish delusions of the solidity”: The nightmare of working life

A historicized, demythologised child of the slums, Annie is the antithesis of the generic “Child” of the *bildungsroman*.³¹ She harbours no desire to seek external validation or achievement within orthodox parameters. On the contrary, she wishes to escape orthodoxy and refuses to conform to society's expectations. Annie resents the prefigured future of “a husband and the factory” (*SSM*, 12) that her mother envisages, and ignores encouragements to be more conventionally womanly — to “stop roughing about”, to “quit whistling and sparring”, and to “speak soft and sweet and give over running from here to the pump every morning bollicky naked” (*SSM*, 13).

Her rebelliousness is best articulated by her advisor, the sage street-trader Ellen Simms, who hopes to pass on her business to the child, and Simms identifies the strength that has taken Annie “this far without help or benefit from clergy or state” in her willingness to question authority:

It's whatever it is made you face me when others your age were running the other way and crying 'witch' [...] It's the thing that makes you brave the shopkeepers of Dublin day after day and risk five or six years in a reformatory [...] It's [...] what's making you stand up to your mother and her childish delusions of the solidity she thinks she can surround herself and them useless sisters of yours with, by condemning you to that hell-hole of a factory. It's whatever it is that makes you fight and go on fighting the way you do. (*SSM*, 115)

She anathematizes the supposed “solidity” of mediocrity, the limitations of capitalism and the “clergy or state”.

³¹ I am thinking here, for instance, of the generic child compelled to find acceptance in society: Dickens' orphans or victims of troublesome childhoods in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860); the narrative of hard knocks reproduced by Somerset Maugham in Philip Carey (*Human Bondage* (1915)). Most novels in this genre sustain a linear narrative of initiation or progression, from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), with the titular protagonist's ultimate union with Rochester and enlightenment in forgiving her cruel aunt, to novels like Kingley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954), with the albeit comic union of protagonist James Dixon with a good job and a good woman.

Throughout the novel, Barker's factory looms over Annie as a nightmarish vision of industrial imprisonment. She views its workers as "skinny an bet an lonesome", so much so that she "could cry" (*SSM*, 15). With only a week to go before the factory takes her on as an employee, she feels time is "shrinking at a nightmare rate" (*SSM*, 94). It is "shadowing her like some creature of nightmares", "black and terrifying and many-armed", she imagines (*SSM*, 120). The tone of finality and feeling of imminent horror cultivate a sense of "feeling trapped and with no real prospect of getting the few pounds she would need" to escape by buying Simms' trader's cart, and from the tales of her friends and acquaintances, it seems her fears are somewhat justified (*SSM*, 120).

Rose's story, of becoming a prostitute because she could not abide her work at a shoe factory, hints at brothel owner Miz Robey's invitations to Annie to join their business. Florrie's, another local girl's, escape earlier in the novel, when she "quit skivvying for the Jews on the South Circular, got a lend off wan a them and went to London an became a hoor", is explicitly given a "connection" (*SSM*, 16) to Annie's decision to give up her milk round and attempt to make money by cinder picking. Such tales of ingénues turned to prostitutes by circumstance are common in depictions of working-class women. A.P. Wilson's consumptive Annie in *The Slough* complains of the "infernal factory" that is "killing" her, but her sister Peggy escapes from "slaving in a shop morning, noon and night for a pittance" by turning to prostitution in Liverpool.³² Oliver St. John Gogarty's ironically named Lily, in *Blight* (1917) also escapes "honest work" in a laundry because of the lack of "honest wages", only to find work in a restaurant where it is insinuated that she has a dubious relationship with affluent male customers, earning "seven and six a week [...] and free temptation".³³ Plunkett's prostitute in *Strumpet City* (1969), also named Lily (perhaps in tribute), equally escaped from a factory by selling sex, and Rosie in Christy Brown's *Wild Grow the Lillies* (1976 — again alluding to metaphoric deflowerment), chose the same profession to escape "a tenement with two rooms and rats as big as kittens playing tick-tack all over

³² A.P. Wilson, "Tom Robinson's Part Act I", *The Slough* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Papers, 1914; National Library of Ireland Mss. Dept.), p. 2, 3; Ibid. "Peg Hanlon's Part Act III", p. 5.

³³ Oliver St. John Gogarty, *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty* (Delaware: Proscenium, 1973), p. 23. [Emphasis in original.]

the place”.³⁴ Big Moll’s tale of lost youth in *Summer Sang in Me*, from being “like a flower” in youth (to redeploy the now wilting cliché), to becoming a prostitute at “the end of her usefulness”, highlights the narrowness of opportunity that working-class women are afforded in capitalist Dublin. Patrick MacGill had also deployed this topos in *The Rat Pit* (1915), in which Norah Ryan progresses from the pastoral innocence of a Donegal childhood to her degraded death as an urban prostitute.

Smith’s city is full of such anti-coming-of-age narratives. The limited occupational choices of Dublin’s working class are symbolically inferred elsewhere in the novel, where jobless beggars and cinder pickers are ironically named “Brennan the Builder” and the “Plumber” (*SSM*, 124). Their misnomers infer the city’s lack of skilled work, and from Annie’s perspective, adult working life has nothing dignifying to offer. She is trying to escape what adulthood (in capitalism) holds for her, not reconcile with it.

Counter-culture

Smith depicts Annie’s childhood disdain for the adult “nightmare” of working-class labour as part of a critique of the system reinforcing it, and an assertion, like Plunkett’s, of the radical alienation of working-class Dublin from that system. Annie continually criticises and opposes capitalism’s commonplaces of exploitation, profit and loss. She is perplexed by a moneylender’s lack of conscience, and wonders “how that woman can create the misery she does and still enjoy the comfort of her bed” (*SSM*, 87). She finds it “funny the way people who have money never believe others can be broke” (*SSM*, 84). She also feels “sickened and empty” when she listens to the “complaints or sagas of achievement” (*SSM*, 20) of prostitutes, raging: “I just wish I could pull this whole, lousy street down” (*SSM*, 20).

Annie’s mother, Mrs Murphy, recollects how her daughter hilariously “banded together” a “mob of tramps”, in order to “start a new revolution” (*SSM*, 9). Mrs Murphy is also dismayed at the trail of “foul-mouthed police” and children coming to her door, and “the shopkeepers whose tills you were knocking off because you thought they were wallowing in profits they should never have made” (*SSM*, 9). Similarly, Annie’s

³⁴ Christy Brown, *Wild Grow the Lilies* (London: Minerva, 1990), p. 41.

robbery of orchards – and attempt to “uproot the trees as well, then plant them along the banks of the canal” (*SSM*, 9) – reflects a comic redistributive ideology. Unable to fathom the logic of capitalist thinking, she links it, tellingly, with religion, arguing that the idea of a “living Christ” with “many houses” (as the Bible puts it) is “something I just don’t believe [...] To begin with, why should one man have two houses” (*SSM*, 38).

But this “Annie who looked out for the maimed in mind and limb”, who “gave to Jesus [a local beggar] and others like him, taking desperate chances to feck [thieve] the cigarettes they had to have” herself exemplifies Christian kindness (*SSM*, 39). She sets aside “a stack of black cinders” for Scraps (*SSM*, 35). She loses the gains of her robberies by giving plundered goods away to the less fortunate (*SSM*, 82). It is through “her own weakness” – an impulsive generosity – that Annie affords Mary Doyle their robbed sugar, because she “will be needing it” (*SSM*, 83). She assumes the role of provider for the vulnerable in her community, as the person “who put boots on their feet and kept the coats on their backs”, “who scoured the streets in the depths of winter to get the eightpence that bought the beds in the night shelters” (*SSM*, 39). She is intolerant of injustice, voicing her “trumpet tongued resistance to wrong” at the affluent dwellers of a “mean house” who pay a “mean, lousy half-dollar” for “a full day’s scrubbing” (*SSM*, 26). As Tommy observes, she had “never shared in her life the general opinion on anything” (*SSM*, 78).

A young boy’s death is a moment of epiphany in the novel that allegorises more generally the industrial crisis of Free State Dublin and the alienation of its working class. Alfie, who endearingly secretly “likes dolls”, is covered with a collapsed heap of “rock and stone and sliding slime” (*SSM*, 56) as the children desperately plunder coal from a store-yard — a kind of disaster that hovers in the background of Pat Larkin’s *The Coalboat Kids and Other Stories* (2007), in which children of 1960s Dockland’s Dublin continually risk life and limb to steal coal, copper and other much-coveted scraps from the treacherous landscape of Dublin Port to sell to “the people in the posh houses”.³⁵ But the tragedy of a child’s death in *Summer Sang in Me* is accentuated by

³⁵ Pat Larkin, *The Coalboat Kids and Other Stories* (Dublin: Eprint, 2007), p. 10. One of the scavenging children, Two Slices, ends up badly injured while foraging for scrap on a ship; see. *Ibid.* pp. 80-81.

what Smith hints is society's systematic elision of such stories. When Alfie suffocates under the slag, a policeman arrives and treats the children as criminals. Subjected to "the questions, the chastisements" of his investigation, the death is rewritten by capitalist power, because of the "jobs that have to be made and kept":

But first, the pad, the pen in white hands, and you look, from them up to the condemning stares, and from them to the pad again and the clever, sinuous movement of the finely fixed hand holding the pen, weaving lines over the lovely bare whiteness of the paper. (*SSM*, 57)

Smith's allusion to the textual power of state apparatuses, which collude in absolving the owners of the coal yard, conveys the corresponding lack of power in working-class society.

For "trespassing on private property" (*SSM*, 57), the children, and not the system that makes them risk life for coal, are culpable for Alfie's death. The link between industry and Alfie's death is hinted at in Tommy's simile for death itself, as "like the inside of coal" (*SSM*, 58). He uses this comparison as a stacked turf boat passes him, and it too is a reminder that the demands of survival are never far away. Even as his friend lies dead, he ponders: "If Annie and I hurried, we could get it at Leeson Street bridge, going through the locks. Lovely hard, red turf. I'd like to cry, but I don't. I'd like to move, but I don't move. Some things can't be lived with." (*SSM*, 58) Like Roddy Doyle's Henry Smart, in *A Star Called Henry* (1999), materialism is always to the fore in Tommy's thoughts. His awareness of necessity in tragedy compounds the sense of entrapment for both Alfie, under the coal, and the other children, whose lives depend on it, confirming Ellen Simms' assertion that: "we are all of us trapped. We are born trapped and most of us stay trapped" (*SSM*, 117).

This theme subverts yet again the discourse of the traditional coming-of-age narrative, which Paul Sheehan identifies as "the clearest link between the humanist tradition and the novel"; Humanism's "central theme", he argues, "was human potentiality" – the idea that "man possessed latent powers of creativity, which could only be released through formal education".³⁶ The *bildungsroman*, however, proposes that its protagonist must learn the universally obtaining humanist lessons of life

³⁶ Paul Sheehan, *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 2.

“through self-forged learning on the streets, living by his wit”.³⁷ In *Summer Sang in Me*, the lessons of the streets only serve to undermine “human potentiality”.

The triumph of failure

Annie fails to succeed as a *bildungsroman* heroine conventionally ought to. Her mother sneeringly dismisses Annie’s business “plans” as the “contrivances of a genius” (*SSM*, 8), but the mayhem they cause serves to underscore her valiant enthusiasm. Murphy recalls her “plan to supply the shops of Dublin with fruit and flowers looted out of every garden you came across”, which “brought [Annie’s] poor father closer to the gates of Mountjoy [jail] than he had ever been” and left Tommy “with the spike of a railing up his guts” (*SSM*, 9). It is one of many failed schemes to make quick money, such as Annie’s advertising venture for Miz Robey’s brothel or her cinder selling farce, which results in her being branded a “capitalist” and accused of “‘arse nesting,’ and ‘ripe robbery’” (*SSM*, 124). But each of these failures brings her closer to the dreaded factory and thus *Summer Sang in Me* depicts an unsuccessful “entry into modern life”. Like George Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver (*The Mill on the Floss* (1860)), whose ability is continually frustrated by forces beyond her control, Smith’s protagonist frustrates the conventional, linear trajectory of the novel of formation. Capitalism fails Annie in her various entrepreneurial escapades and her dreams of social mobility, despite her evident, if amusingly hyperbolic, determination.

In the classic *bildungsroman*, the reconciliation of conflicts of ideology is often achieved by “the making of a gentleman and gentlewoman”, but *Summer Sang in Me* ironises this characteristic trajectory to success.³⁸ Rather like Behan’s circular narrative in *Borstal Boy* (1958), in which the barely fictionalised author emerges unreconstructed from his experiences in borstal life, Annie’s story refuses to acquiesce in the affirmation of normative values. In the precarious world of the Dublin slums, she and her companion long for “the permanent in people and things and places” (*SSM* 17), but this permanence proves elusive. Annie struggles with her inability to impose logic on a world in which “nothing is ever what you think it will be” (*SSM*, 104). Life’s feeling of

³⁷ Ibid. 4.

³⁸ William E. Cain, *Figures of Finance Capitalism: Writing, Class, and Capital in the Age of Dickens* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 174.

uncertainty defies language; she cannot “find the right word to tell of doubts in herself she had not felt before” (*SSM*, 104): “I don’t know rightly how to explain what I mean” (*SSM*, 104). Smith stresses her sense of awakening to a fragmentary modern world throughout the novel. Its plot is predicated on a kind act by Ellen Simms – her generous promise, like a looming *deus ex machina*, to give her street-seller’s cart to Annie – but although the certainty that this cart will be hers spurs Annie on, the premature loss of Simms’ life crystallises the sense of unreason from which she recoils.

Ellen has survived many ordeals in a turbulent sub-plot of overcoming, which she relates to Annie and Tommy. She has endured the death of her sweetheart, and her own ensuing insanity (*SSM*, 112). At one stage, she is unable to “check the drift” into madness, and becomes dislodged from any sense of purpose, walking ceaselessly and manically, without direction, finding solace amongst “Tinkers or Gipsies” (*SSM*, 113), whose nomadic lives are themselves symbols of her alienation, liminality and restlessness.³⁹ But Ellen survives her institutionalisation and surmounts her problems to become a woman of her own means. It is therefore all the more dramatically tragic when Ellen is killed in a freak accident, run down by a horse and cart, and Annie’s hopes of salvation – along with her mentor – are ruined. Smith accentuates this tragedy through the coincidence of the news of Simms’ death reaching Annie and Tommy just as their most lucrative entrepreneurial venture has failed. The “lousy scurvy trick” (*SSM*, 128) of their fellow cinder pickers, in selling them bogus merchandise, thwarts the duo’s budding business. Annie’s consequent epiphany, her realisation that life, in its manifold misfortunes, cannot be moulded to the contours of a teleological narrative, disputes capitalism’s promise of transcendence, which is integral to the coming-of-age novel’s archetypal discourse of “professional mobility” and “full social freedom”, that “represent[s] capitalism” and its “new regime of accumulation”.⁴⁰

³⁹ One of these dislodged, erratic types is Gissingesque symbol of the senseless self-abuse of the poor in pleasing the rich, selling her ability to “munch glass [...] to amuse the laundered people in the big demesnes” (*SSM*, 113). Another “told fortunes with a ball of hair cut from the stomach of a cat” (*SSM*, 113). Her futile and eccentric attempts to foretell the future are a dramatic symbol of the failure of Reason itself.

⁴⁰ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Sbragia (New York: Verso, 2000), p. ix; Carolyn Lesjak, *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel* (London: Duke UP, 2006), p. 16, 89.

Franco Moretti characterises the English bildungsroman “from Fielding to Dickens” as “one long fairy tale with a happy ending”.⁴¹ However, after Ellen is “kicked to a pulp [...] be a horse and dray” (*SSM*, 129), Annie learns that “things happened [...] The world was big and mysterious”; “It can’t be grasped at once [...] Everything can’t be explained”. Her positivist dream of an all-encompassing knowledge that would come to her with age is invalidated:

‘I wish I was old,’ Annie often said. ‘I wish I was old because then I’d know things. When a person’s old they know everything.’ But now, standing on the steps of the hospital, she said nothing, only looked until her eyes grew dim with looking. (*SSM*, 133)

In an elegiac ending, Tommy observes that “it was against humanity’s and God’s indifference that Annie cried” (*SSM*, 137). Like Maggie Tulliver, Annie’s obvious ebullience and talent are squandered by a callous social system. The concept that “things are [...] working themselves up into a state where they all come together like peas in a pod and finally show” is a sham (*SSM*, 107). Smith correlates Simms’ burial with Annie’s ideological defeat. Annie keens, not just the lost of her friend, but perhaps, by extension, for the loss of her own faith. The order of the funeral mass and the nuns who attend it contrasts vividly with the disorder of Annie and Ellen’s lives. Smith punctuates Tommy’s recapitulation of their failed escapades, and Annie’s “keen of grief”, with the ritual Latin intonations of the mass (*SSM*, 135-136), interweaving order with disarray, augmenting the feeling of futility. Annie’s cry is said to have “tore itself with the brutal authority of sorrow, right across the voices of the choir, who faltered indecisively, then ticked a minute like a clock, prim and slow, before they gave way altogether” (*SSM*, 136); their clock-like harmony wanes in the face of her distraught screams. “Under the chapel’s roof” – as if stabbing at the figurative structure of faith – “her crying fought and struggled with itself [...] and, scalpel sharp, found incisions where before none had existed” (*SSM*, 136).

Annie’s lament echoes the sense of futility and orderlessness that Mary Makebelieve feels as her modest hopes of marrying above her class begin to fall apart in James Stephens’ classic, *The Charwoman’s Daughter* (1912). As her hopes of a

⁴¹ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 213.

matrimonial escape from poverty fade, Stephens depicts Mary walking away from a cleaning job: “She was very careful not to step on any of the lines on the pavement; she walked between these, and was distressed because these lines were not equally distant from each other”.⁴² Life’s lack of geometric certainty is symbolised by the uneven pavement, with its “unequal paces”. Mary finds it difficult to negotiate life because, while “the physical and mental activities of the well-to-do person can reach out to a horizon”, those “of very poor people are limited to their immediate, stagnant atmosphere, and so the lives of a vast portion of society are liable to a ceaseless change” with “no safeguards and not even any warning”.⁴³ This, and not the farcical luck of her mother’s inheritance of a fortune late in the novel, is the central message of Stephens’ novel.

Annie’s experience, like Mary Makebelieve’s, makes her suddenly aware of the “ceaseless change” that is the lot of the poor – and with a volcanic outburst, “a crumbling, a scattering, as of ashes in an earthquake”, her mouth is “filled with protest”, echoing “the long barely subjugated cry of the lonely, the unwanted, the lovely who are not loved, whose expressions are of sleep, solitariness, savaged under the hobnailed boots of the selfish, the uncaring, the untouched” (*SSM*, 136-137). Some time later, she is depicted as “beginning to accept the situation created for her by others” (*SSM*, 140). There is “a containment about her this morning that was not there before” (*SSM*, 142). The normally tomboyish girl even asks Tommy to kiss her, because “you’re supposed to want to [...] All girls are supposed to” (*SSM*, 145). She indicates that she now wants to fit in. When Tommy opines that this is something “only proper girls” do, she reminds him that she is “a proper girl” and she now expects that “with lipstick on, a person should shiver like they have a fever” (*SSM*, 145, 146).

In a classical allusion to the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, whose forbidden, tragic love was inscribed by their blood on the Mulberry Tree, Tommy notices the “overripe mulberries” which “from a tree in the garden fell” and “stained black” the path before him.⁴⁴ Whereas the Thisbe of Roman legend had commanded that the tree would “ever bear fruit black and suited for mourning, as a memorial of the blood of us

⁴² James Stephens, *James Stephens: A Selection* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 56.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 76.

⁴⁴ Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, trans. H.T. Riley (London: George Bell and Sons, 1898).

two” and, symbolically, their undaunted passions, Smith’s trampled, black mulberries, “walked [...] into the path”, would seem to allude to the death of Annie and Tommy’s passionate *joie de vivre* and of the illusion of permanence that Thisbe longed for.⁴⁵ Presently, in an emblematic departure from childish games, Annie disappears from a game of “Relievo”, going home “without saying” (*SSM*, 147). Her mother now forces her into high heels and instructs her to eschew the “peculiarities” that might see her “balling up [her] chances below in Barker’s” factory. She must “try to behave like everybody else” (*SSM*, 147, 148).

In an antithesis of the classic “socialist *bildungsroman*” identified by Lukacs, whereby characters progress from false consciousness to class-consciousness through a series of epiphanies, Annie regresses from socially-aware entrepreneur to socially constructed stereotype through a series of obstructions; but Smith’s message is still counter-discursive.⁴⁶ Her eventual accession to convention ranks with that of other female characters whose “progress” makes the *bildungsroman* form problematic. Susan Fraiman identifies the phenomenon of formulaic subversion in the *bildungsroman* “counternarratives” of Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot.⁴⁷ They contradict the linear progress of the traditional *bildungsroman* with plots that present “circularity” and “futility”, broaching “dissonant ideas about just what formation is or should be”.⁴⁸ Such a strategy is explicit, for example, in an authorial intervention in Patrick McGill’s *Children of the Dead End* (1914), which reminds the reader that “in my story there is no train of events or sequence of incidents leading up to a desired end”.⁴⁹ In Stephens’ *The Charwoman’s Daughter*, the *deus ex machina* of a long lost brother’s bequeathed fortune is a sardonic comment on this narrative teleology of the bourgeois novel. Mrs Makebelieve’s earlier fear that her daughter, Mary’s life

⁴⁵ Ibid. 125.

⁴⁶ Lukacs’s classification of the socialist *bildungsromans* is synthesised by Sylvia Jenkins Cook: “They take up the life of the hero or heroine at a point where the conventional *bildungsroman* usually ends: with the acceptance of a traditional role in society or complete alienation from it. Then the characters are drawn into an increasing involvement with new social forces, which brings on a series of crises of consciousness”; Sylvia Jenkins Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), p. 92.

⁴⁷ Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), p. xi.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 53, 140.

⁴⁹ Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: Jenkins, 1914), p. 111.

was leading “to a bleak and miserable horizon where the clouds were soapsuds and floor cloths, and the beyond a blank resignation only made energetic by hunger”, is inferentially the more likely prospect for such people.⁵⁰ In Smith’s novel, conformity and acceptance – the normative features of a *bildungsroman*’s resolution – are equated with Annie’s sublimation as a character, her “blank resignation” to the horrors of child labour. In this way, society’s injustices are indicted along with the distortions of customary form.

Form and formation: Subversion and the novel

For Benedict Anderson, the novel facilitates a union of the individual with the “imagined community” of the nation.⁵¹ Historically, both concepts emerge about the same time in the eighteenth century, and both rely on the same idea of a coterminous community, in which people living separate lives are tied together in space and time. Novelistic narrative links characters around a single plot, just as the the nation links its “imagined community” about a single story of nationhood. As Anderson argues, the novel facilitates a sense of empathy in readers that allows them “to visualise in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves”.⁵²

Both of the novels this chapter explores self-consciously promote such visualisations of commonality, but the visualisations of Plunkett and Smith focus on commonalities of class. They eschew the concept of national identity in favour of class solidarity. Both use a theoretically “national” form to challenge the association of novel and nation, a theoretically “bourgeois” form to subvert its association with the middle-class values. This formula is remarkable in British working class writing; David Trotter notes “the extent to which working-class fiction was able to represent working-class experience while still resembling bourgeois fiction” and that there were “advantages to be gained from adopting, without too much subversion, the literary form most likely to attract readers”.⁵³ Both Smith and Plunkett engage the novel’s capacity to show readers

⁵⁰ *James Stephens: A Selection* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 49.

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁵² *Ibid.* 77.

⁵³ Trotter, *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920*, p. 30.

the “existence of thousands and thousands like themselves” to portray the origins and persistence of a counter-hegemony of working-class consciousness, in private and public forms of rebellion.

Chapter 5: Prison Stories - Writing Dublin at its Limits

Declan Kiberd notes that, for the imprisoned Oscar Wilde “jail revealed to the writer the soul of man under capitalism, allowing him to ‘see people and things as they really are’”.¹ Exclusion from society paradoxically afforded him a deeper awareness of its realities, making the Aestheticist *par excellence* reach beyond “art for art’s sake”. Kiberd even terms his poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” (1898) an “avowedly proletarian” work, because of its representation of jail as a foil for the social decay of capitalist society, and its life of “living Death”.² Prison was a dark-room, a place in which society’s negative could be developed into a crystallised depiction of its social relations, and this use of what he saw there as a mirror on life under capitalism resonates in the prison narratives this chapter examines. Brendan Behan, Peter Sheridan and Paula Meehan’s respective prison plays transfigure the carcereal experience, developing it into a synecdoche for a failed society. This later triumvirate follow Prisoner C33 (as the jailed Wilde was known), who smote the hand that “straws the wheat and saves the chaff / With a most evil fan”.³

The Quare Fellow (1954), *The Liberty Suit* (1977) and *Cell* (1999) develop their commentary on life under capitalism by bringing those on its margins quite literally centre-stage. In each, one is urged to see beyond the social and cultural boundaries of habitus, to perceive the commonality of mankind amongst those convicted of its greatest abominations. Audiences are asked to question the inequalities that lead to the sufferings of convicts, and to see their plight as a thematic defence of those who suffer the inequalities of society at large. Prison drama is exceptionally incisive in this regard — as it stretches the logic of the class system to its conceptual extremes. On one side of the theatrical divide are the (overwhelmingly) bourgeois theatre goers with their

¹ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, p. 334

² Ibid. 338; Oscar Wilde, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 858.

³ Oscar Wilde, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 2001), p. 857.

privileged gaze; on the other are the (overwhelmingly) working-class prisoners, who endure their surveillance.

One concern about this representation might be its focus on a small coterie of lumpen elements to illustrate the broader subjection of the working class. Marx's theory of the lumpenproletariat problematises the position of criminals from working-class backgrounds, in that it suggests that those who commit crime are part of a distinct sub-strata of society, a generally unproductive class that is the surplus of all classes, or in Engels' opprobrium, "scum".⁴ I will return to this argument later in this chapter, but it suffices to note at this stage that *The Quare Fellow*, *The Liberty Suit* and *Cell* develop a proletarian analysis of the inequalities of Irish life by representing jail as a mirror to society, a specular criticism of its socio-economic ills.

The prison as social laboratory

Inherent in the "realism" of these plays are the dramaturgical and ideological inflexions of a literature *engagé*. Their realism is only "real" in so far as it reflects the dynamics of socio-economic inequality. As Charles Baudelaire put it, realism is a "mot vague et élastique", but its elasticity is utilised in strikingly similar ways by all three writers.⁵ Engels described a style of realism that elucidated both "truth of detail" and "truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances", later elaborated as "tipichnost" ("typicality") by Russian socialist realists; its aim, of capturing "typical circumstances", is integral to the shared aesthetic vision of these playwrights.⁶ The plays also employ, to varying degrees, some dramaturgical resemblances to the *Lehrstücke*, or "learning plays", of Bertolt Brecht, and his later development of the alienation theory known as the *Verfremdungs-Effekt*.⁷ From the late 1920s, the German dramatist increasingly relayed overt political messages by developing a stagecraft that encouraged audiences to think outside the immediate context of the action in front of them. Theatre, in Brecht's mould, resisted the traditional Aristotelian objective of

⁴ Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, (New York: International Publishers, 2000), p. xii.

⁵ Qtd. in John Anthony Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Deutsch, 1979), p. 731.

⁶ "Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle", 8 May 1859, in *Marxism and Art, Writings on Aesthetics and Criticism*, ed. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams (New York: David McKay, 1972), pp. 48-50.

⁷ See John J. White, *Bertold Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Suffolk: Camden House, 2004), esp. p. 198 for more on the "lehrstück", and pp. 120-26 on "verfremdung".

engrossing theatregoers in narrative action, as if it were *really* transpiring before their eyes. Instead, Brecht sought to cause them to reflect on political themes in a cerebrally removed manner. He encouraged players to act “in quotation marks” for instance — in a “gestural” style that called attention to the artificiality of what they were doing.⁸ Drama, Brecht-style, doesn’t so much “show” or “tell” as it “asks”. As Terry Eagleton explains, it wants to “create contradictions within” audience members, “to unsettle their convictions, dismantle and refashion their received identities, and expose the unity of this selfhood as an ideological illusion”.⁹

Othering the Other Fellow: Behan’s anti-capitalism

Behan’s political message in *The Quare Fellow* is developed through an elaborate pattern of such ‘unsettling’, reflexive strategies and conceits. The play, which hinges on the plot of a murderer’s execution and prisoners’ reactions to it, depicts typical prisoners in typical prison activities. The foreboding caused by the looming execution, the prisoners’ attempts to smuggle alcohol, their squabbles over food or bets and their mischief-making efforts to catch a glimpse of female prisoners all correlate broadly with the typicality of Behan’s own prison experiences in *Borstal Boy* (1958). But the play also refuses to allow its audience to be lulled into an unthinking immersion in the events on stage. This is characteristic of Behan’s dramaturgy, as exemplified more flamboyantly by the Joan Littlewood productions of *The Hostage* (1958). These diverged wildly from an earlier Irish language version, *An Giall* (1957), by including an array of defamiliarising devices. From song and dance to direct (and often drunken) impromptu comments from Behan himself on and off-stage, Littlewood’s production utilised Brechtian theatrics. But such strategies were not garnered from Littlewood (a follower of Brecht’s drama), or indeed Brecht alone, as Robert Welch notes. Behan’s

⁸ *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), for example, uses characters with placards that explicitly comment on the events of the play, along with an anachronistic timeframe (ostensibly a remote seventeenth century war, but inferentially the contemporaneous Nazi invasion of Poland) and unrealistic props (a tree for an entire forest, for instance), which have the effect of distancing audiences from events on stage. *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), an earlier play, employs slogans on placards and uses an unrealistic ending to question the discourse of the play itself.

⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 162.

uncle, P.J. Bourke, had written a number of patriotic melodramas for the Queen's Theatre, and the "songs, jokes, slapstick humour, and cross talk" of *The Quare Fellow* reflect Behan's "absorption of these techniques as he attended his uncle's shows". Brecht is there as well, Welch argues, "but at a level much deeper than propaganda". The experience is about how it makes the audience feel; Behan "shows how the laws and ordinances of society condemn people to our rejection of them" and makes us feel our "collusion with these dictates".¹⁰ Like Brecht, he seeks to throw the spotlight backwards, into the aisles, to criticise the structures of Irish society and those onlookers who support them. As John Brannigan observes, "*The Quare Fellow* registered a growing sense of recalcitrance on the part of Irish intellectuals towards the dominant social, political and cultural trends sanctioned and policed in the Irish Republic".¹¹ It is also one of the first major pieces of writing in the post-war era to engage the central themes of this thesis, and the earliest work its temporal scope concerns.

From the very beginning of its first act, *The Quare Fellow* tries to blur the conceptual boundaries between players and audience members, law breakers and law abiders, as a sign "on the wall and facing the audience", in "large block shaded Victorian lettering", imposes "SILENCE".¹² While fictionally the sign's intended readers are the *dramatis personae* of the prison, it is also reflexively read and enacted by the audience as it falls silent. Theatre etiquette and the imposing "Victorian" regime of the prison are performatively conjoined, as are the audience and the prisoners in their joint act of submission to institutional powers (theatre and prison). Only the singing prisoner in the solitary confinement cell disobeys the edict as the curtain rises and, when he sings that "the screw was peeping", and the warder retorts that "the screw is listening as well as peeping" (*QF* 40), the performativity of the play is emphasised anew. The audience is reminded of its own parallel listening and peeping, its own collusion in the warder's act of surveillance.

¹⁰ Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 164-165.

¹¹ John Brannigan, *Brendan Behan: Cultural Nationalism and the Revisionist Writer* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002), p. 79.

¹² Brendan Behan, *Behan: The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2000), p. 39; all further references to this play are indicated in the main text in parentheses by *QF* etc.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault explores the similarities between surveillance in the “panopticon” prison and the control mechanisms of society at large, whereby the prison mimics the more general social surveillance of state apparatuses.¹³ This “panopticism” is portrayed most vividly in another slice of working-class life, Pat Barker’s *The Eye in the Door* (1993), when the British military intelligence officer, Billy Prior, spies on his own former comrades and neighbours, who are “conchies” – conscientious objectors to the First World War – and is haunted by the spectre of the “eye”, which is painted on a prison door by his jailed neighbour and former guardian, Beattie Roper. For Roper, the eye is a reminder of the constant surveillance she endures, but for Billy it typifies his own conflicted duality, as “watched” (by his own superiors) sympathiser with the radical conchies and “watcher” intelligence officer for official power. He also feels conflicted as, on the one hand, a functionary for the capitalist state, and on the other, the son of a socialist who wanted to “raise the status of the working class as a whole”.¹⁴

Billy’s feeling of duality is similar to what Behan harnesses in unsettling his audience, in dramatising Foucault’s assertion that “we are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism”.¹⁵ The prison play itself enacts this feeling of duality — giving audience members a glimpse of the conditions they themselves enforce. Behan specifically distances the normativity of bourgeois society through a number of reflexive, comic scenes. When Prisoner A suggests that it is a “nice day for the races”, Prisoner B responds that he has “too much to do in the office” (*QF* 40), juxtaposing his comic estrangement from “office” society with the idiomatic small talk by which it is ironically invoked. Dunlavin’s assiduous shining of his “little bit of china” (*QF* 42) – a prison chamber pot – also contrasts the proprietorial pride of homely, bourgeois curatorship with the ignominies of prison life.

More pointedly, Behan also reasons that prisoners like Dunlavin have been drawn further into crime and degeneracy by the “corrective” institutions of justice themselves,

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Penguin: London, 1991), pp. 195-228.

¹⁴ Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 93.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 217.

and by extension the society that empowers them. When two young prisoners come “singing softly” to see a different kind of hanging – the “mots [in an adjoining women’s prison] hanging out the laundry” (*QF* 47, 48) – their vulnerability and energy provide a vivid contrast to the morbid meditations of the older, hardened prisoners. The youngsters flee their own wing, where death, in the form of a carpenter bringing up a coffin for the Quare Fellow, is the antithesis of their youthful concerns. “I’d sooner a pike at a good looking mot than the best looking coffin in Ireland”, Young Prisoner 1 declares (*QF* 48). He is nicknamed “scholara” (*QF* 58), the Irish term for scholar (properly *scoláire*), inferring a reputation for erudition, but Behan posits the kind of “education about screwing jobs, and suchlike, from experienced men” which he may well get in jail (*QF* 48). Two such “experienced men”, Dunlavin and Neighbour, represent the boys’ probable future as lumpenproletarian outcasts, “too old and bet for lobbywatching and shaking down anywhere, so that you’d fall asleep on the pavement of a winter’s night”, waiting for the “market pubs to open” on “hard floorboards” with “a lump of hard filth for your pillow”, and a “wish that God would call you” (*QF* 60, 61). Implicit in this is the question of how society has let its prisoners down, as opposed to the more familiar concern of how they have let society down.

Prisoners “A”, “B”, “C”, “D” and “E” may appear alphabetically and pointedly as anonymised members of a degenerate social cohort, but they question the social inequalities that have depersonalised them in public discourse, and do so pointedly on a class basis. In an interchange between Dunlavin and Prisoner A, they infer the absurdity of social distinctions. Dunlavin speaks with reverence for “the fellow [who] beat his wife to death with the silver-topped cane, that was a presentation to him from the Combined Staffs, Excess and Refunds branch of the late Great Southern Railways”, his verbosity approximating a comical reverence for petty social status (*QF* 42). Equally, Prisoner A reserves a certain regard for the upper-crust murderer, who deserved his death-sentence reprieve because,

well, I suppose they looked at it, he only killed her and left it at that. He didn’t cut the corpse up afterwards with a butcher’s knife [...] a man with a silver-topped cane, that’s a man that’s a cut above meat choppers whichever way you look at it (*QF* 42).

This trivial (and gruesome) hauteur is just an exaggerated image of the snobbery that pertains outside the prison, a point conveyed by Behan's linguistic connotations of conventional elitism: the symbolic associations of a "silver-topped cane" and the presentation of it by a quasi-distinguished institution to a man who is, in comical wordplay, a "cut above" his peers. It correlates with Ciaran McCullagh's analysis of crime and class, which suggests that Irish society skews justice according to ingrained notions of social snobbery.¹⁶ In his analysis, which he supports with some considerable research, prison itself reflects class bias, and criminality is associated with the working class in general public perceptions of crime. As Leslie J. Moran notes, "middle-class men are not culturally associated with violence as there is an assumption that violence (as pathology) is a characteristic of the criminal 'Other', the working and underclass".¹⁷

Dunlavin and Prisoner A's parroting of this class snobbery is extended into an absurdist conceit in the interplay between the comic pair and two new prisoners, the middle-class Other Fellow, and Lifer, the "silver-top" killer. While Dunlavin has excused Lifer's crime as a "natural class of a thing could happen to the best of us", he is deeply perturbed by the "offence" for which the Other Fellow has been jailed. The unmentionable abomination of this "dirty beast [...] dirty man-beast" (*QF*, 43-42) is of such an odious nature that even Dunlavin (who has just recently outlined, with little delicacy, various methods of assassination, from poisoning to mutilation) fastidiously refrains from naming it. Invoking the sacrilegious irony of J.M. Synge's Christy Mahon, Lifer is "only" in for "murder, thanks be to God", but the loathsome Other Fellow is of "that persuasion" (*QF* 42), which suggests he is imprisoned, like Oscar Wilde was, on charges of homosexual acts. What Dunlavin disparagingly terms the "dirty animal on me left" is so beyond human decency that he even advises Lifer, the "decent murderer", to get away from the Other Fellow's cell, lest he be "getting

¹⁶ Corporate crime fails to "mobilise the stigma of criminality", because mostly it doesn't get punished by the courts. "In those few cases that come to the attention of the courts," McCullagh adds, "offenders are 'let off' with a fine". This anomaly has more to do with the class of the criminal than the class of crime, he concludes: "[It is] in some contrast to the way in which the criminality of the working class is dealt with. At the most basic level there is a somewhat greater willingness to use prison as the sanction for the offences they commit"; Ciaran McCullagh, "Getting The Criminals We Want: The social production of the criminal population", in *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Clancy et al. (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1999), p. 424.

¹⁷ Leslie J. Moran, "Homophobic Violence: The Hidden Injuries of Class", in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 209.

[himself] a bad name" (*QF* 43, 51). But the "sex mechanic", as it happens, has a "good accent" (*QF* 64, 49), has never been in prison before, is in early middle-age and wears a suit — probably looking and sounding much like the patrons of an average theatre. He even fears that he will have to endure the company of "murderers and thieves and God knows what": "you haven't killed anyone, have you?" he asks in frightened tones (*QF* 52). Again, the bourgeois theatregoer is forced to question class loyalties, but the ostracism of gay men is questioned also. When Dunlavin finally relents in his persecution of the new arrival, reasoning that the Other Fellow is "someone's rearing after all", he hints again at the theme of class antagonism by surmising that the "sex mechanic" "could be worse"; "he could be a screw or an official from the Department" (*QF* 64).

Kiberd argues that Behan's plays "owe more to the absurdist theatre of Ionesco, Genet and Beckett than their forerunners in the Irish dramatic movement", but like Ionesco's utterly absurd *Rhinoceros* (1959), which carries a subtextual critique of conformism – or more appropriately, Genet's *Deathwatch* (1949), set in a prison cell, which depicts three men trying to "kill each other off", Behan's absurdity comes loaded with serious undercurrents.¹⁸ He questions the nature of class and moral prejudice in particular and their role in the classification of crime.

Capitalism as crime: "What's a crook, only a businessman without a shop"

Behan's use of metaphors for cannibalism and spectatorship compounds this theme by criticising capitalist society's moral compass. The imagery develops into an elaborate conceit in the play, symbolising society's parasitic, voyeuristic and inhuman treatment of its most alienated citizens. Talk of food and animal imagery is used as symbolism for humanity's blood lust; men are depicted bestially feeding off each other, just like Lefranc is accused of "feed[ing] on others" in Genet's prison play.¹⁹ In explaining the ministerial decision to spare one death sentence recipient, Dunlavin says "enough is as good as a feast" (*QF* 43). When Young Prisoner 1 objects to Neighbour ogling his girlfriend, Prisoner B jokes that "he's not going to eat her" (*QF* 57). Neighbour terms

¹⁸ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 513; Jean Genet, *The Maids and Deathwatch: Two Plays*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1962), p. 103, 115.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 157.

the prison doctor a “vet”, and he and Prisoner E (a prison bookie) bet their Sunday bacon on whether or not “the quare fellow will be topped” (*QF* 61,77), equating the devoured spectacle of hanging and the devoured Sunday meal, and the “devoured” man with the devoured meat. Indeed, the prisoners obsess about the Quare Fellow’s final dinner, “two eggs, the yolk in the middle like [...] a bride’s eye under a pink veil, and the grease of the rashers [...] pale and pure like melted gold”, but they will pass on the “rope stew to follow, and lever pudding and trap door doddle for desert” (*QF* 85).

In Prisoner B’s story of a hanging, warders “have their breakfasts and don’t come back for an hour. Then they cut your man down and the doctor slits the back of his neck to see if the bones are broken.” (*QF* 45) As he arrives to oversee preparations for the execution, the prison governor tellingly appears in “evening dress” (*QF* 110) — dressed for the spectacle and dressed to consume. During his execution, the Quare Fellow is even said to have a “white pudding bag” (*QF* 120) over his head, and the play abounds with many more instances of such imagery, which Behan adroitly employs to impose a sense of moral nausea. We are made to “taste” the noxious reality of hanging as something that society has cannibalistically gormandised, to see, as prisoner James X does in Gerard Mannix Flynn’s play, that prisoners are viewed as “only animals savaging each other”.²⁰ Like Peter Sheridan’s use of the Eucharist – the symbolic eating of the body of Christ – to symbolise capitalist competition in *Big Fat Love* (2003), Behan defamiliarises its dog-eat-dog ethic by showing how it makes humans no better than cannibals.

He is not merely critiquing capital punishment here, but, emphatically, the ideology of capitalism — of fractured, competing and unequal human relations. Imagery of gaming and entertainment is used to associate the execution explicitly with economic exploitation. Aleksandr Pushkin reminds us that “drama was born in a public square, it formed a popular entertainment [...] The people require strong sensations – *even an execution is a spectacle for them*”, and the audience is reminded of its own participation in such “entertainment”, and the capitalist ideology he associates with it.²¹ Warder Regan sardonically argues that the hanging’s “show” quality merits its staging

²⁰ Gerard Mannix Flynn, *James X* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003), p. 43.

²¹ Qtd. in Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Nebraska: Nebraska UP, 1983), p. 130. [Emphasis added.]

like a public sport, “put on in Croke Park; after all, it’s at the public expense and they let it go on. They should have something more for their money” (*QF* 114). The words of the Home Office memorandum on hanging etiquette accentuate this gaming motif at the end of Act Two. While providing company for the condemned prisoner in his final hours, the warders are instructed to deport themselves with “an air of cheerful decorum [...] and a readiness to play such games as draughts, ludo, or snakes and ladders [...] A readiness to enter into conversations on sporting topics will also be appreciated” (*QF* 104). Their association of sporting pleasure with death is paralleled with the worst *schadenfreude* of the prisoners themselves. Prisoner A recounts a spell in Strangeways jail, Manchester, where, “during the war, we used to wish for an air raid”; when “a bomb landed on the Assize Court next door, and the blast killed twenty of the lags”, he adds, “we all agreed it broke the monotony”. (*QF* 85-86). Neighbour’s bet of his Sunday bacon may sound like something uttered by someone “in a week-end pass out of Hell” (*QF* 104), but his casual barbarity reflects the cruelty of his society.

Felicitously, Behan’s hangman is also a publican (*QF* 111), who serves entertainment and intoxication to his customers — who profits from it as he does from his public executions. The prisoners may seem crass and opportunistic when they squabble over profits from the stolen Quare Fellow’s letters – which they hope to sell to Sunday papers – but they remind us that such is the business of commerce on the outside. “There’s no need to have a battle over them,” Prisoner B interjects during their argument over the spoils, and Prisoner D concurs: “Yes, we can act like businessmen. There are three. One each and toss for the third. I’m a businessman.” (*QF* 124) Prisoner A acquiesces too, stressing the play’s subtext: “Fair enough. Amn’t I a businessman myself? For what’s a crook, only a businessman without a shop.” (*QF* 124) As they toss for the final letter, using its envelope rather than a coin, Prisoner D’s casual enquiry of Prisoner A, as to “what side” he is on, “the blank side of the side with the address”, is the last comment before the curtain falls, and a profound piece of wordplay. The tossed envelope, with its “blank side” and “side with the address”, is an emblem of the false division between the prison and the society that surrounds it. Official society, “the side with the address” i.e. with property, is a reflection of its flip side, the elided and propertyless “blank side”. Despite their division, both are made of

the same substance. The criminal avarice of these prisoners is merely a reflection of the appetite for sensationalism that the newspapers feed outside. If the prisoners see the hanging as a game, then society does too; if they profit from the “business” of reified humanity, they only replicate the processes of capitalism on the outside.

When Mickser relays news of the hanging live to his fellow prisoners, in a manner rather “like a running commentary in the Grand National” (*QF* 106), his parodic register ties together the themes of gaming, dehumanisation and voyeuristic cruelty in emphatic and shocking form (*QF* 121). As with Brecht’s characteristic meta-commentary, the running commentary is a metatheatrical, defamiliarising reflection on the theme of the play itself. Despite its surface levity, the spectator is forced to consider his or her own appetite for the “sport” of hanging, as though it were a “game”, and 1954, the year of the play’s production, was also the year of Ireland’s last hanging. Marx’s theory of reification, “Verdinglichung” – which literally means “thing-ification” – is apposite here, for the reduction of man to an object of consumption implies a wider social process of reified human relations. The Quare Fellow who “bled his brother into a crock, didn’t he, that had been set aside for pig-slaughtering”, who used his “experience as a pork butcher” (*QF* 76, 97) to commit fratricide, is hypocritically murdered like a pig by the society that condemns his brutality. He, like it, and the man he killed, is “thing-ified”.

Such estranged social relations are integral to the functioning of capitalism, Behan suggests. Prisoner D, a white-collar criminal, who embodies the interests of the political and business classes, stresses that class solidarity is a threat to the corrupt system he supports. He is embroiled in the murky side of electoral politics — jailed “for embezzlement”, “there were two suicides and a bye-election over him” (*QF* 94). But whereas Prisoner C and Crimmin come “from the same place” and show a parochial and, inferentially, a class solidarity by being “for hours talking through the spy hole, all in Irish”, Prisoner D sees this familiarity as “most irregular” — a threat to the stability of social gradation: “How can there be proper discipline between warder and prisoner with that kind of familiarity?” (*QF* 95) Equally, when Warder Regan broaches a left-wing perspective on the class makeup of prisons, it is Prisoner D who strongly objects. The prisoners are “good boys only a bit wild”, according to the

warder, who articulates his view in distinctly political terms: “[they are] doing penance here for the men who took us up, especially the judges, they being mostly rich old men with great opportunity for vice” (QF 93). Emerging symbolically from a freshly dug grave, Prisoner D again counters with what is inferentially a moribund way of thinking. Stating his middle-class credentials “as a ratepayer”, he can’t stand these “libellous remarks about the judiciary”; “property must have security”, he complains (QF 94). If implemented, the benevolent warder’s disdain for punitive justice would result in everyone being “innocent prey of every ruffian that took it into his head to appropriate our goods [...] Hanging’s too good for ’em” (QF 94). Fundamentally, his defence of punitive justice is therefore allied to the logic of capitalism. Regan’s class consciousness points the way forward in threatening the limitations of both the jail and the society around it, and underlines Behan’s central message, that crime and punishment are inextricable from the functions of economic organisation, and that the jail’s horrors reflect the systemic injustices of society at large.

“Scrub some of the Dublin scum off yourselves”: *The Liberty Suit* and social defecation

Peter Sheridan makes the importance of this aesthetic of tipichnost explicit in his author’s note to *The Liberty Suit*: “In short, the aim [of the production] has always been to move from the typical individual to the social environment [...] beyond the experiences of one individual former inmate”.²² The individual former inmate referred to is fellow Dublin writer Gerard Mannix Flynn, whose experiences informed the writing of the play, but, as with Behan’s play, theatre’s task here is not merely strict mimesis. The play is designed to encapsulate the macrocosm of a “social environment”, to go beyond the particular of its immediate action. A socialist analysis of class strife is also apparent throughout the *Liberty Suit*. Divisions are drawn between warders and inmates, Travellers and “settled” people, and the rural and the urban, which foreground the issue of class conflict.

²² Peter Sheridan, “Author’s Note”, *The Liberty Suit* (Dublin: Co-op Books, 1978); all page references for this play are hereafter cited in the main text in parentheses as *LS* etc.

As in *The Quare Fellow*, social control and surveillance are emphasised from the start of this play, but in *Liberty Suit* this control is framed explicitly in terms of a conflict between rural and urban Ireland. Warder Martin, otherwise known as “Diarrhoea Powder” (LS 8), echoes Behan’s imposing “screw”, in the opening act of *The Quare Fellow*, but this time the tone is specifically anti-urban. Prisoners are ordered to “get into them showers and scrub some of the Dublin scum off [them]selves”, to which Curley, Sheridan’s central protagonist, retorts that Martin is a “culchie bastard” (LS 8). “Right gurriers”(LS 10, 21), the prisoners are anathematised by an anti-urban, official jaundice that sees the city’s lower orders as a social contaminant.

Sheridan is not merely criticising the ascendancy of the rural over the urban in Irish culture. Joe Furey, the “silent itinerant” (LS 10), is also mocked and jeered as an outsider by the Dublin prisoners, a counterpoint to their own marginalisation which suggests deeper concerns. The play is essentially about class consciousness, and the failure of class solidarity within the prison manifests itself in the persecution of Furey, who is continuously bullied as an Other. Branded “Joe Shite” (LS 60) by Curley, Sheridan’s working-class protagonist, the Traveller’s willingness to participate in the most odious of prison jobs – collecting and disposing the faeces that other prisoners have ejected from their windows – both marginalises him as an individual and symbolises the more general alienation of Travellers in Ireland. It also conveys the senselessness of intra-class strife. Metaphorically and socially, Furey is at the bottom of the pecking order, suffering the “excrement” of others who needlessly make life difficult for an othered member of their own class by throwing faeces out their cell windows. Behind the scatological crudity is hidden pain. Following an uproarious strip-show, and the ensuing farce of a prison riot, there is an “extremely slow fade-up” that jars dramatically with the levity of the previous scene: “As the light grows the figure of BILLYBOW is seen facing GER’s cell. In the cell FUREY is hanging from a rope. Dead.” (LS 59) O’Flaherty, another Traveller and Furey’s friend, emphasises that prejudice is to blame for the suicide. He points to his and Joe’s social exclusion as Travellers, shouting that “youse don’t understand him [...] he’s only a travelling man”, but turning on Curley – the man he now perceives as a murderer – O’Flaherty ironically

parrots the kind of pointless intra-class persecution that has killed his friend: “He was only a travelling man ... Ye dirty Dublin ...” (LS 59, 60)

Despite their culpability in this death, however, Sheridan refuses to vilify the prisoners. Indeed, he emphasises that they have a great deal in common with the persecuted Traveller. Even though Curley had bullied “Joe Shite”, he too suffers hidden despair. When he asks Ger, “did you ever try [suicide]?” both show their scarred wrists, admitting their “depression” and “loneliness” (LS 60). Like the symbolism of Behan’s prisoners betting on death, Sheridan’s imagery suggests that life is cheapened by a form of currency exchange. Ger had taken the rope subsequently used by Furey to hang himself from the yard because he “thought [he] might be able to swop it for some tobacco” (LS 61). It was “a bit of mess” (LS 61), he concedes, sounding distinctly infantilised. Curley too had smuggled medicinal anti-depressants for Furey, and had a rope smuggled for himself. Those with shared class interests, and who have suffered similar social exclusion, nevertheless choose to trade in misery — something Joe’s demeaning job had also implied. As with *The Quare Fellow*, *The Liberty Suit*’s prison mirrors fragmented social relations on the outside and stresses how conflict *within* the lower classes – and its roots in capitalist individualism – results in collective misery.

Class consciousness and political action

This focus on the failures of the working classes to fully understand their own, common plight as subjects of a capitalist system is essentially a critique of how both institutional and social influences have moulded the prisoners’ false consciousness. Beginning the play as a “fire bomber” – in terms of both his crime of arson and his generally volcanic disposition – Curley claims to be the “innocent victim of Irish law” (LS 5). He has heard and adopted the rhetoric of the ongoing North of Ireland conflict, but shows no real understanding of it. Because he has seen and envied the benefits accorded to IRA prisoner Lane, however, he is “claiming political status” for what seems an act of unadulterated vandalism – the burning down of a factory – and threatens “hunger strike” to attain it (LS 21, 27). Opportunistic charade and farce as this may be, there is nonetheless a tentative political consciousness in Curley’s posturing. Indeed, we are never privy to his reasons for burning the factory down.

Curley refuses work with the ignominious “shite party”. Like Behan’s chokey singer, he uses songs to express his experiences, and these songs gain an increasingly polemical tone as the play progresses. This, of course, is a distinctly Brechtian technique; the lyrics act as authorial metacommentaries on the action of the play itself. Curley “started to rob” because he “could not read nor write” one song claims, rooting his descent into crime in his fundamental lack of “cultural capital” (*LS* 34).²³ When he is isolated in the chokey, however, Curley degenerates into a subhuman state. The “come day go day” (*LS* 53) world of solitary confinement induces introversion and near-madness, articulated in incoherent and disjointed ramblings:

Small, hard, rounded, lumps of black brittle shite ... on the mattress, the blankets, the floor, the window, the walls, the plastic cutlery, my body ... My body, mi-wadi. Body, biddy, billy, baddy, bandy, randy ... on me biddy, billy, bandy, randy body. (*LS* 49)

His breakdown manifests itself in a desperate grasping for language and meaning in bland alliteration and assonance. He retreats into a debased, dehumanised state, a world reduced to the scatological – his “black brittle shite” – and the libidinal – his “biddy, billy, bandy, randy body” (*LS* 49). This depersonalisation through jail life was hinted at when Warder Martin numbered him “8072”. Indeed, it is notable that Sheridan randomly and frequently switches his protagonist’s name from “Jonnie” to “Curley” in the script, eroding and destabilising even this paratextual nominative certainty. Curley had earlier regarded another prisoner, Billybow’s, institutionalised mindset “disgustedly”; the latter’s lack of a sense of self is, for instance, illustrated by his absurd adoption of warder Carson as “my Daddy” (*LS* 6, 7). But if he too is made insensible by the prison, it also gradually affords him a new political awareness.

Speaking of the scars he bears from beatings at Daingean Reformatory School, a children’s correctional institution, he attempts to find some pathological rationale for how he has ended up in institutions all his life. Although the prison describes him as

²³ Part of what Beverly Skeggs (*pace* Bourdieu) terms “symbolic capital”, the “properties capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on the holder”. Beverly Skeggs, “Classifying Practices: Representations, Capitals and Recognitions”, in *Class Matters: ‘Working-Class’ Women’s Perspectives on Social Class*, ed. Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek (London: Taylor & Francis, 1997), p. 127, 135.

having “no distinguishable features” on an official report, it belies the inner injuries of the state’s “reform”; he is “L-A-C-E-R-A-T-E-D”, physically and mentally (*LS* 49). During his time in these institutions, he was forced to deny his very identity, again in the language of rural dominance: “I’m sorry for being smart, Sir. I hate Dubliners” (*LS* 49). He shows that he has introjected the social stereotyping of the “‘dangerous’ classes” (Marx) by praying insanely to a dead rat:²⁴ “Oh Satan ... say it. Oh Satan ... good. For all the sins ... of my past ... and present life ... I am truly glad.” (*LS* 49) This self-vilification is repeated by Mannix Flynn’s protagonist in *James X* when, skirting near madness, he thinks of Satan and becomes “alive with power, the power of destruction, destroy, smash, rip apart”.²⁵ But in beginning the process of rationalising how he has ended up in prison, Curley also begins to understand the set of social, cultural and economic factors that have blighted his youth.

He is aware from the start of the play that he has been “las.er.ate.did” (*LS* 8), though his poor spelling is a metaphor for his limited perception. Having had “enough of schools in Daingean [Reformatory]” (*LS* 17), he is ill-disposed to educational instruction; we see from the actions of Warder Martin, who ironically “punches [Curley] across the room” (*LS* 8) when he misspells the word “reformatory” (how will this help reform?), that institutional instruction is equally ill-disposed to learning. When he expresses his budding artistic talent by penning amorous poems for his teacher, his creativity is again repressed by the prison regime. Martin confiscates the poems because “anything to do with prison life is prison property” (*LS* 54). As Curley’s lyric expresses, the prison is a stifling place:

Now your nerves will go when you hear the blows,
And the scream from the prisoners down below,
And you beg the Lord to let you go.
Oh no ... oh no. (*LS* 32)

In a dramatic epiphany at the end of the play, he exposes the program of vocational and rehabilitative learning in the prison as a mere charade. He has been “sawing the same log since [he] came here. The same fucking log, Ger”. “Nothing changes”, and even

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital, the Communist Manifesto and Other Writings*, ed. Max Eastman (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 180.

²⁵ Mannix Flynn, *James X*, p. 42.

though he has “only three days to go”, he sardonically questions “what [he is] suitable for [...] sawing logs on the outside?” (LS 67) Gesturing to his fellow inmates as if performing a surreal benediction, he then points his axe at each of the other prisoners in turn, punctuated by the now correctly-spelt letters of his angry refrain, “I ... a ... c ... e ... r ... a ... t ... e ... d. *On the final letter he smashes the axe into one of the logs*” (LS 67-68). This “laceration” is what Foucault terms “the branded existence of delinquency”.²⁶ In Foucault’s view, “the prison cannot fail to produce delinquents. It does so by the very type of existence that it imposes on its inmates: whether they are isolated in cells or given useless work [... it is] an unnatural, useless and dangerous existence”.²⁷

But from that existence Mannix Flynn had developed a political consciousness, and Curley’s progress to socialism reveals the central message of the play. Earlier, Lane spoke of Warder Carson as a fellow proletarian and another “oppressed victim of the system” (LS 22), just as Behan’s Martin and Cummin indicate their common class position with prisoners. Curley incredulously dismissed this class analysis, scoffing, “so we’re all victims then” (LS 22). For much of the play, Lane’s politicised logic (inflected here with Behanesque bestial imagery) has fallen on deaf ears:

Ger. Some of the screws treat us like animals.

Kava. All of them. That’s why they’re called pigs.

Lane. But if it’s yous that are being treated like animals then you’re the pigs, not them.

Kava. Who are you calling a pig?

Lane. Forget it, Kava. You wouldn’t understand.

Kava. Who wouldn’t understand? I forgot we were all stupid except for Che Guevara here. (LS 42-43)

As the action unfolds, however, Curley arrives at a qualified understanding of Lane’s ideology, soon advising Kava that, “all screws are not bastards ... That’s shite talk” (LS 36). He even adopts Lane’s systematic view of prison violence, continuing: “I don’t blame the screws for being the way they are [...] The violence breeds itself”. This

²⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 179.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

progress to political consciousness lends some credibility to Lane's assertion of the potential for left radicalism amongst his fellow inmates. "People like them have the right to rob, steal, march, organise," Lane argues, "'cos they've nothing. And they've nothing 'cos the comprador classes left them with nothing. And they left them with nothing 'cos they sold out to monopoly capital" (LS 42).

But Curley even exceeds his political mentor and in doing so articulates a more authentic understanding of socialism. Although Lane may profess to be "in here because [he] tried to better the lot of people like Kava" (LS 11), his patronising, pontificating deportment reveals a Coveyesque unease with the people he seeks to radicalise. His imperious attitude of "you wouldn't understand" is remarked upon by Ger when he asks "how come, Lane, when you talk about screws and prisoners it's always them and you. You never include yourself." (LS 43) Similarly, Lane's class solidarity with the warders is betrayed as hollow rhetoric when he misinterprets Carson's offer of a cigarette as a "bourgeois trick" (LS 36). As his name suggests, Lane may offer a route into politics, but it is a narrow one at that. Reminiscent of Harold Heslop's Welsh trade unionist Joe Tarrant, in *The Gate of a Strange Field* (1929) – whose education only sullies the initial purity of his political convictions, allowing him to "lord it over the rest of his workmates" – Lane's erudition actually becomes an impediment to class solidarity.²⁸

Curley, who initially prefers "wanking and football" to politics, displays how his immersion in popular culture jars with Lane's socialist rhetoric (LS 15):

Jonnie: And what's the badge, George Best?

Lane: No. That's Lenin.

Jonnie. Where's Yoko Ono? (LS 14)

However, his preference for pop culture begins to develop into a politicised exploration of his own misfortune later on. As Curley sings the words of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" – "Mama, uh, uh, uh, I didn't mean to make you cry" — pop-singing

²⁸ Harold Heslop, *The Gate of a Strange Field* (London: Brentano, 1929), p. 112. It also recalls something of the dismissive attitude of Communist advocate Jim, in Maura Laverty's *Liffey Lane*, who fumes at a fellow tenement dweller's incomprehension of his ideology: "Wasn't James Connolly the eejut of a man to die for the likes of you?"; Maura Laverty, *Liffey Lane* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947), p. 42.

suddenly turns to personal revelation: “Why did you send me away, Ma? I was only eight years old. I wasn’t a criminal.” (LS 50) Another song indicts the prison:

Hey warder, I was down on my knees
I was begging you to stop your blows and to let me go
But now I know what freedom means,
It’s not a dream, it’s not obscene,
It’s in my heart and my soul
You’ll never find it
Cos you are blinded
And growing old. (LS 57)

Lane, unlike Curley, is aloof from and dismissive towards popular culture. Ger and Flaherty like the magazine *Victor*, but Lane accuses Warder Michael, who kindly provides them with an edition, of using pop culture as a pacifier, a “solution to prison problems” that aims to produce Orwellian proles: to “get the prisoner stupid enough to read the *Victor* and the *Hotspur*? You won’t find them handing out copies of James Connolly’s ‘Socialist Ireland’, ‘cos then the prisoners might really ask questions” (LS 42). But whereas Lane trivialises his fellow inmates’ interests in “stupid” popular culture, Curley fuses “high” and “low” culture in a manner that mirrors his creator’s own aesthetic practice.²⁹ He may have packed a “dirty book” for his departure, but he packs a “Connolly poster” as well (LS 68). The man who dubiously posed as an “innocent victim of Irish law” (LS 5) was then a parody of heroic political posturing, but his new-found socialism suggests the possibility of real political engagement:

Lane. [...] *Taking him aside*. Are you going to join the Movement when you get out?

Jonnie. *After some thought*. I’ll tell you what, Laner, I’ll think about it. (LS 68-69)

Whereas Lane preaches class solidarity, he excoriates a prison informer as a “rat face” (LS 43). When he seemingly advocates a fight between Curley and Kava, albeit latterly claiming that this suggestion was a joke, Curley retorts that, “if Kava smashed my face

²⁹ Conor McCarthy observes that, if the writers of the “Dublin Renaissance” felt “profoundly alienated” from literary tradition, they were “more at home with the range of mass cultural references (television, rock music, film, Anglo-American youth culture”); Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland*, p. 135.

in and I kick him in the bollox, what good is that for your struggle? I'll tell you. No fucking good" (*LS* 37). Curley is proselytised by Lane to a new faith that urges him to "rob, steal, march, organise", but he also transcends Lane's hypocritical elitism.

Sheridan conveys that leftist politics is vacant if it is aloof from working-class culture. When Curley, with his common touch, wins the prison's "Entertainer of the Year" competition by writing a political ballad, he exemplifies how art can forge a link between the lived experience of the disadvantaged and the complexity of socialist politics. His song exemplifies the *nardnost* ("ready accessibility to the people" in socialist realism) aesthetic of his creator's play and its words are the kernel of the play's political message — that capitalist society has fostered criminal activity through inequality, and that it is only through politics, through knowing "what freedom means", that Curley can wear his "liberty suit".³⁰

Cell: "An intensified microcosm"

It is apt, then, that Paula Meehan immortalises her days of theatrical collaboration with Peter Sheridan with an image of him preparing a theatre set while also preparing for revolution:

I saw
A man once hammer Connolly
Into a picture of our history.
His anvil rang sparks into the dark.
Some must catch, take fire.³¹

The young poet's symbolism of hammer and anvil, the invocation of James Connolly and her portentous "sparks" of revolutionary fervour reflect an enthusiasm for social change that underpins both writers' work. But Meehan's hope that art can feed the "fire" of revolution is undercut by her acknowledgement of the cultural exclusion of the working class in Irish life. In the same poem she criticises a perceived elitist emphasis

³⁰ Again, there is a parallel with Brecht who – unlike the disdainful theorists of the Frankfurt School – could enjoy Hollywood gangster films and the delights of popular music, as well as the *Communist Manifesto*.

³¹ Paula Meehan, "The Apprentice", in *Return and No Blame* (Dublin: Beaver Row Press, 1984), p. 28.

in Irish literature by mocking a man who stands at its core, W.B. Yeats. The great poet's own self-deprecations, in his epic encomium to the Easter Rising rebels, "Easter, 1916", echo sardonically in Meehan's assessment of cultural class biases.

Yeats had himself admitted to having lived outside the main concerns of Irish society, "where motley is worn"; the austerity of his rebel acquaintances was but fodder for a "mocking tale or a gibe" at his "club".³² For Meehan this concession is symptomatic of a cultural malaise; the poet who "spied motley / From high Georgian windows" with his "literary crew" is representative of a legacy of cultural inequality, whereby "the poor become clowns / In your private review".³³ She might dismiss too easily the man who famously and fancifully sought to ally the peasant and aristocrat against the acquisitive mediocrity of bourgeois values, but the sentiment stands. Yeats and the literature he represents have conceded little to the subjectivity of the poor, she argues, in a pointed reference to another of his poems, "Among School Children":³⁴

But when all is done and said
Your swanlike women are dead
Stone dead. My women must be
Hollow of cheek with poverty
And the whippings of history.

Like Sheridan's men, Meehan's women are "lacerated" by their circumstances. If Yeats's "Quattrocento" portrait of a Ledaean beauty "bent / Above a sinking fire" is a universal, ahistorical, and idealised transcendence of the political (it is posited as a reverie that diverts from his senatorial duties), Meehan's women are, by contrast, particularised, historicised "sparks" to light a rising fire of discontent.³⁵

³² W.B. Yeats, *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 87.

³³ Meehan, "The Apprentice", in *Return and No Blame*, p. 27.

³⁴ Meehan's contrast between Yeats's "swanlike women" and her own impoverished characters pointedly invokes Yeats's representation of Maud Gonne as a "Ledaean body", and then, by contrast, as a figure "hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind". Her women are emaciated by physical privation of history's "whippings", whereas his idealised Gonne is immersed in history's "mess of shadows", as a spectral figure that has taken the metaphysical world "for its meat". The deflationary invocation of Yeats marks a disdain for the ethereal, unworldly imagery of Yeatsian aesthetics, and a preference for social engagement. Ironically, it is in performing his own duties of social engagement as a senator that Yeats conceives his otherworldly poem. See "Among School Children" in *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, pp. 113-115.

³⁵ Yeats, "Leda and the Swan", *Ibid.* 113.

First performed in the City Arts Centre, Dublin, on 6 September 1999, *Cell* is the most recent prison play of the three explored here, and the only one to focus on female prisoners. Like the other two, it is a politically charged, social-realist work. It also employs techniques of audience estrangement to unsettle discursive orthodoxies on class and crime. Furthermore, it is both temporally and thematically about breaking new ground. The play's first production came a timely twenty-two days prior to the opening of the new women's prison at Mountjoy Jail, Dublin, which was hopefully named the Dóchas ("Hope") Centre and was supposed to herald considerable changes in the prison regime. Meehan's cellmates continuously refer to the much-anticipated new prison and the original audience was alive to the political resonances of the action on stage, its propitious link with reality. As a former tutor to both male and female inmates, Meehan had taught impoverished inner-city women, who were mostly jailed for drug-related crimes, since the early 1980s. She had also encountered the questionable effects of "reformatory" justice: in her first educational workshop in Mountjoy, Meehan had tutored twelve women prisoners, but when she attempted to track them down over a decade later, only one was still alive.³⁶ Prison had clearly failed to correct their downward spiral.

To be sure, *Cell* indicts society at large for such failures from the first moments of the first act, when, as in *The Quare Fellow*, the action on stage reminds its audience of their own intrusive presence in the theatre, and through it, their own empowerment *vis à vis* the players. Echoing also the scatological shock value of the Sheridan's "shite party" – and Wilde's description of prison as a "latrine" – the first "articulation" of the play is a prisoner's "strong stream of piss into a galvanised bucket", engendering a palpable, physical awkwardness between audience and players.³⁷ Made to feel like an obtrusive voyeur, the audience member is again part of the prison surveillance system as it infringes graphically on the prisoner's privacy.

Delo, the woman whose urinating we hear, plays a key role in revealing the perverse results of the justice system. Due to the communal fear of spreading AIDS, it

³⁶ Interview by present author with Paula Meehan, 11 May 2005.

³⁷ Paula Meehan, *Cell* (Dublin: New Island, 2000), p. 7; all page references for this play are hereafter indicated in the main text in parentheses by *Cell* etc.

is vital that the women in her cell synchronise their menstrual cycles.³⁸ As the cell matriarch, she monitors this synchronisation, and is apoplectic when someone has upset it by menstruating “out of sync with the heavenly cycle”, breaking their “pact”, their “solemn promise” of “no blood” and “no faecal matter”. Menstruation – a metonym for the natural cycle of reproduction – should be curbed and controlled due to the expediencies of containing “the big V” (*Cell 9*), but this bodily containment is not just about avoiding contamination. Delo speaks of nature itself having “failed to get the message” of the daily morning call in the prison. “The sun still sleeps” (*Cell 10*), she says, as if natural time is somehow subservient to the prison regime. Lila, her cellmate, later echoes this sentiment when she disjointedly articulates her estrangement from the real, natural world outside her window. Her automated delivery echoes Curley’s staccato monologue in *The Liberty Suit*: “Lovely roundy moon, check. Weeping willow, check. Leaves falling, check. Yellow, check [...] Black clouds away over the canal, check. Dark blue clouds too, check. Rain, check.” (*Cell, 47*) In the rigidly inhuman jail, there is little room for natural feeling, Meehan infers.

Her prisoners are institutionalised and dehumanised. Delo curbs her own maternal talk of her children’s funny lingo lest she might arouse any unwanted emotions: “He-highls. That’s what my girls used to call [high heels]. When they were only little. They’d dress up in my old stuff and ... Ah fuck it.” (*Cell 14*) Like Curley, talking to the Satanic rat, she indicates that she has succumbed completely to the psychological branding of state correction, intoning a similarly malevolent and parodic creed of the *bête noire*: “For I believe in the one true apostolic church of God Almighty. Who has four hooves and a flying mane. Or a scaly body and he breathes fire.” (*Cell 11*) Satanic undertones recur when she abuses Lila’s drug addiction by forcing the younger, more vulnerable woman to pay for heroin with sex. As Lila fondles Delo, the drug dealer speaks in a grotesquely distorted, incestuous maternal lexicon, urging her cellmate to “snuggle in there. Oh yes. That’s the spot. X marks the spot. Sex marks the spot. O I like that”, then asking, “Who’s my girl ... won’t I mind you ... who’s your best pal?” (Again the audience is aware of its intrusion.) Delo refers

³⁸ In the interview Meehan spoke of the endemic fear and ignorance surrounding HIV in the Women’s Prison, which she observed while conducting educational workshops on the issue.

to the tattooed, satanic snake on her arm in a perversely parental, infantilised tone: “And Snakey likes it too! [...] Snakey loves it” (*Cell 15*). Later, in a more overtly incestuous register, she intimates that “mammy loves Lila” and that “mammy loves her little titties”, fondling Lila’s breasts and making her “want to throw up” (*Cell 19*). Lila has “no choice in the matter” of her subjection to abuse. As Martha warns, if she does not obey Delo she will “end up with Tracey fucken Dunne farting in your face while you suck her off” (*Cell 20, 22*).

The grotesque imagery of Delo’s perversely maternal abuse is part of an indictment of the prison’s maternal pretensions to care — a theme which emerges in the subtext of Martha’s (another cell mate’s) bizarre cannibalistic nightmare. In it, she searches madly for her daughter:

Only I couldn’t find her anywhere and there was this strange smell coming from the kitchen. I went in and there was a pot on the gas boiling away like mad. I lifted the lid and there was Jasmine [her daughter] all chopped up. Like a lump of meat she was. There was a bit of her face and the eye; and then another chunk with her mouth; all rolling around in the boiling water. And do you know what I did? I turned the gas down to simmer and put the lid back on (*Cell, 10*).

These scenes use the theme of perverse motherhood to illustrate the real role of punitive justice. Jasmine, the flower, is the Hindu symbol of love (Meehan uses other Hindu symbols in the play, which are discussed below). The ‘chopping up’ of Martha’s daughter is the perversion of love. The conflict between the ostensibly benign, motherly tone of Delo’s “baby-talk” and the transgressive, rapacious aggression of her sexually predatory actions not only foregrounds Delo’s malevolence, but also, like Martha’s fantasy, refers to something vile in the prison and society outside. In calling Martha and Lila her “little piggies”, with her their “mama sow” (*Cell 7*), Delo invokes Joyce’s axiomatic analogy of warped nationhood, the “old sow that eats her farrow”.³⁹ She may contend that she is “like a mother”, with her “family” in her “nest”, but Delo, as Mother Ireland, continually abuses her disobedient charges, for instance by making them stand in their bare feet “for thirty bleedin hours” (*Cell 10, 13, 23*). As a drug dealer, she feeds off their misery, and an analogy is drawn between this “monster” (*Cell 43*) mother and

³⁹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 231.

the monstrous country that facilitates that abuse through dehumanising prison conditions.

Meehan stresses this thematic synergy between cell and society by continually invoking the lexicons of political and religious discourse. As the general election from which the prisoners are “disenfranchised” takes place outside, Delo poses as an election candidate, assuring her cellmates of “my un- un- wavering, yes, that’s the word, unwavering support” (*Cell* 37, 60): “In any way, on any day, say but the word, and Delo will do her utmost [...] We should tackle this together as a community. Community action against drugs.” (*Cell* 60) Mark O’Rowe invokes a similar parallel in his play *The Aspidistra Code* (1999), in which ruthless criminal loan shark Drongo parrots the language of conservative politics to justify his amoral attitude to customers who can’t make repayments: “Rules are what keep society in shape, keep it from getting flabby. Rules are what prevent anarchy [...] What are we worth *if* we break them? Nothing. We are people without laws and without a code. We’re animals.”⁴⁰ Ironically, his rules are not the rules accepted by the preponderance of “society”; ironically also, it is the would-be politician who does the drug dealing in Meehan’s prison. It is a typical pillar of “society”, her solicitor, who supplies the drugs.

Meehan echoes here the allegory of an earlier poem, “She-Who-Walks-Among-The-People” (1994). In a fairy-tale land, she places two unequal sets of “tribes”, firstly “the tribes who had nothing were broken in spirit. Nobody cared about them, and nobody listened to them”. Their children were “charmed by strange potions, bad visions, grew thin [...] were locked away in dungeons.”⁴¹ This tribe, of course, is the urban proletariat, in which heroin addiction had reached epidemic proportions. The other tribe, in contrast, “had many, many tokens”, but “few [amongst it] were the lawgivers / who cared about justice, few were the doctors / who cared about healing, few were the teachers / who cared about truth”.⁴² These are the administrators of the

⁴⁰ Mark O’Rowe, *From Both Hips: Two Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 1999), pp. 149-150. [Emphasis in original.]

⁴¹ Paula Meehan, “She-Who-Walks-Among-The-People”, in *Pillow Talk* (Oldcastle, Meath: Gallery Books, 2000), p. 60.

⁴² *Ibid.* 61.

state apparatus, who are meant to uphold communal values of justice and truth, but in Meehan's verdict largely fail in that regard.

This allegory of class warfare has echoes in *Cell*'s structure of prison exploitation. Delo's political parody is accompanied by bourgeois talk of being a "humble trader", her "motto" being "fair trade" (*Cell* 30, 10) and, like Behan's gamblers, she imbues the language of commerce with a criminal inflexion, suggesting that her parasitic preying on other cellmates is an organic part of the system outside. Audience culpability in this system is again hinted in another cryptic invocation of Hindu symbolism. When Alice asks Lila if her name is an abbreviation for Delilah, Lila pointedly tells her that it is actually an Indian name: "My Ma was into a lot of Indian stuff when she had me [...] meditation, the Guru." (*Cell* 25) Sometimes spelt "leela", the Sanskrit term *lila* relates to a Hindu concept that sees the universe as a cosmic puppet theatre and plaything for the gods.⁴³ Literally meaning "play", and referring in religious texts to "divine play", the idea is employed as an oblique analogy for Meehan's own dramatic strategy. In Indian drama, the term refers to a dramaturgical act of transcendence in the "play of God":

According to Hindu thought, Man and the World are but images in God's dream; consequently, Man's sense of reality is nothing but an illusion (*maya*). Only when Man transcends the physical and material bounds of existence does he encounter God. *Lila*, then [...] is a limited revelation of the mystery of God's eternal dream.⁴⁴

Meehan version of "divine play" is one that puts the theatregoer in the seat of the divinities, affording a god-like insight into "puppets" in a place that is often far removed from public conscience and concern. Utilising the same dramatic principles as *The Quare Fellow* and *The Liberty Suit*, it questions the audience, probing the extent of their own participation in events on stage. They, like the "gods", play a vital part in the

⁴³ See William S. Sax, *The Gods at Play: Lila in South East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) and Norvin Hein, "The Rām Līlā", *The Journal of American Folklore* 71.281, Traditional India: Structure and Change (July-September 1958), pp. 279-304.

⁴⁴ Farley Richmond, "Some Religious Aspects of Indian Traditional Theatre", *The Drama Review* 15.2 (spring 1971), p. 131.

creation of prison norms, and for Meehan, society and its prisons are reflections of one another:

You can learn an awful lot about your culture by looking at how prisoners are treated. It is a good barometer of what's happening in the culture outside. And it's a microcosm – an intensified microcosm – of the forces that are at play in the greater culture.⁴⁵

Her analogy achieves further resonance in an Austrian staging of the play (directed by Georg Staudacher, in Theater Kosmos, Bregenz, premiering on 23 September 2004), which harnessed the defamiliarising potential of the *lila* by staging it in a more obviously Brechtian format.⁴⁶

Characters wore tee shirts that labelled them: thief, dealer, murderer, junkie [...] The effect was to make people ask about their own/society's labelling of people they wish to imprison. [...] The Austrian production had a subtext which was developed in the director's staging — that the real prisons are in the mind. It was a very free, body-oriented production. Even with my minimal German I got it because it was almost danced rather than performed.

In short, this production was more “philosophical” and sought to “imply that we are our own warders”.⁴⁷ *Cell*, like the *lila*, reflects culpability back on the audience.

The burden of responsibility: “My city's million voices chiding me”

Meehan's poetry contains references to the political valence of literature that parallel the preoccupations of this play. She reveals an almost tribal sense of kinship with, and responsibility to her class, a burden of accountability that infuses the very essence of her work and propels her writing towards social engagement. In “Intruders” (1984), she graphically portrays how the voices of her community petition her, imagining them as pleading and unrelenting phantoms of a ghostly past.⁴⁸ During a holiday to the Shetland Islands, she portrays impoverished Dublin as a reproving interloper on her isolation.

⁴⁵ Interview by present author with Paula Meehan, 11 May 2005.

⁴⁶ Photos taken of the Austrian set are still available on the website <http://www.theaterkosmos.at/conts/06archiv/2004_03/01.htm> [accessed 25 July 2008] and reveal a distinctly Brechtian use of lighting, photographic projections and props.

⁴⁷ E-mail correspondence from Meehan, 3 July 2008.

⁴⁸ Meehan, “Intruders”, in *Return and no Blame*, pp. 37-38.

Although she tries not to “hear / My city’s million voices chiding me”, she cannot extinguish the spectral images of inner-city Dublin:⁴⁹

Then the boys appear by the dyke lobbing
Stones at passing cars and plundering
The small grimy shops of country merchants
That hold their ma’s to ransom.⁵⁰

This imagery not only attests to her abiding sense of social responsibility, it also invites comparisons with Sheridan and Behan. As with *The Quare Fellow*’s equation between business and crime, and *The Liberty Suit*’s exhortation to “rob, steal, march, organise”, the notion of criminality is problematised by her vandalising class warriors. Even though they live in different social spheres (the country and city), bourgeois “country merchants” hold the boys’ “ma’s to ransom”; the ransom is not a literal, physical act, but part of a general class analysis. The boys avenge themselves on the bourgeoisie through “plundering” shops and stoning cars.

Like the ransom-taking country merchants of “Intruders”, drug dealer Delo personifies the corollary between capitalism and crime. She also adopts the language of a busy entrepreneur in battling rebellious proletarians, outlining her “work to be done. Deals to be struck. Profits to be made. And the drones mutinous” (*Cell 10*). Self-styled as a “humble trader” (*Cell 30*), her drug dealing is part of the system of “fair trade”, which is “the principle” of her business: “Hasn’t that always been the motto” (*Cell 10*). Like a publican, her “company motto” is “do not ask for credit as a refusal often offends” (*Cell 13*). She also promotes social snobbery and class division. Annie, a deceased Traveller who had previously shared her cell, was bullied by Delo as a “knacker” and an “awful eejit” (*Cell 21*). Just as the “Joe Shite” is rejected as a social contaminant in *The Liberty Suit*, Annie is said to have had a “smell” and is even, in similarly scatological tones, blamed for Delo’s constipation (*Cell 22*). Delo sat with a clothes peg on her nose as a way of tormenting Annie; like Joe Furey again, Annie ended her sufferings by committing suicide. Delo explicitly associates her bullying with politics, invoking its semantic duplicity again when defending her own harsh treatment

⁴⁹ Ibid. 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 38.

of Annie: the Traveller's suicide reflected "a woman's right to choose" (*Cell 34*). Equally, she is "proud" that crime is the election's "big issue" (*Cell 37*); parroting the lexicon of the Peace Process, she opines that "they want us kept off the streets", to "make them safe for peace and reconciliation" (*Cell 18*).⁵¹ But whereas Delo would vote for a "general amnesty ticket" (*Cell 37*), Alice, another prisoner, is given the voice of authorial intervention when she says that she would not close prisons, but "open a sight more of them" and "put the real crooks in", starting "with the politicians themselves" (*Cell 37*). As in *The Quare Fellow* and *The Liberty Suit*, pillars of society are indicted as part of a criminal and corrupt system. Delo's exploitation of her "family's" drug addictions is framed in the same linguistic terms as conventional commerce, suggesting an association between orthodox, capitalist activity and the unorthodox, illicit "business" of crime.

Bakuninity: Radicalising and reclaiming Marx's "refuse"

"This scum of the depraved elements of all classes, with headquarters in all the big cities, is the worst of all the possible allies. This rabble is an absolutely venal and absolutely brazen."⁵² This was Engels' advice to anyone who thought that the lumpenproletariat could serve in socialism's march to victory. In it, and in Marx's often caustic descriptions of the "dangerous classes", we can locate the broad social cohort to which the prisoners depicted in these plays could be said to belong, but in it too we find a problem at the heart of socialism and Marx.⁵³

The term refers to a rather nebulously defined grouping in Marx's writings, which includes criminals, and is broadly labelled "unproductive", but Marx's excoriation of the lumpenproletariat in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852)) is problematic. Firstly, its emotional and toxic tone suggests a move beyond the

⁵¹ The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was established as a means of furthering the Irish Peace Process in 1994, following the Downing Street Declaration. The term "peace and reconciliation" thereafter became one of the many (hackneyed) phrases of political discourse.

⁵² Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, (New York: International Publishers, 2000), p. xii.

⁵³ Karl Marx, *Capital, the Communist Manifesto and Other Writings*, ed. Max Eastman (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 180.

vector of a scientific, economic paradigm of social analysis into the realm of social stereotyping and moralising crudity. Just as the modern British and Irish “chav”, “scanger” or “knacker” is identified with certain types of apparel (consider the familiar ridicule of “chav” Burberry wearers or the recent British ban on “hoodies” in shopping centres), Peter Stallybrass notes that the term “*Lumpen* means ‘rags and tatters’”, suggesting “less the political emergence of a class than a sartorial category”.⁵⁴ If modern terms of abuse for an “underclass” indicate an anxiety with a supposedly dangerous cohort who can often be identified by their clothes as much as (or more so than) their economic position, Marx’s caustic words also betray his anxiety with a whole swathe of society that “threatened to subvert Marxism as a *science*”. As Stallybrass argues, “the lumpenproletariat disarticulated the one-way determination between social class [proletariat and bourgeoisie] and political action [revolution and counter revolution]” in its refusal to fit into any easy rubric under Marx’s economic paradigm.⁵⁵

Meehan, Sheridan and Behan’s depictions of society’s pariahs also show that it is difficult, if not impossible, to attach any consistent, singular paradigm of class to their prisoners; Behan and Meehan are particularly eager to show the class divisions their relationships highlight. Marx saw the lumpens as categorically undifferentiated and benighted parasites on bourgeois society, and therefore he aligned them to middle-class (not working-class) interests. But that did not make them middle class either; rather, they were “the refuse of all classes”, he argued, “swindlers, confidence tricksters, brothel-keepers, rag-and-bone merchants, beggars, and other flotsam of society”.⁵⁶ This heterogeneous fusion would equate James Plunkett’s indigent Rashers Tierney (with his chimpanzee and organ-grinder) and Roddy Doyle’s Dolly Oblong (as affluent brothel keeper) on equal class terms: an odd alignment indeed. And many modern Marxists would no doubt recoil in horror from easy equations between the

⁵⁴ Peter Stallybrass, “Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat”, *Representations*, 31, Special Issue: The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England (Summer, 1990), p. 70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 88.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963; orig. 1852), p. 75.

“underclass” and the criminal underworld — particularly their use by US racists to vilify African-Americans.

Marx’s lumpen was beside the proletariat – and other classes, including France’s elites – broadly unproductive in its labour and its revolutionary potential, sharply differentiated from the working class. Lumpen criminals were a counter-revolutionary force due to their reliance on capitalism for the proceeds of crime. The “bands of declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat”, as Leon Trotsky saw it, joined a reactionary social rump that was brought to “desperation and frenzy” by capitalism.⁵⁷ Yet, in their severance of this rump from the working class, there is a difficulty for conventional Marxists. As Paul Phillips argues, “the recourse to ‘fractions’ of classes [...] indicates that [...] ‘class’ is not a sufficiently precise concept to be of value in explaining particular events”.⁵⁸

Marx, for example, excoriates the Mobile Guards in Paris as belonging “for the most part to the lumpenproletariat [...] *gens sans feu et sans aveu* [...] never renouncing their lazarroni character”, but recent research shows that these nineteenth century “chavs” (as the casually flung “lazarroni” – used as a pejorative to describe monarchist Naples peasants – suggests) were actually from *bona fide* working class backgrounds.⁵⁹ The assertion that Marx was being more than a little blasé in his categorisations of the *Lumpen* is borne out by the fact that the term merits only one cursory paragraph in the *Communist Manifesto*. Engels, his collaborator, even ahistoricises this sub-class with his assertion, in *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850), that “the lumpenproletariat is, generally speaking, a phenomenon that occurs in a more or less developed form in all the so far known phases of society”.⁶⁰ Rather than re-theorising the conditions that have led to underclass “desperation and frenzy” (in Trotsky’s terms), this seems to merely parrot the commonplaces of incorrigible,

⁵⁷ Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder, 1971), p. 155.

⁵⁸ Paul Phillips, *Marx and Engels on Law and Laws* (Oxford: Robertson, 1980), p. 151.

⁵⁹ See Richard F. Hamilton, *The Bourgeois Epoch: Marx and Engels on Britain, France, and Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 82. Stallybrass defines *lazzarroni* as “like *lascar*, [a term which] moved between being a category of ethnic or racial horror and of fascination at the exotic”. See Peter Stallybrass, “Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat”, p. 83.

⁶⁰ Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, p. 8.

transcendental essences that inform traditional conservatism. In this, Marx's writing "reflects the morality of his times", Lydia Morris argues: "Here in the lumpenproletariat we are presented with an entirely blameworthy, immoral and degenerate mass, a category which differs from the surplus cast off by the industrial machinery of capitalism, standing apart from the 'real workers' of the proletariat."⁶¹

Allowing that times have changed considerably from the period of social unrest in which Marx was writing, and allowing that the emergence of the Welfare State has blunted somewhat the reactionary capacity of the lumpen, there is nonetheless a profoundly conservative reflex at work here. Marx uses pejoratives to describe and denounce a reactionary quasi-class that was the backbone, in his view, of Napoleonic power, but in doing so betrays a latent reactionary tendency in himself. As Stallybrass notes: "Marx and Engels, indeed sometimes used lumpenproletariat as a racial category, and in this they simply repeated the commonplaces of bourgeois social analysis in the nineteenth century: the depiction of the poor as a nomadic tribe, innately depraved".⁶² The stereotype of *lazzaroni* neatly evades some home truths about the counter-revolutionary potential in broad swathes of the working class, and it also ironically confounds Marx's own overriding optimism about the potential of humanity to struggle beyond capitalism. After all, it was Marx and Engels who retrieved the term "proletariat" from ignominy. Dr Johnson had defined "proletarian" in his *Dictionary* (1755) as "mean; wretched; vile; vulgar" and, as Stallybrass notes, "the word seems to have had a similar meaning in France in the early nineteenth century, where it was used virtually interchangeable with nomade".⁶³ Marx and Engels transvalued a negative term, just as modern rap singers or Queer theorists have transvalued "nigger" and "queer". The retrieval of "proletariat" was revolutionary in the true sense of the word: "They inverted the meaning of the term, so that it meant not a parasite upon the social body, but the body upon which the rest of society was a parasite".⁶⁴ For this reason, the terms lumpen and the proletariat have a lot in common; Marx and Engels, by

⁶¹ Lydia Morris, *Dangerous Classes: The Underclass and Social Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 15.

⁶² Stallybrass, "Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat", p. 70.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 84.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 85.

extension, paradoxically have something in common with those who try to retrieve the *lumpenproletariat* from its linguistic and cultural debasement.

What Marx and Engels achieved in terms of transvaluing “proletariat”, the plays I examine here strive to achieve with the lumpen criminals as a pariah social cohort. They suggest an alternative way of understanding criminals, not as a distinct mass – or a heterogeneous class – but as a reflection of the binary of working class and middle class, another part of capitalism’s inescapable dynamic of class warfare. Behan’s betting prisoners, Sheridan’s traders in mutual misery and Meehan’s dealer in death, all represent the worst individualistic tendencies of capitalism, but they do so, inferentially, in the ubiquitous symbolism of “business” and “trade” that the plays draw on — as fully fledged capitalists themselves. On the other side of the social divide are those prisoners like Dunlavin, Neighbour, Curley, Kava, Martha, Alice and Lila, whose capacity to engage in society has been diminished by the privations of capitalist society. These suffering prisoners are represented as part of the general working-class that society has failed.⁶⁵ Just as Marx had redefined the working class as preyed-upon rather than preying, these playwrights redefine these prisoners as victims of society’s superstructural “crimes”. Neville Thompson, in his 1997 novel *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?*, shows how easy it is for a young man in an impoverished working-class community to fall into a life of crime. Ballyfermot born Johnser knows at five years of age he wants to be a “robber”.⁶⁶ This is not to suggest that such depictions represent the broad views of working-class people, but that such people are born and reared within the conditions of working-class life. Their suffering under capitalism was acknowledged most famously by Marx’s fierce intellectual rival, the Russian anarchist and agitator Mikhail Bakunin, who saw lower-class criminals as those most disaffected

⁶⁵ A number of studies have confirmed that there is a broad class correspondence between those imprisoned in Irish jails. Typical prisoners are “young, unemployed and under-educated”, part of the poorest of the working class according to studies conducted in Ireland from the 1980s and 1990s; See Ciaran McCullagh, “Getting The Criminals We Want: The social production of the criminal population”, in *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Clancy et al. (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1999), p. 410.

⁶⁶ Neville Thompson, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1998), p. 12, Thompson also edited *Streetwise: Stories from an Irish prison* (Dublin: Mainstream, 2005), which allowed prisoners in Portlaoise Jail to write their own collection of twelve short stories.

with the social order and capable of playing a role in overthrowing it.⁶⁷ Bakunin's ability to see revolutionary potential in the "primitive peasantry, the unemployed, the outlaws—all pitted against those who thrive on their misery and enslavement" is apposite.⁶⁸ Whereas Marx and Engels dismissed the lumpen as a vulture-like appendage of the bourgeoisie, Bakunin saw it in alignment to the radicalised working class. Changing perspectives in this way is precisely what these plays are about. They estrange the mundane and everyday world, correcting what Marx termed the "camera obscura" of ideology, its capacity to misshape and distort the real powers at play in capitalist society.⁶⁹

In the works of a great realist, everything is linked with everything else. Each phenomenon shows the polyphony of many components, the intertwining of the individual and the social, of the physical and psychical, of private interest and public affairs.⁷⁰

For all three writers, the prison on stage is a microcosm of these affairs, and a platform on which to promote a political message. They estrange the judicial system and the economic precepts that empower it, depicting law as the marshal of class domination. The Quare Fellow may be a murderer, but he will be "surrounded by a crowd of bigger bloody ruffians than himself [on the scaffold]" (*QF* 101).

⁶⁷ Paul Avrich, "The Legacy of Bakunin", *Russian Review*, 29.2, (Apr., 1970), p. 131.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 131-132.

⁶⁹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2004), p. 47.

⁷⁰ Georg Lukacs, "Studies in European Realism" (1950) in *Marxists on Literature: an Anthology*, ed. David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.288.

Chapter 6: Return of the Oppressed – Sexual Repression, Culture and Class

In Ireland before the Celtic yoke I was the voice of Seeing
And my island people's Speaking was their Being;
So go now, brother — cast off all cultural shrouds
And speak like — like the mighty sun through the clouds.¹

- Paul Durcan

In this chapter I will discuss issues of sexuality, culture and class with reference to two specific texts, Christy Brown's *Down All the Days* (1970) and Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990).² I will show how these novels employ sexual repression as a metonym for cultural repression, and advance this theme as a criticism of hegemonic norms. Firstly, I will outline the historical and cultural context out of which both works emerged, and also the relevance of Ferdia Mac Anna's influential essay identifying a "Dublin Renaissance" in literature.³ My thesis here, as elsewhere, is that working-class Dublin is placed in conflict with the dominant cultural norms.

Sex and the "Dublin Renaissance": "Individual rather than state freedom"

In a seminal essay, Mac Anna identified an *avant garde* of writers as the harbingers of a new Irish revival – and a new canonical genre – conceiving the term "The Dublin Renaissance" to describe their theoretical emergence. This renaissance was firmly grounded in experiential reality, he contended, and many of its rising stars would write slice-of-life depictions of working-class people and their communities. Starting with the "less-than-steamier sex" and "punchy hard-nosed" realism of Lee Dunne's *Goodbye*

¹ Paul Durcan, "Before the Celtic Yoke", in *A Snail in My Prime* (London: Blackstaff, 1993), p. 31.

² Christy Brown, *Down All the Days* (London: Pan Books, 1972); Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home* (London: Flamingo, 2003). Further references to these editions are indicated by *DAD* and *JH* etc., respectively, in the text.

³ Ferdia Mac Anna, "The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin writers", *The Irish Review*, 10 (Spring 1991), 14-30.

to the Hill (1965), a renewed “freshness and vitality” infused the city’s literary scene. Its emphasis was on the hyper-local, individuated and anomalous narratives of those who confounded the expectations of a stultifying national culture. In their work, the “Renaissance” writers conveyed that liberation could be “redefined in terms of individual rather than state freedom”.⁴

Identifying Dunne as progenitor, Mac Anna proceeds to delineate a chain of writers who wrote against the grain of a rural focussed Irish culture and charts the emergence of a popular aesthetic. Dunne’s liberal dose of ribaldry and down-to-earth reality suggests the kind of “anti-Kantian aesthetic” that Pierre Bourdieu propounds as quintessentially working-class.⁵ Bourdieu explains that Kant had “distinguished ‘that which pleases’ from ‘that which gratifies’, and, more generally, strove to separate ‘disinterestedness’, the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from ‘the interest of the senses’”.⁶ This artificial division has found favour in aesthetic theory since the eighteenth century, which sought to dissociate “high” and “low” tastes — corresponding with how religion has distinguished between the spiritual and the corporeal. In contrast, working-class sensibilities tend to look towards the more earthy stuff of socially engaged (as opposed to disinterested) art, which aims to serve man more directly. Such art partly strives to “satisfy the taste for and sense of revelry”, “the plain speaking and the hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties”.⁷

Although Mac Anna frames his argument in terms of the urban/rural divide, Bourdieu’s class considerations are salient here, and class is implicit (though not explicit) in Mac Anna’s list of Renaissance writers. His invocation of Lee Dunne, James Plunkett, Heno Magee, Peter and Jim Sheridan, Mannix Flynn, Roddy Doyle, Paul Mercier, Dermot Bolger and Paula Meehan, suggests a strong class bias to the Renaissance. The importance of Dunne’s work was both cultural and stylistic, Mac Anna relates, “that it was the first book we had read that dealt in a realistic and

⁴ Ibid. 15, 16.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 41.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. 34.

believable way with the realities of modern Dublin life”.⁸ Rock band Thin Lizzy, Heno Magee’s *Hatchet* and the work of the Sheridan brothers all contributed to a new aesthetic of “social consciousness”, authentically relating the gritty realities of urban – and mainly working-class – life.⁹

To this extent these writers paralleled developments in British working-class writing, particularly the disenchanting post-war work of “kitchen-sink” social realists like John Osborne, whose *Look Back in Anger* (1956) seemed to answer the exasperated complaint of Arthur Miller that year, in *Encore*, that “British Theatre is hermetically sealed against the way society moves”.¹⁰ John Braine’s *Room at the Top* (1957) depicted a sexually promiscuous young man of working-class origins inveigling his way into bourgeois England by seducing the daughter of a rich businessman. Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1958) delved into the thoughts of another promiscuous and angry young man, Arthur Seaton, and issues like abortion and marital infidelity. Nell Dunn’s episodic *Up the Junction* (1963), with its casual sex and graphic depiction of abortion, caused a furore when it was screened as a television drama by Ken Loach.¹¹

Notably, sex was to the fore on both islands in representing the fissures between orthodox, calcified, bourgeois cultural production and the characteristically more gritty and experiential variety favoured by the working classes. But British society in the mid-century was progressing at a far greater pace than that of its near neighbour, not least as regards matters of sexual openness. John Messenger’s 1960s study of the remote Inis Beag, in which he concluded that “probably the most prominent trait” of the island, and of the Irish personality generally, was “sexual Puritanism”, found that this repression engendered a characteristic psychological cycle of sexual fantasy and repression.¹² This cycle features strongly in both of the novels this chapter concerns. In his 1966 study, *New Dubliners*, Alexander Humphries specifically identified such containment in city

⁸ *Ibid.* 16.

⁹ *Ibid.* 18.

¹⁰ Qtd. in D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), p. 1.

¹¹ Ridgman, Jeremy, “Inside the Liberal Heartland: television and the popular imagination in the 1960s”, in *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 152.

¹² Qtd. in Tom Inglis, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality* (Dublin: UCD Press, 1998), p. 31.

men, finding that, “though more open than the countryman on the subject of sex, [the city men] too feel that sex is somehow evil and suspect”.¹³ This puritanical frame of mind led to particular social evils, Tom Inglis argues, including violence, alcoholism and fanaticism.¹⁴

It is therefore unsurprising that writers of working-class Dublin were developing a broader critique of this conservatism in Irish society by returning its repressed sexual monsters to the forefront of literature. From Paul Smith’s gritty portrayals of sexual life in *Esther’s Altar* (1959), *The Countrywoman* (1961) and *Summer Sang in Me* (1972), through James Plunkett’s questioning of church teachings on birth control in *The Circus Animals* (1990), to Peter Sheridan’s challenge to social taboos in *Big Fat Love* (2003), sex is used to criticise cultural conservatism generally. Roddy Doyle also confronts the issue of pre-marital sex in *The Snapper* (1990), and uses sex to poke fun at nationalism in *A Star Called Henry* (1999) by having his protagonist, Henry, make love amidst the making of war in the hallowed birthplace of the Republic, Dublin’s GPO. The link between violence, psychological angst, social disease and repressed sexuality is a major conceit in both of the novels I assess in this chapter, and this link resonates within a larger body of working-class writing. Brown and Bolger use it to develop a proletarian counterblast to state norms, to what Liam O’Flaherty had termed “the dour Puritanism of the young generation, arisen since the revolution”.¹⁵

Planning his own birth: Cultural anxieties and reproduction in *Down All the Days*

Christy Brown delivers this counterblast in the form of an Oedipal rebellion against the old, sexually repressed world of his father, Patrick, whom he “never loved and often hated”.¹⁶ Brown’s attitude to the paterfamilias, and the cultural zeitgeist he represents,

¹³ Alexander Humphries, *New Dubliners* (New York: Fordham UP, 1966), p. 232.

¹⁴ Inglis, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality*, p. 31-32, 94, 140.

¹⁵ Liam O’Flaherty, *The Assassin* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1998), p. 81.

¹⁶ Qtd. in Georgina Louise Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot* (London: Mainstream, 2007), p. 140.

is revealed in a strange and symbolic mixture of love and loathing in *Down All the Days*. He even figuratively *fathers* himself in the novel, depicting his coming-of-age as artist as a self-induced birth. A major conceit of the work is its use of sex and reproduction as metaphors for artistic fecundity, while sexual repression is correspondingly associated with perversion, mental angst and violence. Brown charts the beginnings of his aesthetic consciousness – in a world with which, as a severe cerebral palsy sufferer, he cannot communicate – to his emergence as artist from a long, painful, but ultimately enabling gestation.¹⁷ Throughout his story, which depicts childhood in a bustling working-class family, the Kimmage writer also links the rise of his own aesthetic, symbiotically, with his father's decline into death. While his art seeks to represent what is depicted as an authentic, historically grounded proletarian culture, he shows how, in order to depict that culture veraciously, he must flee the nets that have been imposed on working-class life.

Class Consciousness and Culture: “He sat entranced by it all”

This novel, then, is about both continuity and change in working-class Dublin, and despite his reservations about its ingrained conservatism, Brown also wishes to convey the cultural richness of the Dublin of his youth. His ambiguity echoes the preoccupations of English writer and academic, Richard Hoggart, who critiqued mid-century changes in English working-class life in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). Hoggart eulogised the cultural influences of his own upbringing, the “full rich life” – as he termed it – of working-class Leeds: the social networks of workplace and neighbourhood, the closely-knit, familial feel of working-class areas and their pubs, working-men's clubs, typical sports, publications, interactions and vernacular.¹⁸ His vision of an organically authentic proletarian culture undoubtedly resonates in Brown's reminiscences of the local fair, cinema, bookies, pubs, childhood adventures, sports,

¹⁷ While the novel refers to its disabled protagonist as “the boy” and never directly refers to the Brown family, it is largely autobiographical.

¹⁸ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 110.

wakes, ballads, and sense of local history. In this, the Dubliner also illustrates his community's sense of an enduring tradition of proletarian counter-culture.¹⁹

The young protagonist, an autobiographical figure, is engrossed by his mother's sense of history, as she recalls the lore of the tenements, where, in a previous existence as eighteenth-century Georgian houses, "men had died violent deaths at the hands of patriotic assassins in the great upsurge of national identity and pride" (*DAD*, 53). Class consciousness is to the fore in these tales of an age "so genteel and exquisite for some, so brutally impoverished and unbearable for the vast majority of others" (*DAD*, 53-54). This sense of class is strong elsewhere in Brown, as when, in *Wild Grow the Lillies* (1976), Luke Sheridan – a working-class boy who becomes a journalist – is accused of becoming a "classless parasite", no longer "fitting in anywhere because you turned your back on your own people—!"²⁰ Such "fitting in" is integral to the communal life of *Down All the Days*. A shared sense of disadvantage inheres in verse and song, such as in this excerpt from a ballad regarding love thwarted by social inequality:

For he was from the Rathmines district
And I from James's Street
And like the west and the far, far east
Never the twain could meet (*DAD*, 139).

Men link arms and sing "We'll Keep the Red Flag Flying High" and Father reminisces nostalgically about his trade union hero, Jim Larkin (*DAD*, 48, 142).

This communal kinship is stressed in the novel, with many scenes – like those of Maura Laverty's *Liffey Lane* (1947), or Pat Larkin's collection of 1960s short stories *The Coalboat Kids and Other Stories* (2007) – depicting the ready, genial social interaction of a working-class community. On the Kimmage bus, passengers interact and banter in the kind of "dramatically intimate" and "almost unavoidably congested and familiar" mode that Brendan Kennelly had identified when he termed Dublin

¹⁹ Kershner contends that, "in the represented world of Brown's novel overt political issues play little part, as if the world of the Dublin slums were immune to political change, or to history itself." This seems inaccurate, however, considering the abounding political and historical references of the book; R. Brandon Kershner, "History as Nightmare: Joyce's *Portrait* to Christy Brown", in *Joyce and the Subject of History*, ed. Mark A. Wollaeger, Victor Luftig and Robert Spoo (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1996), p. 39.

²⁰ Christy Brown, *Wild Grow the Lilies* (London: Minerva, 1990), p. 17.

“more a stage than a city”.²¹ A mouth organist on the bus entertains with “Mexicali Rose”, a “bearded youth” starts to tearfully recite “My Dark Rosaleen” (*DAD*, 227). Amongst other spontaneous entertainments are two elderly men discussing poet James Clarence Mangan as a “turkey-faced woman” shares her whiskey with other commuters (*DAD*, 227, 228). They carry to the suburb the community culture of the tenements, where, as Laverty described it, “all the families made one family”.²²

Participatory street-culture appears also in the antics of working-class boys in the carnival and cinema, just as it does in Dominic Behan’s memoir *Teems of Times and Happy Returns* (1961), Lar Redmond’s, *Show Us the Moon* (1988), and Billy French’s *The Journeyman: A Builder’s Life* (2002). The uproarious, bustling exuberance of the movies is captured in one long passage of poetic enjambment, describing a “long beehive, serpentine rows of lumber-suited, short-trousered, butt-smoking boys [that] wound sinuously up the narrow sideyard of the picture house [...] a surging, elbow-digging throng of barracking boys whistling, cat-calling, jostling, sly-pinching” (*DAD*, 42). But even as they are immersed in the “vicarious” entertainment of the silver screen, the activities of “slapping, clapping, whistling and applauding”, with “fierce yells of encouragement and glee when there was shooting” and “loud boos and catcalls when there was kissing”, all form a greater part of the diversion (*DAD*, 43, 44). The spillage of cinematic violence into real life vividly culminates in fisticuffs when Mr Brown assaults a notoriously vicious usher, in the manner of boxer “John L. Sullivan” (*DAD*, 45-46). Although the spectacle of mass culture captivates, it is their ability to make a participatory, social occasion of it that characterises its sense of fun for these boys, questioning the left-Leavisite concerns of Marxian scholars, typified by Hoggart or the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer), about the supposedly corrosive influences of mass culture on working-class life. Brown presents a local culture enriched by mass culture and it is difficult, in this context, to sustain R. Brandon Kershner’s contention that “the vitality of Dublin’s workers is drained in drink and brawling” in the novel.²³

²¹ Brendan Kennelly, “City of Talk”, in *Dublins*, ed. Katie Donovan and Brendan Kennelly (Bloodaxe: Newcastle upon Tyne, 1996), p. 12.

²² Maura Laverty, *Liffey Lane* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947), p. 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Indeed, parties, such as that after the protagonist's sister Lil gives birth, punctuate the social scene of Kimmage life with nights of song and communal engagement. The hordes of alliteratively "gobbling, guzzling, swearing, singing, shouting, bawling, calling" locals entertain with spoon playing, bawdy horseplay, recitations, song and gossip — hardly a loss of "vitality" (*DAD*, 89, 89-99). Class-consciousness is again implicit: in verse and song they identify with "the ubiquitous underdog, the worm that turned, the berated beggarman roaming the streets with flapping uppers and bleeding feet" (*DAD*, 98). Moreover, the emphasis on experience and usefulness, whether in extolling political values or creating communal fun, correlates with Bourdieu's identification of working-class people with aesthetics that "perform a function" or have "an ethical basis".²⁴ This experientially linked realm of cultural exuberance thrives alongside rapid modernisation, informing some of the most poetic passages of the novel.

However, there is an ambiguity also in Brown's inheritance of working-class traditions, hinted at in the symbolic link between his own work, as artist, and that of his father, as builder. Brown portrays the labour of the skilled tradesman dubiously, with a conflicted sense of both affection and fear. He regards his father's "large, loose, knuckle-jointed, work-roughened hands", tellingly, with "terror and yet a strange burning unnameable longing". Like Seamus Heaney, who draws an evocative parallel between his father's digging for potatoes and his own symbolic "digging" for knowledge in the eponymous poem ("Digging" (1966)) – or Thomas Kinsella, who draws inspiration from the discovery of his father's tools with their almost alive "soft flesh", that endures after his death in "His Father's Hands" (1979) – Christy compares his writing with the physical labour of Patrick Brown, imagining:²⁵

those hands alert and agile with the bricklayer's trowel and chisel [...] magically moulding a patchwork pyramid of cemented rectangles to enclose the lives, loves, labours, passions, despairs of innumerable strangers; those master craftsman's

²⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 5.

²⁵ Seamus Heaney, "Digging", in *On Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 31; Thomas Kinsella, "His Father's Hands", in *A Dublin Documentary* (Dublin: O'Brien, 2006), p. 31.

hands turning deserts of empty spaces into jungles of human dwellings (*DAD*, 130).

The awe of the “master craftsman”, with his “patchwork pyramid”, is powerfully redolent; it lauds his diurnal achievements, links them with hallowed ancient art, and also with the ambitions of Christy’s own aesthetic — its parallel “moulding” of material to “enclose the loves, loves, labours” of his “innumerable strangers”. Like Heaney, with his metaphor of the “digging” pen, Brown intimates a sense of continuity with his own family tradition of labour, invoking also a potent signifier of class to elaborate his emerging aesthetic. However, that this analogy incites “terror” in the young Brown is also revealing. If his father represents something he wants to emulate, he also symbolises something Christy deeply fears.

Catholic Guilt: “Blissful burning melting of will”

Where both Patrick Brown and Irish society meet on the figurative plane of Brown’s emotions is in their dual role in repressing Christy’s sexual feelings, inducing dream-like bouts of neurosis throughout the book. Brown posits this repression as the locus of more generally regressive, conservative tendencies, and thus shows how the habitus of working-class Dublin impacts on his own agonised development. For Patrick’s generation, sexuality is something of a curse, “so bloody unfair” (*DAD*, 185). Its result, the scatter of children about him, is more to be endured than enjoyed, evidence of “God taking it out on him just because what he had down there between his legs was warm and real and alive and not entirely useless” (*DAD*, 185). This misery, he knows, is partly the result of his own class position; the unmanageably large family is inextricable from “the way the poor people live and they say the grace of God shines on us each time we make a child” (*DAD*, 185). Sex and poverty, along with religion, have conspired to destroy his and his wife’s lives, he imagines: “Poor bloody him. Poor bloody her [...] There was this wildness in him that got in the way of everything [...] crucifying him with a blood-red, beer-black, sperm-thick uproar” (*DAD*, 185). Due to the strictures of Catholicism, which forbid contraception and encourage prodigious childbirth, sexual repression is particularly acute for the poor.

In Lar Redmond's *Emerald Square* (1987), he describes this era of Catholic containment and its effect on working-class women who are told, despite dire poverty, to "obey your husband and multiply in the sight and love of our dear creator".²⁶ Maura Laverty ironised Irish society's attempts to deny sexuality by depicting how tenement children were forced to pretend that they didn't know about sex, or reproduction, even as their mothers approached labour. "This hush-hush policy in defence of innocence was always put into fullest operation when a mother's time became due [...] it was an unwritten rule that all these signs and portents" – including the mother's bump – "should be ignored". Such feigned innocence was ironic, "living as they did", in claustrophobic, overpopulated poverty, where children knew all about sex from an early age.²⁷ Neville Thompson's Jackie fumes in *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (1997), that "God's wish" was the dictum that impelled women of a previous generation to have larger families, but it was also "God's wish that none of us ever had a pair of trousers with an arse in them. God's wish that Santy always brought us broken toys. Some wish."²⁸ As Hambleton has observed, Christy Brown also "saw poverty lock his family and himself, especially his father, in a social jail cell".²⁹

In embracing his sexuality and the experiential world it is part of, Brown rebels against the underlying religious and cultural influences that also confined his family to a life of struggle. His imagery continually illustrates an almost instinctual refusal to internalise "the appalling messages of society or the Church", as Nancy J. Lane terms it.³⁰ One early passage, at the local fair, where his brothers and friends take an adolescent pleasure in pornographic images in a "picture box", indicates the crucial role sexuality will have in his aesthetic development. The protagonist is "utterly absorbed in watching" a woman undressing rhythmically, initially a pure, even *high*, artistic experience, "melodic, like a ballerina", a "Picasso-like distortion of reality" (*DAD*, 8, 9). Repression, fear and shame, however, are never far away. The woman's gyrations

²⁶ Lar Redmond, *Emerald Square* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 312.

²⁷ Laverty, *Liffey Lane*, p. 36.

²⁸ Thompson, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?*, p. 6.

²⁹ Georgina Louise Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 136.

³⁰ Nancy J. Lane, "A Theology of Anger When Living with Disability", in *The Psychological and Social Impact of Disability*, ed. Robert P. Marinelli and Arthur E. Dell Orto (New York: Springer, 1999), p. 183.

arouse him, triggering an illicit memory, which, “before he could grasp it, identify it, it darted away, back into the subterranean cave where such things remain hidden most of the time” (*DAD*, 9). Despite the flamboyant sexual horseplay of the boys, “winking and making obscene signs with their fingers” (*DAD*, 7), the imperative of keeping “such things” “hidden” is omnipresent. Tormented recollections of glimpses of his teenage sister in their cramped bedroom resurface with “painful, ecstatic, guilty feelings” and, in a “haze of anguish and pleasure”, the boy’s inevitable arousal is unspeakable, unprintable, and only intimated in the reactions of the others about him, accentuating his acute “shame and guilt” (*DAD*, 15). His juxtaposition of the *higher* inclinations, invoked by Picasso and the ballet, and the *lower* inclinations, of sex and voyeurism, is of course subversive in itself, for: “the denial of the lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment [...] implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined [...] pleasures forever closed to the profane”. This separation of *high* and *low* culture fulfils “a social function of legitimating social differences”.³¹ But Brown’s consequent feelings of “rage” and “betrayal” are tellingly the “only clear articulate thing left in him” (*DAD*, 15). His art and his “articulation” emerge from his struggle with these “lower emotions”.

Just after Brown has depicted his protagonist’s terrible ignominy at the fair, he ironises the shameful spectacle by mischievously intimating Freudian sexual connotations in religious symbolism all about him. There is a conspicuously phallic obviousness in the local church’s architecture, in which the “blue veined pillars of marble”, which “rose steeply to the huge dome”, infer subconscious sexuality’s irruption through moral piety. Outside, he observes “moist fingers and fronds of moss twined around the gnarled barks of ancient trees” and “against the linen-white clouds of autumn the church spire glinted reddish in the sunset, sharp and slender as a pared pencil” (*DAD*, 16, 17). Sexual repression only makes sexuality more pervasively, if subliminally, present in his thoughts, and it is notable that his projections take the form of phallic creativity — in the architecture of the church, an “arrowhead” (*DAD*, 15) of life-sustaining sunlight, the fertile body of a tree, and the writer’s tool, a “pared pencil”.

³¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 7.

When he relates his sins of “solitary dark communion with himself” through a series of contrite grunts in confession, a young priest advises the boy “to think of the Holy Virgin” whenever “bad thoughts” enter his head, but the advice only serves to underscore the futility of sexual repression (*DAD*, 27). Inglis observes this “inculcation” of the “teachings of the Church” in twentieth century Ireland, “through a series of strategies based on creating shame, embarrassment, guilt and awkwardness about sex”.³² Lar Redmond also explains how “a perfectly normal young man” growing up in the mid-century is made to feel like “some kind of sex maniac” because of “information via the Church”.³³

In a sexual dream, Christy sees a seductive “Virgin Mary [who] kept coming and going all in her gown of Reckitt’s blue” (*DAD*, 19). The association of Reckitt’s, a brand of sky-blue coloured washing soap for whitening clothes, accentuates the contrast between religious sanitation and its unintentional effects.³⁴ Such iconoclastic sacrilege is repeated in Gerard Mannix Flynn’s James X’s recollection of his first sexual arousal in a Christian Brothers’ institution, when he “fought hard to get the image of Holy God and Mary and Joseph out of [his] head” as he “began to stroke [him]self”.³⁵ Brown’s iconoclasm continues in the novel when one of his dreams transfigures a “fat, simpering” breastfeeding neighbour into a symbolic vision of religious iconography, “with a knitting needle stuck through her huge bare breast and drops of blood oozing out of it instead of milk” (*DAD*, 37). This warped deformation of the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows – with her heart depicted as a symbol of persecution, pierced by swords – encodes another subversive message.³⁶ The “knitting needle”, symbolising creativity, is turned perversely on woman herself. It sears through her breast, a source of sexual attraction and reproductive sustenance, producing blood instead of milk. The tortured

³² Inglis, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality*, p. 35.

³³ Lar Redmond, *A Walk in Alien Corn* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990), p. 62.

³⁴ This iconoclastic juxtaposition that recurs in Brown’s work, for example in *Wild Grow the Lillies* (1976), where Babysoft discovers her “oul’ ram of a Da” with another woman while her mother is in labour, “working away like billyo screwed into her, bejaysus, under the picture of the Sacred Heart”. Brown, *Wild Grow the Lilies*, p. 152.

³⁵ Gerard Mannix Flynn, *James X* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003), p. 30.

³⁶ The Catholic iconography of Mariology represents the *Mater Dolorosa* in images with her heart pierced by seven swords, each representing one of her biblical sorrows. See Carol M. Schuler, “The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in Pre-Reformation Europe”, *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 21.1/2 (1992), 5-28.

Virgin is transformed into an image of warped sexuality and perverted creativity, and Catholicism's most vaunted icon of female chastity becomes a motif for sexual angst. As John Messenger's 1960s study, the more Christy attempts to deny his sexuality, the more of an obsession it becomes; his thoughts are also consequently suffused with guilty and violent horrors.

Exorcising Old Ireland: "Cry and be cleansed"

He is continually tempted and tormented by satanic forces, devils "dancing around him, their bodies writhing grotesquely, their private parts hanging and swaying lasciviously and hideously" (*DAD*, 63), yet these images also chart a cultural and aesthetic pilgrimage of sorts. When a she-devil displays her pubic hair, her groin area also appears as a "flaming arrow [...] like a little goat's beard" (*DAD*, 61), the recurrent "arrow" symbolism (of needles, spears, obelisk, church spire and pencil) suggesting a journey, pointing somewhere. As Kershner notes, the invocation of the goat can also be taken as one of many allusions to Joyce and the terrifying "lecherous goatish fiends" haunting Stephen's dreams in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916); it hints also at the kind of artistic emergence that Joyce's *künstlerroman* conveyed.³⁷ Explicitly, Brown shows that these dreams emerge from his Freudian subconscious, as the return of his repressed desires, for "a dream is just as real as the five fat fingers on my hand or the hair growing out of my nose holes [...] merely the irrational and totally unbound side of reality. It is, if you like, the absolute reversal of the external experience" (*DAD*, 195). This authorial intervention finds a corollary in his poem "Mulum in Parvo" (1971), in which a sexually liberated woman is associated with mental health: "She has enough to carry her [...] no neurosis complex / believing religiously in sex."³⁸ Here, sexual liberation is linked with mental well-being; in the novel, the protagonist's sexual repression is linked with mental ill-health. It is also associated with the social ill-health of his father's generation.

³⁷ R. Brandon Kershner, "History as Nightmare: Joyce's *Portrait* to Christy Brown", p. 37; James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 157.

³⁸ Christy Brown, "Mulum in Parvo", in *Collected Poems - Christy Brown* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982), p. 27.

In the same dream, the spectre of his “father’s face”, a “large thorny murdered head”, invoking the crown of thorns on the crucified Christ, enacts the climax of a rape fear, as a “muscular forearm” appears, “gripping a white-hot poker with pulsating circles of heat extending halfway up its length” (*DAD*, 195). In its ghostliness, it also brings to mind James Joyce’s theme of the false father in *Ulysses* (1922), particularly in its many references to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. As he feels the phallic poker “embedded in his flesh”, Christy hears his father’s words hailing him: “My son breathes in me as I in him. Brave, oh brave. He never uttered a whimper” (*DAD*, 195, 196). Symbolically, his dread of what amounts to a symbolic rape in this interlude is of a perceived violation of personal integrity to be committed by his Christ-like father, and by extension Christianity — that he will become as one with his father and the Catholic orthodoxy he obeys, breathing “in me as I in him”. This linkage of sexuality, sin and the silencing — “not uttering” — expresses the essence of Brown’s anxieties.³⁹

Father is associated with sexual and emotional repression, inverted moral prurience and misogyny throughout the book. Patrick’s hatred of women, in its utter barrenness, is portrayed as the antithesis of his son’s creativity. His daughter, Lil’s, shame at her pregnancy, feeling “awkward” around her brothers, conveys how reproduction is taboo in the household (*DAD*, 176). Patrick blasts that she “couldn’t keep her legs shut”, despite her apparent chastity (*DAD*, 71). Further imagery suggests that Lil’s sensuality is “cropped” by Patrick’s oppressiveness.⁴⁰ Lil’s “fine dark under-hair” gives the protagonist “a peculiar throb of pleasure”, and symbolically it seems “cruel and barbaric when later she shaved her armpits with Father’s safety blade” (*DAD*, 101). Violence against women is a recurrent feature of domestic life in his household — a fact entirely omitted from *My Left Foot* — and, as such, a fact that Brown had surely found difficult to represent.

However, when he ventures to glimpse inside his father’s mind, Christy finds an essentially pathetic vulnerability behind the oppressive, macho façade of a man who was, despite his son’s loathing, “a very real person indeed”.⁴¹ The elder Brown

³⁹ Brown also suffered from severe dysarthria, which impaired his speech.

⁴⁰ Both Frank McGuinness and John Banville found this scene particularly evocative. See Georgina Louise Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 150.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 140.

beseches himself to cry, but can't, lacking "the gift of tears": "Oh cry, damn you. Cry and empty yourself of the hard dried-up concealed grief lying in your heart like dead blood. Cry and be cleansed, be purged [...] for some unnameable thing unnameably lost down all the speechless years." (*DAD*, 189-190) It is no coincidence that this excerpt contains the first coded reference in the text to the novel's title. Father's internal monologue is, in fact, an imagined dialogue from son to father, a painful wishing away of his father's emotional and expressive shortcomings, his "unnameable" loss of communication, "down all the speechless years". As his virility ebbs, Father considers bitterly his pathetic envy of the female body: "A wide lonely landscape pitted with hidden ravines [...] A woman's body the endless plain over which a man strayed all his life and sometimes lost himself. Theirs the power and the glory, the triumphant pain." (*DAD*, 191) The longing is expressed in terms of his loss of sexual potency, his loss of words, but also as an absence of femininity. The elder Brown's rage towards his wife is fuelled by jealousy and fear; he has wasted his life "raging against her tenderness, her knowledge of him, the terrible innocence and clarity of her through which he saw finally his own utter weakness" (*DAD*, 191). The "cascade of senseless violence" against women in the novel is something of a "God-given duty" for men of his background, but repressing women is also about repressing a hidden aspect of his own character (*DAD*, 68, 69, 191). The real problem with his wife is that she has exposed a lack, "probing to the final level below which lay nothing but the dense dark and desolateness of self" (*DAD*, 192).⁴²

In this regard, Patrick articulates a barren conception of reproduction, thinking that "a deeper part of" a man's vitality is lost with each new child, that "each kid that came kicking and bawling into the world took a part of you with it, made you less and less, weaker and weaker as a man" (*DAD*, 181). Seeing a "nest of baby mice" that makes him "bloody sick", he reflects nauseously on his children, "nothing but glistening lumps of boneless raw flesh. Rabbits. Mice. Rats. Kids." In horribly pouring "the scalding contents of his billycan over them, almost hearing them bleat", he repeats his visceral fear of creation and new life — linking it again with his fear of woman:

⁴² Patrick Brown, known locally as "Squabblers", was a notorious hard-chaw, given, as Noel Pearson would recall, to settle "everything with a head-butt"; Georgina Louise Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 158.

“take away the womb and you’re okey-dokey” (*DAD*, 181, 182). This rejection of the corporeal and the sexual is reiterated by the Matt Talbot character in Thomas Kilroy’s *Talbot’s Box* (1973), in which the Dublin workers’ “saint” adheres to the biblical concept that the body is a “garment of shame”, which “shall be cast off ‘n there will be no more male ‘n female”.⁴³ Patrick Brown’s repression of sexual feeling, his author-son shows, is a stifling of fecundity, and metaphorically, creativity.

Sex and the emergence of an aesthetic: “Show us the way to go home”

It is therefore fitting that Brown’s literary coming-of-age is represented from within the same lexicon of sexual reproduction, as a “birth”. He dreams of a giant pregnant woman, whose stomach is “transparent, like a sheet of plateglass”, and inside he sees “the unborn infant curled up within her” (*DAD*, 199). The child is “shaped like a question mark” – a metaphor for his questioning (which he uses several times) – which is the impetus behind his art.⁴⁴ The face staring out at him, “to his unique surprise”, is his own and the metaphor of vaginal emergence is employed also in another dream, during a real-life surgical operation, in which the boy is “crawling down a long, dark tunnel of pain” where “the walls seemed about to collapse, to fold in upon him; everything seemed to be breaking up, dissolving, disintegrating; he seemed to be stuck, submerged in a sort of gum mucilage” (*DAD*, 199, 37). Both images correspond with his infantilised state as a cerebral palsy sufferer, unable to talk, emitting only “mumbled grunts and semi-said words”, expressing himself – in his own disdainful words – with “twisted ugly faces [...] like a pig” (*DAD*, 27,60). Brown shows that the rebirth he envisages is also about articulation.

As he descends into flames of hell in another dream, Christy can only make “grunting noises”, prompting laughter from the ubiquitous devils, who mockingly request him to make “more funny noises” (*DAD*, 62, 63). Disability becomes a symbol of personal and cultural struggle. As Kershner attests, “the protagonist’s immobility

⁴³ Thomas Kilroy, *Talbot’s Box* (Dublin: Gallery, 1979), p. 25.

⁴⁴ This may also, again, be in reference to Joyce. Frank Delaney noted of *Ulysses* that if Leopold Bloom’s movements are traced on a map they form a shape akin to a question mark. Brown again sees the shape in a taxi driver’s ear towards the end of the book; See Frank Delaney, *James Joyce’s Odyssey: A Guide to the Dublin of Ulysses* (New York: Holt, 1982).

becomes the perfect metonym for the paralysis of everyone surrounding him. If he is reduced to primal grunts and uncontrollable bodily reactions, so to a degree is everyone else in his world".⁴⁵ The symbolism of the sin book in Chapter 10, when "red Indians" and "glowing little devil-figures" dance around as his sins are disclosed from a text, conveys his fear of being textualised by others — by priests, doctors, nurses, neighbours, and his father, who impose their views upon him throughout the novel (*DAD*, 62). Against this fear, he discovers his literary voice, his vocation to speak, not just for himself, but for others, for those who he "fishes" for in a dream, caught in "huge barbed-wire-strung nets in which [...] human infants wriggled and squirmed in lieu of fishes, their soft pink limbs plucked asunder and harpooned by the dagger ends of wire" (*DAD*, 210). The author himself is a Christ-like proselytiser, a fisher of men.⁴⁶ In the dream, trapped babies ask for someone to lead them, to "show us the way to go home" (*DAD*, 210). They beseech their saviour to write the stories of those who lie under the "black engraved lettering" of tombstones, the victims of textual tyranny: the boy is asked to tell "the dull short histories of those who lay recumbent beneath them [...] revealing the closed little volumes of their lives" (*DAD*, 212).

Brown suggests his role in unearthing submerged narratives of those precluded by history, just as he yearns to reach out artistically, to "share a single intense moment of his existence with" his family: "as long as he had known the moment, stepped over the threshold, savoured the warmth, touched their uniqueness with his own, free of the muteness that chained him." (*DAD*, 118) He feels his community, his family, calling for representation in literature; that which was "tiresomely real" can be "made dream-like", he envisages, "the dream descending and putting on ordinary garments, an ordinary face, dancing on ordinary feet, beckoning him, saying there was no longer need to hold back from the loud laugh and lusty stamp of careless life loving".

His repetition of "ordinary" infers the predisposition of his art. There is an emphasis on his desire to partake of the experientially linked world about him, "that he might enter their dusty bellowing arena, partake of their bread, share their rough

⁴⁵ Kershner, "History as Nightmare: Joyce's *Portrait* to Christy Brown", p. 44.

⁴⁶ Hambleton notes that Christy's self-portraits "often combine his own image with that of Christ weeping or bleeding"; Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 134.

warrior kit, their brawling, bruising, belligerent world” (*DAD*, 123).⁴⁷ In another late reverie, a climactic epiphany, he conceives this fusion in an image of classical art. Set in a Grecian courtyard, an enlivened marble statue of a woman, a “naked female figure, resting on elbow”, with “a laurel crown girding the smooth forehead”, is the quintessence of his woman-as-creativity conceit. She also invokes the sites of origin for Eurocentric high art (in ancient Roman and Greek cultures), and its connotations of permanence (*DAD*, 207).⁴⁸ But Brown’s vision of the sublime, like that of the earlier “pyramids”, is set in his native city – what seems to be the Dockland/quays area of the Inner City where his family originated – near a “compact toy-like train”, “tall blackened roofs of factories, warehouses, churches, the squat flattened domes of gasometers, the phallic spires of electric pylons” (*DAD*, 207). Juxtaposed with a panoptic vision of the urban, industrial modernity of working-class Dublin, the statue surveys “the grit and grime and gangrene of living”. Christy associates his aesthetic vision with revered cultural wealth, but inflects it with his desire to represent ignored urban reality. Before the “unseeing, all-seeing, the unparalleled eyes” of the statue, which “gazed far out beyond his own fitful little life crackling dully inside him like a damp fuse”, he begins the process of self-articulation (*DAD*, 208): “And he heard his voice, his words, moving like deep waves within him. ‘Who are you? Where am I?’” (*DAD*, 208) In her “all-alive and lifeless perfection”, the statue represents a paradox of aesthetic practice; she symbolises the “lifeless” eternal verities of high modernism, but also an “all-alive” art of the masses, “facing towards chaos” and the city “of industry” (*DAD*, 208).

Like the black hawks that clamour all about him, he enjoys a piercing, panoptic spectacle of Dublin while suffering the brutal restrictions of cerebral palsy, his and “their wings strapped cruelly to their bodies” (*DAD*, 209).⁴⁹ Film director Jim Sheridan’s comment, that talking to Brown was “like watching a 747 prepare for

⁴⁷ In 1973, Brown would write of similar desires in a letter to his close confidant and brother Seán. He was “driven to mad acts in [his] longing to approach them and absorb myself in their lives”; qtd. in *Ibid.* 31.

⁴⁸ As Hambleton notes, Brown “wanted more than anything” to “produce a piece of art that would last in time”; *Ibid.* 105.

⁴⁹ Hambleton sees the ubiquitous hawk symbolism in his work as expressions of his feelings as “the outsider quietly observing from afar”; *Ibid.* 32.

liftoff” is apt here; he was “a massive energy and presence at once grounded and struggling for flight”.⁵⁰ Brown’s dialogue with the statue, its representation of sexuality and its transcendent values of artistic excellence, represents this struggle for “flight”. This emergence is also emblematic of a broader cultural break with Irish mores. He hears his father’s voice “rolling over the lost sandcastle years of his childhood like a giant breaker flinging aside the delicate debris of his dreams”, but staring at the now dead father before his funeral, the rebel son narrates that “nothing stirred inside him now save the need to be done” (*DAD*, 237).

Christy still feels the stifling sway of cultural restraint; the black tie that “lay coiled about his neck like a soft silk noose or a snake curling tighter”, is “a burning scapula round his throat [...] lighting in his heart a tiny voiceless dread”: the Catholic scapula is, paradoxically, associated with the satanic biblical snake (*DAD*, 238). But now, as the elder Brown begins his final journey, his son reveals his final epiphany; a “light [is] snapped on inside his head” as, “the negative side of reality flared suddenly into relentless black-and-white planes blazing into his mind” (*DAD*, 239). An earlier motif is resurrected in Glasnevin Cemetery, the ambiguous symbolism of phallic power, in the “gracious stone obelisk pointing like a giant finger skyward under which reposed the broken bones of the man who had set this land of green fields and squalid cities breakneck to bitter freedom under the lash of his silver tongue” (*DAD*, 245). The obelisk is dedicated to Catholic emancipator and patriot, Daniel O’Connell. It invokes again the symbolism of androcentric, Catholic cultural hegemony and its repressed sensuality that irrupts conspicuously in artistic form.

But this time the symbolism precedes scenes of pilgrimage and rebirth. It is Easter, Brown reminds us, and the plangent bells of the risen Christ toll “out over the risen city” (*DAD*, 248). Passing the “cold shadow of the obelisk”, there is a sense that his life can only begin, can only “resurrect”, by leaving behind his father and the past; the obelisk is also a “pointing” “finger”. He infers Zozimus, the famous, blind, Dublin street-poet Michael J. Moran (circa. 1794-1846), in the reference to a “blind juggler of words and images” and the “gold plaque inscribed to the memory of a blind Irish poet”

⁵⁰ Qtd. in Carol Meinhardt, “Books, Films, and Culture: Reading in the Classroom”, *English Journal* 80.1 (January, 1991), p. 84.

in a local pub, hinting his own emulation of another disabled artist (*DAD*, 250, 241). Joyce writes, in *Ulysses*, on the return journey from Dignam's Glasnevin funeral, that "it's the blood sinking in the earth gives new life", and after his visit to the same cemetery Brown feels, at the "long narrow last-supper table" in Brendan's Bar, that his own new life is emerging, Christ-like, from the ashes of death (*DAD*, 251). The cognac he drinks is "anointing" his flesh, "with a fiery touch" (*DAD*, 243).⁵¹ Despite the "titanic tyrannic tormented shape" of the elder Brown "throwing its ubiquitous shadow over his life", he looks at himself, ominously, through a "tankard by his side" and sees, in the last words of the novel, "his own face, thin as a hawk's and his eyes already voyaging, rising to meet the world" (*DAD*, 254, 255).⁵² Christy's "rising to meet the world" is evocative of Dedalus's declarative "welcome" to "life" and "the reality of experience".⁵³ The shadow of Brown's father's "tyrannic" shape is resonant also of Dedalus's "fear" of the Gaeilgeoir Mulrennan, "just returned from the west of Ireland", and the metaphoric resolution to a "struggle" with him "all through the night till day come, till he or I lie dead".⁵⁴ Brown, like his father, will encapsulate the lives of his fellow city-dwellers with his art, but, unlike his father, he will build on his own terms. In the "burial", the artist is "born", no longer "so much a cripple endeavouring to overcome his handicaps, but rather an adult faced with the far more intimidating problem of overcoming himself after his handicap".⁵⁵

⁵¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 137.

⁵² In a letter to his brother, Seán, Christy had spoken of his father, and then, in similar terms, of "trying to avoid shadows, like any other man, I suppose, standing and trying to survive in my own little truth". In the same letter, he had spoken of feeling "weak, terribly weak" and fearing he would "give way", that life would become "too much". These feelings reflect the sense he expresses in the novel of his father's legacy as an imposing shadow that he struggles, falteringly and fearfully, to escape. Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 141.

⁵³ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 288.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 287. Brown uses similar imagery to that of Flann O'Brien, in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, who has his student narrator see himself in a mirror "supplied gratis by Messrs Watkins, Jameson and Pim", bearing a "brief letterpress in reference to a proprietary brand of ale"; Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two Birds* (Dublin: Penguin, 1992), p. 11. Both budding writers view themselves, self-deprecatingly and jocosely, through references to that great artistic enabler, alcohol. O'Brien had even characterised the Irish writer as a "drunk in the darkness of a railway tunnel for days, waiting for the coming of dawn"; qtd. in Keith M. Booker, "The Bicycle and Descartes: Epistemology in the Fiction of Beckett and O'Brien", *Eire-Ireland: A Journal Of Irish Studies* 26. 1 (Spring 1991), p. 79.

⁵⁵ Christy Brown qtd. in Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 90.

The end of history: Bolger's bleak suburbs

Dermot Bolger expresses similarly conflicted views on his native city, albeit with a more mordant inflection, in *The Journey Home* (1990). Bolger's vision of Irish life is riven with conflicting allegiances, polyglottal voices and an unremitting sense of the nation as a deeply divided society. As Ray Ryan writes, his "work is the most sustained attempt to thematise the divisions of country and city in the Republic", and these divisions are heavily inflected with issues of class.⁵⁶ Like Brown's novel, *The Journey Home* shows how sexual repression projects itself into disturbing psychological anxieties, and it also uses this theme to illustrate a broader social malaise: the subjection of Finglas's working class to a rural-centric, nationalist and corrupt bourgeois elite whose sexual perversity is the symbolic outworking of their repressed humanity.

Bolger's Dublin is less knowable than Brown's, less a community than a site of cultural and generational conflict. The difference between their cities marks a Hegelian break in the history of working-class Dublin. Lynn Connolly recalls the latter period, in the life of a working-class suburb, as one in which community began to break down. In her memoir, *The Mun, Growing Up in Ballymun* (2006), "apathy" "took over" in the suburb's high-rise flats; "within ten years Ballymun had gone from being a model estate, filled with respectable families, to becoming a place where only the desperate wanted to live [...] somewhere that nobody seemed to care about any more".⁵⁷ As the narrator puts it in Bolger's 1999 novella *In High Germany* – which is ironically set amid the patriotic fever of the Euro 1988 soccer tournament – "Home? Where the hell was home for us any more?"⁵⁸ The travelling army of Irish soccer fans becomes a metonym for the nomadic condition of the Irish nation, in both demographic and cultural terms. Declan Kiberd identifies a characteristic "bleakness of tone" in plays and novels of this period and Bolger's novel compares strongly with Paul Mercier's play *Wasters* (1985), for instance, which situates its desolate tale of petty crime,

⁵⁶ Ray Ryan, "The Republic and Ireland: Pluralism, Politics, and Narrative Form", in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999*, ed. Ray Ryan (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 84.

⁵⁷ Lynn Connolly, *The Mun, Growing Up in Ballymun* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2006), p. 117, 120. Bolger would explore this deterioration of the flat complexes in 2004 with his play *From These Green Heights*, and four years later in another play, *The Consequences of Lightning*.

⁵⁸ Dermot Bolger, *In High Germany* (Dublin: New Island, 1989), p. 38.

poverty and emigration in the dialogue of teenagers who socialise on waste ground at the edge of a council housing estate, where there is “fuck all to look forward to”.⁵⁹ In Jim Sheridan’s play of the mid-seventies, *Mobile Homes* (1976), Shea’s father shatters a mirror to pieces, invoking again the ubiquitous trope of mirror-to-nation in Irish literature, this time to represent a young generation that is “shattered into a thousand fucking pieces all over the kip”.⁶⁰ In James McKenna’s mid-seventies poem “Crisis”, he too asks “what has gone out of men?”⁶¹ The seventies and eighties is a period typified in depictions of Dublin’s working-class as a time of worsening social, economic and cultural malaise, and in this regard, the *The Journey Home* is typical of its milieu. The novel captures the general mood of a country “mired in an economic depression from which there appeared no possibility of escape”.⁶² It harnesses and exaggerates social ills, representing working-class Dublin as a profoundly alienated social space.

Based in Bolger’s home suburb of Finglas, “a country village populated by an influx of families from both the old city and the country, all in search of *Lebensraum*”, it portrays a deeply divided and uncertain Ireland.⁶³ The novel tells the story of Hano, a young man from Finglas, his relationship with Katie, a young heroin addict, and his friendship with the charismatic Shay, another young local, whom Hano comes to idolise. It charts the events leading up to and immediately following the latter’s death at the hands of a local parliamentarian’s, Patrick Plunkett’s, son, and culminates in Hano’s murder of the politician’s brother, the corrupt businessman Pascal Plunkett. The rest of the book is taken up by Hano’s flight from the authorities with Katie, and their

⁵⁹ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 609; Paul Mercier, *Wasters* (1985, unpublished mss. supplied by the author), p. 94.

⁶⁰ Jim Sheridan, *Mobile Homes* (Dublin: Irish Writers’ Co-operative, 1978), p. 53.

⁶¹ James McKenna, “Crisis”, a poster issued by the Goldsmith Press, n. d. My dating of this poem to the mid-seventies is based on its inclusion with another publication of the Goldsmith Press from 1975 in the Trinity College archives. See also “The Goldsmith Press Calendar 1975”, on which the month of January is illustrated by McKenna’s poem “The Dance of Art”. The same sense of fragmentation is to be observed in Neil Jordan’s Dublin labourer, in *Night in Tunisia* (1976), cast upon the social melting pot of London’s “acquisitive metropolis”, having “realized that he would never know” the people about him; Neil Jordan, *Collected Fiction* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 10, 14.

⁶² Colin Coulter, “Introduction” to *The End of Irish History? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, ed. Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003), p. 3.

⁶³ Dermot Bolger, *Invisible Dublin: A Journey through Dublin’s Suburbs* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1991), p. 12.

sense of homelessness, being socially and culturally unmoored in an alien Ireland. It represents the political rot that was beginning to emerge in media revelations of the time, when “the sense that politics was a corrupt affair, peopled by self-serving members of the bourgeoisie”, had “accumulated to public life”.⁶⁴

Bolger draws a parallel between these revelations on a political level and those of another kind. The Republic’s aversion to disclosure in sexual matters was illustrated in the extreme by the Granard Grotto incident of 1984 and the Kerry Babies’ scandal of the following year. These and other controversial punctures in the edifice of public morality – particularly in the area of clerical child sexual abuse – shattered confidence in church and state.⁶⁵ Ferriter observes that the following decade was a time of revelations, heralding a “growing awareness of many of the failures in independent Ireland”, and Bolger creates the sense that Ireland’s dam of secrets was about to burst.⁶⁶ In his novel *The Woman’s Daughter* (1987), which concerns a Finglas girl born of an incestuous relationship and hidden by her mother from society, he delved beyond the closed door of sexual taboos. In *The Journey Home*, his graphic images of sexual perversity are even more arresting, coagulating both major strands of revelations – the sexual and the political – into a caustic indictment of the failures of Irish society.

Cultural fragmentation: “All twisted up in our heads”

Like Brown, he stresses working-class Dublin’s accommodation of mass cultural influences, but Bolger’s protagonists are trapped between two cultures, one old and rural, the other new, urban and increasingly cosmopolitan. Whereas Brown had evidently enjoyed the authentic, organic working-class traditions he so enthusiastically documented, Bolger’s characters come to loathe their cultural heritage. They live in an alienated, individualistic Ireland, one Bolger had documented in the dystopian *Night*

⁶⁴ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 86.

⁶⁵ As Ferriter also comments, “the [abortion] campaigns of the 1980s graphically highlighted the tendency in Ireland towards denial”; Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2004), p. 717. In 1984 a 15-year-old died during childbirth at a grotto to the Virgin Mary in Granard, Co. Longford and in 1985 the case of another hidden pregnancy and infanticide came to light in the Kerry Babies’ scandal. Both cases highlighted the code of secrecy surrounding extra-marital childbirth and led to a wider national debate on the issue. See Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, pp. 715-716.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 664.

Shift (1985), when, in a bus scene that seems almost a direct counterblast to Brown's depiction of the Kimmage bus camaraderie, Donal recalls how "two schoolboys had hurled a seat down the stairs, laughing at the top of their voices", but now "nobody looked up from their newspapers" and "nobody cared".⁶⁷ This was a changed city, a more alienated, less knowable social space, and *The Journey Home* emphasises the transformed, increasingly international character of working-class youth culture.

While he lives "among the hens and barking dogs" of his father's *rus in urbe* oasis – the council house his father attempts to annex to his native rural Ireland – Hano, or "Francy" as he is termed by his country parents, can not "belong" to their outdated rural world (*JH*, 11). He feels that "each walk home from school by the new shopping arcades, each programme on the television" is "thrusting" him "into [his] own time" (*JH*, 11). Photographs of rock stars are hidden "like [they are] pornographic pictures" and the names of English soccer players are scrawled on copybooks with a feeling of "betrayal" (*JH*, 11). The family itself is cut adrift, with very little sense of familiarity of intimacy amongst them in the novel. This foreshadows the kind of utterly dystopian inter-generational relationship Mark O'Rowe depicts in *Howie the Rookie* (1999) in which the dysfunctional Rookie Lee gets revenge for his father's abandonment of the family home by having sex with "the dirty jezebel [who] stole the oul'fella from us" himself.⁶⁸ In Neville Thompson's *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (1997), there is scant communication between the generations in a working-class suburb, with one of the main characters, Jackie, noting that her boyfriend "never talked about" his mother, and despite them being in a year-long relationship, "he had never been to my house, I had never been to his". Later on, Jackie has her first "real conversation" with her mother when her own marriage breaks down.⁶⁹

Such alienation in family life is paralleled in Bolger's novel by alienation from the state. Just as his father's domestic world is increasingly outmoded, Hano finds the society about him is an anachronism in the modern world. When Shay and Hano speak of school, and their "monstrous thug of a vice-principal", with his "array of canes" and "tricolour flown from the mast", it seems as if he is "from another century" (*JH*, 9).

⁶⁷ Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 27.

⁶⁸ Mark O'Rowe, *Howie the Rookie* (London: Nick Hern, 1999), p. 30.

⁶⁹ Neville Thompson, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1998), p. 46, 180.

The powerful image of the teacher, who “drilled behind” (*JH*, 376) his students with a 1798 pike, illustrates both the epistemic violence of a suffocating national culture and its anachronistic bizarreness — rather in the manner that Miss Watkins’ “bata”, which she uses to point out each word on the 1916 Proclamation, suggests a dated patriotism’s maintenance through epistemic and physical violence in Roddy Doyle’s *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993). The “ardent Gael”, Mr. O’Rourke’s, intoning of Irish in James Plunkett’s short story “Weep for Our Pride” (1977) is equally accompanied by the habitual “ferocious crack” of his leather.⁷⁰ Such educational practices suggest the indoctrination of children is an increasingly arduous task, and that the Ireland it attempts to inculcate is far removed from their urban reality. In bitter tones during a rural foray, Hano relates that “places like this were meant to be more Irish than the streets I was born in”:

It was weird, all twisted up in our heads, wanting to blow up the Brits and following their football clubs. All the teachers with bog accents talking about Iosagan and Peig like this glorious shagging kingdom you were excluded from. (*JH*, 195)

Ireland’s introversion has accompanied the isolation of its working-class. Its repressive culture, its attempts to beat back the tide of modernity, causes proletarian urbanites to rebel. Hano’s father is even threatened by pop music, standing in his son’s bedroom “examining a record sleeve, his face troubled and then angry”, but when Hano thrashes violently at the overgrowth in their back garden, with “every blow” becoming “like an act of finality, a foretaste of separations to come”, he violently asserts his refusal to submit to the old Ireland that his father represents, repeating Christy Brown’s Oedipal metaphor (*JH*, 170, 17). After setting fire to the overgrowth, he feels “finally severed from the life of that terrace”, relating that he has “watched [his] childhood burn” (*JH*, 18). Implicitly, he is erasing the last traces of the rural world in an act of cathartic violence.

Representing the Repressed: “Both menacing and menaced”

⁷⁰ Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 20; James Plunkett, “Weep for Our Pride”, in *James Plunkett: Collected Short Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2000), p. 86.

An anecdote of the Plunketts' Machiavellian bid for political power in the 1960s is emblematic of middle-class Ireland's reconstitution of historical narrative to suppress the working class. The "fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising" – a landmark event in the history of the Irish Republic – is recalibrated as a landmark in the consolidation of corrupt business interests. It is "the making of" the Plunkett brothers, who comically take advantage of its outpouring of nationalist sentiment by having their ailing grandfather "dragged up" for the occasion. An elderly war hero from Mayo, Eoin Plunkett is presented by his grandsons as evidence of their republican credentials. Although, as a "confirmed socialist", he had "joined with Connolly's men" in the workers' Irish Citizens' Army, and later fought on the socialist side in the Spanish Civil War, the proletarian rebel is ironically enlisted as a form of cultural currency for his capitalist grandsons.

His working-class politics are silenced by the opportunistic pair who, "each evening before they took him on their rounds of the estates" of Finglas, "would remove his false teeth so that the people mistook his tirades against the smugness of the new state for the standard pieties they expected" (*JH*, 214). The rebel grandfather is a cartoonish device, but he is also an emblem of the disaffection of the dispossessed with the Free State, and the disaffection of rebels like Lar Redmond's father, in his memoir *Show us the Moon* (1988), who had played their part in winning "freedom [...] all the freedom in the world to starve".⁷¹ Eoin Plunkett's legacy is repressed and revised to bolster his acquisitive, bourgeois grandsons' efforts to take power — in an analogy for the convenient historical revisionism conducted by the *nouveau* elites in Irish politics. But poignantly, Eoin also dies "as the first bombs exploded on Derry's streets", underscoring both the failure of the Republic to resolve colonial and class conflicts, and the ultimate folly of trying to repress the truth of the past (*JH*, 214).

The Plunkett brothers – Pascal the politician and Patrick the businessman – who represent the alliance of both spheres in mutually beneficial, bourgeois corruption, are

⁷¹ Lar Redmond, *Show us the Moon* (Dingle: Brandon, 1988), p. 11. Redmond uses the analogy of Dáil deputies raising "a laugh by laying bunches of rhubarb, carrots and cauliflowers at Queen Victoria's statue on Leinster Lawn" to illustrate the growing gap between their tokenistic anti-Britishness and the material realities of working class life that they were seemingly oblivious to; these "jolly little offerings" would "have been swiped in two seconds had her statue been in the Liberties" he surmises. *Ibid.* 12.

used to link the social and cultural degeneracy of Irish life with sexual repression. Such repression is projected into all areas of Irish life in *The Journey Home*, which, like *Down All the Days*, plays out social problems on the psychological plain. Bolger associates “rural traditionalism” – which, as McCarthy observes, is culturally “upstairs and implicitly dominant” in the novel – with hidden sexual perversity and repression.⁷² The Plunkett brothers personify a monstrously Freudian “return of the repressed” in the twisted, violent and bizarre perversion of their thwarted sexual lives.

A rapacious gay sexuality is repeatedly associated with fear, danger and corruption. The Phoenix Park, a notorious meeting point for male prostitutes, is “dangerous at that hour when furtive men sought each other” and Hano recounts how, “often their footsteps would follow yours, you’d glance over your shoulder to see their eyes, both menacing and menaced” (*JH*, 149). This inferred homosexual menace achieves its full realisation in Pascal’s lust for Hano. Moving from the “veiled but unmistakable dropping of innuendoes”, Pascal’s suggestive overtures culminate in a graphic and violent rape (*JH*, 224-225). Having pinned Hano to the floor, he molests him, his “insistent, animal-like” voice repeating a lustful mantra, “I want! I want! I want!” (*JH*, 225, 226) A nauseous scene follows in which Pascal forces Hano to perform oral sex, while the latter feels “vomit about to rise” (*JH*, 226). But society’s role in cultivating Pascal’s perversity is revealed some pages later. “Nobody ever let me be who I am. How could I ...” he trails off (*JH*, 229).

Pascal proceeds to narrate the tale of how, in his youth, he had suffered a homophobic attack on a building site after a gay liaison with another worker. He explains how the attack affected his mindset from then on: “That taught me Francis, taught me gentleness was a luxury for the likes of me”. Corresponding with the associations of capitalism and repression in the election episode, he then links his own sexual repression with his success as a businessman: “I switched cities [after the attack], another site, worked my back off, rose to foreman, never let anyone see me weak again. Then I undercut, got contracts myself.” (*JH*, 227) Sublimation of secret sexual feelings fuels a ruthless capitalist greed, and the mantra “I want! I want! I want!”

⁷² Conor McCarthy, “Ideology and Geography in Dermot Bolger’s *The Journey Home*”, *Irish University Review*, 27.1 (Spring/Summer 1997), p. 103. However, McCarthy very forcefully argues the political inconsistency of Bolger’s polarisation of nationalism and modernisation; see *Ibid.* pp. 103-105.

encapsulates both. As Linden Peach notes, “menace, theft and violence are not simply signs of the underbelly of Dublin” in *The Journey Home*, “but interleaved with negative aspects of capitalism: greed, exploitation and selfishness.”⁷³ By sacrificing his identity, Pascal takes what he “couldn’t have by force”, but spends his life trying to “to bury the poverty of his youth” (*JH*, 230, 264).

This ‘burial’ of powerful traumas and its consequences is paralleled with his brother, Patrick’s, encounter in Amsterdam with Shay. There, the politician feeds Shay to the point of gluttony in a restaurant, and then pleads with his surfeited guest to “do it on me ... [defecate] on my face, on my chest, please” (*JH*, 337). Graphically, Shay listens to Plunkett “squirm to get his face directly below” him in a bath (*JH*, 338). He has “sold” himself in engaging in the act, for which he was paid, and has “never felt clean again”, suffering, with Hano “to carry the sins of the Plunketts” (*JH*, 338, 339, 254). The scatological act represents the politician’s association of sex with humiliation, his need to confront repressed feelings of filth, weakness and abjection in order to become aroused. The Plunketts repress who they really are (grandsons of a working-class socialist, and gay), in order to achieve success in bourgeois society (as capitalist and politician). This repression, Bolger’s symbolism infers, results in and emerges from a perverse society.

Hano’s murder of his rapist is a cathartic act that represents a release from the clutches of both sexual *and* social oppression. “Everything in his house made me feel unclean except the blood that was caking my flesh,” Hano says, depicting the brutal slaying as a purgative liberation (*JH*, 384). The murder is also a figurative attack on the accumulations of affluence: “I started pulling out the suits and the neatly folded shirts and jumpers. I was filled with fury as I ripped them, as though his possessions were mocking me” (*JH*, 384). He sets fire to the house, and just as the earlier burning of his father’s garden overgrowth reflected a rejection of the rural ideal, this later fire represents his release from social trammels, hinted at by the “bondage magazines” that fall from Plunkett’s bed, and remembered in Pascal Plunkett’s stare, “which seemed to say: *Soon I will own you too*” (*JH*, 385, 163). Hano refuses to be owned and in doing so

⁷³ Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel – Critical Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 42.

refuses subjection to the orthodoxies that the Plunketts embody. Juxtaposed with the sub-plot of Mooney, an office manager's sexual harassment of a young trainee, the story of Shay and Hano's abuse at the hands of the Plunketts is part of a caustic attack on the sham morality of bourgeois Ireland (see *JH*, 301-311). As Shay comments, "when something is dying it rots all over" (*JH*, 366). For Bolger, this technique is more about consciousness-raising than strict verisimilitude. Disdainful of the Irish people's tolerance for political corruption, he felt, on writing *The Journey Home*, that he had to shock his readers into recognition of a malaise they had come to accept: "As a writer I had to find a way to suggest [political corruption], to make people look up".⁷⁴

However, whatever sympathy one has with this exasperation, it is notable that sexual perversion is, in the main, homosexual in the novel, and that homosexuality is repeatedly associated with political corruption and capitalist exploitation. True, at the more subtle level, there is a suggestion that Shay and Hano's "intimacy" is something more than friendship on a number of occasions — that Hano in particular is repressing unwanted feelings (*JH*, 5). A work colleague questions, "are the pair of them bent or what?" and Hano's romantic characterisation of their relationship, which is "as close to love as I had ever known", hints at something more than platonic friendship (*JH*, 95). Shay is Hano's "hero", his "other half", but there is never an outright expression of romantic love, the suggestion being enough to rouse curiosity, the omission enough to underscore the code of silence surrounding homosexuality (*JH*, 303). But at a time when "homosexual acts" were unlawful in the Republic — and when many were actively campaigning for their decriminalisation — it is questionable if Bolger's consciousness-raising efforts were progressive in this regard.⁷⁵ Such reservations are compounded by the fact that homosexuality is "a very rare theme in working-class

⁷⁴ Interview with the present author, 24 August 2007.

⁷⁵ Damien Shortt contends that because Pascal's attack emerges from self-repression, and is thus an effect of social conservatism, Bolger is saved from the charge of homophobia. However, this argument elides the fact that homosexuality is overwhelmingly associated with capitalist greed, mental illness and sheer malevolence in the novel. See Damien Shortt, "Dermot Bolger: Gender Performance and Society" in *New Voices in Irish Literary Criticism – Ireland in Theory*, ed. Cathy McGlynn and Paula Murphy (New York: Mellen, 2007), pp. 163-164.

writing”, and Bolger misses a rare opportunity to treat it with the complexity and respect it deserves.⁷⁶

Bolger’s hyperbole: “I’m exaggerating, but it was some such shite”

In representing Ireland’s development from “*Gemeinschaft*” to “*Gesellschaft*” – organic to corporate community – Bolger’s failures of subtlety and coherence diminish the strength of his tirade.⁷⁷ Declan Kiberd sees “something overdetermined” in the novelist’s attack, making it “considerably less subversive than it sometimes took itself to be”:

In its underlying sentimentality about its youthful subjects as victims of social tyranny, it grossly exaggerated the malevolence and the importance of priests, teachers, politicians.⁷⁸

Indeed, despite Hano’s advice that “it’s a mistake to ever get sentimental”, the sheer emotionalism of Bolger’s attacks on Irish life, throughout the novel, leaves his message seeming somewhat overcooked (*JH*, 329). Patricia Craig summates that “at his best, Bolger is a forceful social critic, but his portrayal [of Dublin in *The Journey Home*] might have been fashioned with greater sharpness, less bludgeoning”.⁷⁹ The text itself is surfeited with melodramatic sequences and overwrought symbolism. His didacticism is ever-present and obtuse. The control the Plunkett family exercise on business and politics in Finglas, for example, reads like a bad conspiracy theory. Plunkett auctioneers, Plunkett Stores, Plunkett Motors, Plunkett Undertakers – “the crucifixion” of Plunkett enterprise – plus, for good measure, their “name on every second shop

⁷⁶ Ian Haywood, *Working Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote, 1997), p. 130.

⁷⁷ Conor McCarthy uses these terms in arguing that there is a latent and hypocritical ruralism in Bolger’s somewhat confused retreat from modernity (while simultaneously pretending to champion the urban world); McCarthy, “Ideology and Geography in Dermot Bolger’s *The Journey Home*”, p. 110. Michael Böss criticises McCarthy and Kiberd, in turn, for their negative commentary on Bolger, postulating (both intriguingly and preposterously, in my view) that their contributions are evidence that “Irish literary criticism is strongly [and wrongly] political compared to literary criticism in the rest of Europe”; Michael Böss, “Home from Europe: Modernity and the Reappropriation of the Past in Bolger’s Early Novels”, in *Engaging Modernity – Readings of Irish Politics, Culture and Literature at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Michael Böss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), p. 165.

⁷⁸ Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 609.

⁷⁹ Patricia Craig, “Ireland”, in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 234.

front”, is a grossly exaggerated departure from any monopoly on commercial affairs in any Dublin suburb (*JH*, 100, 313). Justin’s (Patrick’s son’s) depiction as “the angel of death” is clichéd (*JH*, 107); the “Nazi salutes” that mock him behind his back are part of an inflated pattern of caricature (*JH*, 108, 116). A comparison Bolger uses between young Dubliners and victims of Nazism/fascism on a number of occasions in the novel is equally belaboured, a “tasteless absurdity” (*JH*, 15, 327).⁸⁰ McCarthy argues that the “overblown polemical linkage of Irish state-nationalism and totalitarianism” does Bolger a disservice.⁸¹ Pascal Plunkett is, indirectly at least, responsible for Hano’s father’s untimely death, as he is “afraid to go near a doctor [...] You know how Pascal Plunkett is about sick days” (*JH*, 150). The attack by gardaí on Shay is, inevitably and surreptitiously orchestrated by Pascal – and his death is Justin, his nephew’s, handiwork. The Plunkett trio are the Prosperos of Finglas, a suburb refashioned as an autocracy; Hano’s claim that “to hundreds like my mother, [Pascal] was a deity who controlled their lives” is patently outlandish (*JH*, 263-264). Like a caricatured villain of the Boucicault variety, Pascal is even glad that people with degrees are sweeping floors, leaving power to “just me and my kind now” (cue the villainous guffaw, *JH*, 192).

Politics is artificially pervasive in Dubliners’ ordinary lives. Hano suggests his father’s vote will “live on” after his death as part of the cemetery registration campaign conducted by “the [ubiquitous] party” (*JH*, 163-164). A farmer later votes using his dead brother’s ballot, again for the “Soldiers of Density” (a trite travesty of Fianna Fáil’s English translation, the “Soldiers of Destiny” *JH*, 318). Two “big farmers” also force their workers to vote for their cousin during the election campaign (*JH*, 176). When Bolger claims that the ruling regime is “clearing the country of debris”, exiling its youth and building golf courses, leaving “a modest number of natives” to work in “service industries”, there is anger, but overblown hysteria as well (*JH*, 107). When Hano worriedly ponders whether an old woman friend has survived a local crime wave, there is outlandish fear: “Lately there had been raids on old people throughout the West,” he ruminates, “it was an act of faith to imagine she could have somehow

⁸⁰ McCarthy, “Ideology and Geography in Dermot Bolger’s *The Journey Home*”, p. 104.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 108.

survived" (*JH*, 351). The outlook he presents us with "loses some of its impact because it is simply too exaggerated [...] it is too outrageous to be taken seriously".⁸² Bolger's late and rather clumsy attempt to rescue himself from accusations of homophobia, contrasting the good gays, as it were, with the bad gays (i.e. the Plunketts), is so cumbersome that it even exaggerates his own inflated insensitivity. He smuggles a "gay couple" who befriend Shay into the text late in the novel, relating, with contrived back-peddling, that, "watching the lads, relaxed and open as they leaned against each other on the sofa and laughed with Shay, it seemed impossible that men such as the Plunkett brothers had ever existed" (*JH*, 348).

Nonetheless, there is also a sense that form and theme combine in the discourse of repression that frames this novel. In his analysis of the Plunketts, of sexual containment and capitalism's sublimation of character, Bolger emphasises that repression only intensifies that which it represses; like Shelley's spurned creation in *Frankenstein* (1818), it is all the more monstrous and distorted for the attempts to spurn it. Like the dysfunctional young men who kidnap a bishop in Roddy Doyle's *Brownbread* (1992), the repressed turn on the orthodoxy that represses with a horrific fantasy, and an argument that retrieves some of Bolger's credibility in the face of his constant overstatement is that his amplification is effective hyperbole, that his embellishment is exaggeration for effect — reflexively enacting the kind of excessive outpouring of repressed feelings that the novel so often depicts. This is something John Ardagh suggests when he describes *The Journey Home* as "a kind of fable, a psychic history of Dublin in the 1980s".⁸³ The sheer, exaggerated aura of disenchantment is so provocative that it seems to directly address the community it represents. Indeed, when Justin's father, Patrick, delivers a speech, it goes so over-the-top that Hano actually admits, "okay, okay, maybe I've embellished it slightly. I'm exaggerating, but it was some such shite" (*JH*, 109).

⁸² Ulrike Paschel, *No mean city? The image of Dublin in the novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle, and Val Mulkerens* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1998), p. 46. However, Paschel proceeds to contradict himself, later arguing that Bolger's Dublin "underbelly" is depicted with "brutal honesty and realism", p. 62.

⁸³ John Ardagh, *Ireland and the Irish: Portrait of a Changing Society* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 248.

Bolger suggests that Hano's retelling takes poetic license, according with Jim O'Hanlon's contention that "one of the central tensions" in Bolger's work is "that tension between poetry and realism".⁸⁴ He indeed admits that the novel's assembly of caricatures "are not particularly realistic". "The Plunketts were never meant to be real people," he cautions, pointing to the influence of Italian communist writer and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini's controversial film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975).⁸⁵ The Italian's work depicted fierce, outlandish scenes of mutilation and sexual abuse, linking them with the last days of Mussolini's fascist regime. Deranged sex was presented in a deliberately removed and unerotic manner in the film. Bolger's scene in which local representative bourgeois degenerates – a doctor, a chemist, a draper, "a few big farmers with sons at college" and "the local councillor with his fainne" – rape "retarded girls" in an asylum is clearly based on Pasolini's representation of a duke, bishop, magistrate and politician kidnapping and raping young men and women at a palace (*JH*, 69-70). For Pasolini, the sexual abuse was a metaphor for a degraded society, for the dehumanisation that occurred under fascist rule. Bolger argues that he too employed sexual debasement to parallel ends. "I used that sort of *deviant* sexuality, it's not *gay* sexuality. I don't think the couples are gay," he argues. The Plunketts "were vampires, they were like the undead [...] They were metaphors," he points, linking his dark surrealism with the Dublin gothic tradition, and in particular Sheridan Le Fanu.⁸⁶ "I wanted to suggest a culture of political corruption that was prevalent at the time. I mean, everybody knew that Charles Haughey was corrupt at the time, and *people didn't mind* [...] It was trying to shock people." With this intention, he "deliberately made [the novel] slightly cartoonish".⁸⁷

If such a technique can be argued for, it is nonetheless somewhat botched by its overuse. Bolger is adamant that his depiction is veracious in a selective sense, stressing that "the interesting thing about *The Journey Home* is the fact that there is nothing in it

⁸⁴ Jim O'Hanlon, "Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Jim O'Hanlon", in *Theatre talk: voices of Irish theatre practitioners*, ed. Lilian Chambers (Dublin: Carysfort, 2000), p. 30.

⁸⁵ Interview with the present author, 24 August 2007. *Salò* was itself based on the book *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785) by the French writer Marquis de Sade.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

that didn't happen to somebody I knew at the time of writing".⁸⁸ Yet, while "every part of the book happened", he concedes that "this does not make it realistic".⁸⁹ Indeed, when I met Bolger for an interview, he had recently reread *The Journey Home* for the first time since 1990, due to its impending publication in a new US edition. On this reading, Bolger found the work "quite scattergun". In particular, the scenes surrounding the asylum were "very caricaturing" — "even though it was based on something somebody told me". "There are bits in there I would like to take out," he conceded, but the temptation to change the original work was curtailed by his sense that it was, of its time and place, an authentic, if somewhat indiscriminate, expression of youthful exasperation. "It's an angry book and it's a young person's book and therefore parts of it are going to be a load of bollocks."⁹⁰

In the final analysis, this assertion of the novel's historical value may be the most convincing argument for its enduring relevance. The intentional nature of Bolger's consciously unrealistic "style as cynicism" does not make the novel, at times, any less tedious for the reader.⁹¹ But there are flashes of literary brilliance that presage his startling success as a writer. As Neil Corcoran observes, *The Journey Home* "has its melodramatic elements; but these pale in comparison with what it manages in the way of analysis and suggestiveness".⁹² Like Brown, if he shouts sometimes it is because of the deafening silence about him. Finglas is a place where "all the defiant strength seemed to have ebbed from the village, the ordinary courage with which people survived in the face of indifference. There was just the anxiety left ..." (*JH* 368). Working-class areas are vilified in the media, in which journalists style Finglas "a suburb of Beirut", but the real place is "a thousand miles removed from the columns of news-print" (*JH*, 109). Working-class people are sometimes too disaffected to challenge their subjection to this epistemic violence. Bolger's narrator notes the graffitied inscription of "FUCK O" on a wall, but adds that the writer was "too apathetic to finish

⁸⁸ Qtd. in "Interview" with Ulrike Paschel, *No Mean City?*, p. 143.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Interview with the present author, 24 August 2007.

⁹¹ This term is taken from the unpublished manuscript of a conference paper delivered by Shaun Richards in 1992; qtd. in McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland*, p. 149. McCarthy uses it to argue that Bolger's backlash against the Republic is "just as partial as anything purveyed by Yeats or Synge"; *Ibid.*

⁹² Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 127.

the message” (*JH*, 250). Hano feels “a sense of the suburb as being like a creature who’d switched itself off” (*JH*, 30-31).

What the author’s anti-representational exaggeration wishes to achieve is a reaction, a provocation, to impel his community, beyond such apathy, to realise its own potential and reassess the corruption about it, to understand its subjection to political malpractice and social marginalisation. The novel is attempting to develop class consciousness in displaced suburbs. As Fintan O’Toole has put it, Bolger’s role is to represent “new places [...] places without history”, but it is also about warning their inhabitants.⁹³ His foretelling of apocalyptic collapse, of industrial “contamination”, worker “exodus” (*JH*, 388) and economic meltdown is a consciousness-raising, if hysteric, wake-up call to his community, an attempt to make “the cry of an exile” in Irish society — something that other writers, such as Jim Sheridan, had also attempted. In *Mobile Homes* (1976) for instance, there is a premonitory foreboding that “everything is going to crumble”.⁹⁴ By correlating sexual iniquity with corruption, he articulates a volcanic outpouring of disaffection, and while in parts his novel is marred by overstatement, the enduring power and popularity of the work is evidence itself that it hit a raw nerve.

Dublin “with the lace curtains off”

Both Brown and Bolger write provocatively in an attempt to stir their readers from an ideological slumber. Brown courted criticism as well for his effusive anger, “often interpreted by others as a deadly power, unleashed unfairly and certainly in ways that made others very uncomfortable”.⁹⁵ The discomfort with sexuality in Irish society becomes the novelists’ “deadly power”, a motif for that society’s fundamental discomfort with modernity. Brown’s novel had “pointed out the hypocrisies of the Irish culture in its attitude towards religion, sex and tradition”.⁹⁶ In his own assessment, he had wished to write “about Dublin working-class life as I know it, with no great plot or

⁹³ Qtd. in Martine Pelletier, “Dermot Bolger’s Drama”, in *Irish Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort, 2000), p. 252.

⁹⁴ Dermot Bolger, “At Work”, in *Internal Exiles* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1986), p. 9; Jim Sheridan, *Mobile Homes* (Dublin: Irish Writers’ Co-operative, 1978), p. 25.

⁹⁵ Lane, “A Theology of Anger When Living with Disability”, p. 183.

⁹⁶ Hambleton, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot*, p. 191-192.

even melodramatic situations". His novel would depend "ultimately upon its relation to life and its concern with the truth of that life".⁹⁷ This was a Dublin "with the lace curtains off", as William Trevor put it, "a snarling, yelling world in which the language may be good to listen to but yet is the language of sadness".⁹⁸

Bolger also uses his exaggerated attacks on orthodoxy to forcefully render the social and cultural deterioration of Dublin life, and create an eerie sense of imminent social liquidation. But whereas Brown envisages a birth, Bolger foresees social cataclysm. The authors meet in how they portray Ireland's social and cultural degeneracy metaphorically through sexual motifs, and in this they parallel other authors in this thesis who use their work to represent what Brown terms "the unbound side of reality", that which has been repressed by social norms. Peach sees this cultural indeterminacy as the central concern of Bolger's *oeuvre*: "Bolger's novels are invariably based on men and women haunted by absence, and they encapsulate Bolger's large concern with the in-between position of being 'not there' and 'not that' – with the trace itself."⁹⁹ In not fitting in to Irish society, both writers' protagonists are representatives for its repressed side; their class itself, like sex and modernity, has been repressed by stifling social norms. Both chime with the fundamental preoccupations of writers in this thesis. Their "exile" (*JH*, 387), as Hano puts it, parallels that of a class whose welfare has been neglected, yet whose marginalisation all the more forcefully recommends its place at the forefront of Ireland's narrative of modernisation.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 127.

⁹⁸ William Trevor, "The snarling, yelling world of real Dublin", *Irish Times Saturday Review*, 16 May 1970, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel*, p. 126.

Chapter 7: Revising the Revolution – Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry*, Historiography, Politics and Proletarian Consciousness

Lord Mayor. Yeth, yeth, boyth; but remember what the Purple Priest said: an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay.

1st Workman. To hell with the Purple Priest.

Lord Mayor. Remember the example of our ancient warrior forefathers: strength in their arms, truth on their lips, and purity in their hearts.

1st Workman. Well, we’re the young warriors, and we’re different.

2nd Workman. A helluva lot different.¹

Like Seán O’Casey’s socialist workmen in *The Star Turns Red* (1940), Roddy Doyle’s republican rebel, Henry Smart, is “a helluva lot different” from the “ancient warrior forefathers” revered by Irish nationalists. An unconventional, irreverent depiction of the working-class hero, the protagonist of *A Star Called Henry* (1999) is also pitted against the status quo of Irish cultural nationalism, challenging deeply ingrained notions of Irishness and the nobility or wisdom of political martyrdom. However, in this chapter I will argue that if Doyle’s *fin de siècle* novel challenges these and other nationalist discourses with a radically unconventional, proletarian history “from below”, it also glibly reasserts many debilitating, hackneyed historical discourses “from above”. This hugely successful work continues to assert themes of marginalisation and counter-hegemony that have characterised depictions of Dublin’s proletariat in the works explored in this thesis. It rearticulates the paradox of an urban community simultaneously eschewed by and central to the development of the Irish Republic. But Doyle also questions the relevance of political action generally to working-class life. At the end of the century, and as the most compelling elaboration of Doyle’s literary and political ideology, this novel provides for a useful survey of some of the themes that

¹ Seán O’Casey, *Collected Plays Vol. 2* (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 331.

characterise the work of this thesis and the most prominent modern author its subject matter concerns.

“Revisionists and ‘revisionists’”: The Troubles with historiography and class

Doyle’s questioning of the dominant ideologies in Irish culture dovetails with the vexatious debate over historiographic “revisionism”, which continues to provoke crucial interchanges in the development of Irish Studies. Cognisant that the necessarily terse reflection that follows cannot possibly do full justice to the nuances of this gargantuan debate, I nonetheless wish to argue, firstly, that contemporary revisionism has become more of a political intervention than a historiographical precept and, secondly, that this political intervention buttresses anti-nationalist concepts of history. This argument will inform my analysis of *A Star*, which finds that Doyle’s own revisionist stance problematises his outwardly socialist pose. In positing the ultimately misled involvement of Henry Smart in the national liberation struggle, which is refashioned as a capitalist coup, Doyle’s revision of the uprising undermines the possibility of working-class political activism as a vehicle for social change.

In the words of one eminent historian, “clearly, there are revisionists and ‘revisionists’”.² It is widely recognised that Irish historical revisionism has evolved considerably since its inception, and for many the new “revisionism” has been far more politically motivated than its 1930s progenitor.³ While early revisionism sought to professionalise Irish historical analysis by grounding it in academic principles of sound research and objective analysis, later “revisionism” has in part subverted this methodology through tendentious, overtly anti-nationalist interventions. When Theodore William Moody and Robert Dudley Edwards included a special category entitled “Historical Revisions” in their seminal journal, *Irish Historical Studies*, in

² M.A.G. Ó Tuathaigh, “Irish Historical ‘Revisionism’: State of the Art or Ideological Project?” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), p. 321.

³ Brendan Bradshaw, for instance, conceptualises three phases to revisionism in his essay “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland”, in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 122-145.

1938, it was certainly a courageous decision in academic terms. The periodical would refute received wisdom and widely-held assumptions regarding well-known figures and events, not by resorting to other unfounded assumptions, but by analysing the raw data of new historical and archival research. In the interests of probity, Moody, Edwards and their contributors would sear through mythic and misleading versions of Irish history with the dispassionate lance of rigorous and principled academic research. Historians like F.S.L. Lyons, Conor Cruise O'Brien and D.A. Thornley would show how the predominance of constitutional movements in Irish nationalist history refuted what John Hutchinson terms "the republican conception of an apostolic succession of revolutionary leaders from Tone to Pearse".⁴ This work showed how common perceptions of Irish history were being distorted by the process of state hegemonic formation in post-colonial Ireland. Considering its original intent, it is therefore all the more disappointing that modern-day, second-wave revisionism is a much more slippery phenomenon than its precursor and has adopted a stridently political, biased tone.

If early revisionism embarked upon an "innocent" journey of charting historical topography – correcting, revising and reinterpreting its contours according to objective data – later revisionism sought to change the political landscape itself. Early revisionism endeavoured to distinguish between good history "which is a matter of facing the facts of the Irish past, however painful some of them may be" and "mythology" which is "a way of refusing to face" them.⁵ But subsequent to the resumption of conflict in Northern Ireland post-1968, revisionists became more concerned with "the dire past still overhanging the dire present" and the expedient "need to go back to fundamentals and consider once more the meaning of independence [...] revolution [...] nationality [...] history".⁶ While both revisionisms sought to question established metanarratives, the latter's "present-mindedness" – its engagement

⁴ John Hutchinson, "Irish Nationalism", in *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 102.

⁵ T.W. Moody, "Irish history and Irish mythology", in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Conor Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), p. 86. See also Ciarán Brady, "Constructive and Instrumental": The Dilemma of Ireland's First 'New Historians'," *Ibid.* pp. 3-31.

⁶ F.S.L. Lyons, "The Meaning of Independence", in *The Irish Parliamentary Tradition*, ed. Brian Farrell (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), p. 223. In his essay, "Irish Historical 'Revisionism': State of the Art or Ideological Project?" in *Interpreting Irish History*, p. 311, Ó Tuathaigh also notes the explosive effects of the conflict post-1969 on revisionist discourse.

with contemporary political concerns – was an explicit reaction to disquieting modern events, signalling its shift into a new, more overtly politicised role.⁷ This engagement would become a constant in new revisionism's moral and political compass, its dial thereafter pointing north — to the carnage that again made historiography and ideology matters of life and death.

Moody set the pace with his multivolume *New History of Ireland*, which, although first mooted in 1962, did not begin to come to fruition until the end of the 1970s.⁸ But other second-wave works that sought to rationalise the contemporary political crisis would begin to emerge in the meantime, such as Owen Dudley Edwards' tellingly titled *The Sins of Our Fathers: The Roots of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (1970), followed two years later by two major monographs that would establish the politicised trend: future Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald's *Towards a New Ireland* (1972) and future unionist Conor Cruise O'Brien's *States of Ireland* (1972). Both works argued that the true tradition of Irish nationalist politics was in finding an accommodation with Britain through constitutional reform — not in fighting with them for independence as the Provisional IRA was then doing. They articulated a new academic reaction against the re-emergence of a tradition of armed republicanism, which Professor T.W. Moody's compact *The Ulster Question, 1603-1973* (1974) illustrated with its division of the history of the province into two separate eras — pre- and post-Civil Rights — that weighed the previous six years heavily against the previous three hundred and sixty five. This distinctly present-minded book even offered a formula for resolution of the ongoing Northern conflict, and in so doing Moody's metacommentary was surely going beyond any objective notion of history as it is commonly understood.⁹ The book, despite its broad titular scope, was an overt challenge to modern politicians, an explicitly politicised work.

Further revisions in the epistemology of Irish nationalist history emerged with extraordinary efflorescence in the decade to come, in such works as Ian Adamson's *The*

⁷ Boyce and O'Day use this term in connection with revisionism; D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, "Introduction" to *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

⁸ Moody outlines the history of the project in T.W. Moody, "A New History of Ireland", *Irish History Studies*, XVI (1969), pp. 241-257.

⁹ T.W. Moody, *The Ulster Question: 1603-1973* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1974).

Cruithin (1974) and Leland Lyons' *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland* (1978). Later studies, like R.F. Foster's towering and controversial *Modern Ireland, 1660-1972* (1988), would establish revisionism as *the* historiographical orthodoxy in Irish studies, supplanting the predominance of the "traditional" nationalist view that had previously held sway. Some of its analysis emerged from a left-wing rejection of the sectarian aspect of the northern conflict, but as Kevin Whelan notes, "many of those active earlier in espousing these allegedly left-wing views – Paul Bew, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Eoghan Harris – have followed the logical evolution of their arguments by ending up as unionist advisors in the 1990s".¹⁰

Brendan Bradshaw's eloquent essay, "Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland" (1989), encapsulates the anti-revisionist case. While its linkage of his own stance with an admiration for the republican tradition muddies the waters between history and politics, as Paul Bew has noted, this criticism may miss Bradshaw's essential point: that "espousal of the value-free principle may simply result in practice in value-based interpretation in another guise".¹¹ Bradshaw does not eschew partisanship *per se*; his concern is with partisanship masquerading as even-handedness. Edward Said had made this crucial point in *Orientalism* (1978), when he challenged "the general liberal consensus that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not 'true knowledge')". This pretence of even-handedness is a fallacy, Said contended, used "to discredit any work for daring to violate the protocol of pretended suprapolitical objectivity".¹² While both Bradshaw and Said failed to specify any universal approach that could supplant this "protocol" of objectivity, Bradshaw's view that later revisionism has failed to live up to its stated aims is convincing.

Others show how revisionists such as Cruise O'Brien and F.S.L. Lyons shifted their analysis of key periods of Irish history towards a less nationalist and more pro-unionist stance post-1968, clearly indicating the impact of contemporary events on their

¹⁰ Kevin Whelan, "The Revisionist Debate in Ireland", *Boundary 2*, 31.1 (2004), p. 190.

¹¹ Paul Bew, "The National Question, Land, and 'Revisionism': Some reflections" in *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, p. 90. Bradshaw, "Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland", pp. 124.

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 10.

views of the past.¹³ D.G. Boyce instances as typical of the revisionist hypersensitivity to political ideology T.W. Moody's "embarrassed" attempt to attribute the discovery of militaristic sentiments, in a letter written by Michael Davitt (whom he admired), to "the state of excessive mental stimulation and physical exertion in which [Davitt] was living".¹⁴ Clearly such psychological judgements across centuries are reasoned with an eye to the ubiquitous contemporary dilemmas of political violence, part of what Whelan terms "a specific ideological response to the needs of the southern state in coming to terms with a major political crisis".¹⁵

Second-wave revisionism, then, is acutely aware of recent violence, and its interpretation of earlier violence nods towards the political present. Such a politically loaded awareness of contemporary conditions is abundantly evident in *A Star Called Henry*, and it is for this reason that I have also chosen to analyse the novel in the context of more recent cultural influences. While much of what might be termed historicist criticism of this novel has appraised it in terms of the revolutionary period it depicts, the notoriously conservative period of Irish history it presages or the (post-)modern Republic its author actually inhabits, none of it has attended to another salient context — that of "Troubles" literature and film. John Hill, Martin McLoone, Patrick Magee and others have documented the impact of the Troubles on modern perceptions of political violence in writing and film, and such a pertinent context — one that "devastated a whole society, scarring two generations of Irish people" — is indispensable to any evaluation of modern retrospectives on earlier Irish Troubles.¹⁶ *A Star Called Henry* reflects the long shadow this modern-day conflict has cast in the novel's adoption of some of the most notable tropes and themes of its milieu, as the coming analysis will show, and these inflect how Doyle portrays proletarian consciousness and agency.

¹³ Boyce, "Past and Present Revisionism and the Northern Ireland Troubles", p. 222.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 224.

¹⁵ Kevin Whelan, "Come All You Staunch Revisionists: Towards a Post-revisionist Agenda for Irish History", *Irish Reporter*, 2 (1991), p. 26.

¹⁶ John Hill, "Images of Violence", in *Cinema in Ireland*, ed. Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 147-193; Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: The British Film Institute, 2000); Patrick Magee, *Gangsters or Guerrillas? – Representations of Irish Republicans in 'Troubles Fiction'* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001); Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), p. xiii.

Poking Fun: A “shocking substitute” for history

However, if such historical significance is at play in *A Star*, it is important to note that to simply contrast its meandering, playful narrative with “objective” historical record and lambaste it for contradicting some irrefutable “reality” would be grossly unfair. Doyle’s aim was, after all, to “take liberties and mess around and poke fun” with this blatantly satiric work, to usurp reality with a “shocking substitute” — Henry’s own revealing description of himself.¹⁷ In his use of a magic realist technique, Doyle treats history with a flippant, irreverent nod towards comedy and his lively, unconventional narrative should certainly not be regarded as an attempt to achieve *conventional* verisimilitude. Critics such as Rüdiger Imhof and Brian Donnelly have all too readily dismissed *A Star* on the assumption that this was Doyle’s intention and that, in this context, the novel is simply “too good to be true”.¹⁸ Donnelly indeed finds Doyle’s magic realism trying, observing that he employs the technique selectively, that it “jars against the pervading naturalism” of the book.¹⁹ An “execrably bad novel”, Imhof admonishes, it evinces “too much Doyle codology [...] to be convincing”.²⁰ In producing some examples of how Henry Smart is, unrealistically, “physically almost perfect”, Imhof concludes that our narrator “beggars credulity”. Why, he wonders, has the novelist “seen fit to people his novel with so many grotesques”?²¹

This critique arises not from a failure on Doyle’s part to “be convincing”, but from Imhof’s own failure to grasp the logic (or anti-logic) of the novel’s experimental style (this, despite his own pioneering work on John Banville’s experimentalism).²² “Grotesques” are of course integral to a genre typified by a mingling or juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skilful time shifts, labyrinthine narratives and

¹⁷ Stephen J. Costello, *The Irish Soul in Dialogue* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2001), p. 90; Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 1; page numbers hereafter cited in the main text in parentheses.

¹⁸ Rüdiger Imhof, *The Modern Irish Novel: Irish Novelists After 1945* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2002), p. 263.

¹⁹ Brian Donnelly, “Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO”, *Irish University Review*, 30.1 (Spring/Summer 2000), pp. 17-31.

²⁰ Imhof, *The Modern Irish Novel*, p. 256; *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²¹ *Ibid.* 264.

²² See Rüdiger Imhof, *John Banville: A Critical Introduction* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1989).

plots, and instances of the horrific or inexplicable. Improbable occurrences are treated as rationally as more ordinary events, just as they might be in a conventional fairy-tale, and while it is difficult to fully define magic realism as a genre, its potential for “poking fun”, for inspiring iconoclasm and parody, is obvious. Not only does it distort legitimised reality, it unashamedly juxtaposes improbable narratives with probable or widely accepted ones – something that Imhof and Donnelly fail to acknowledge.

Salman Rushdie employed this ambiguity in *Midnight's Children* (1981) — on which some of the episodes in Doyle's novel are obviously based. In Rushdie's work, protagonist Saleem Sinai's unlikely adventures – in the India-Pakistan War, the later 1971 war between East and West Pakistan, and his imprisonment under the Indira Gandhi regime – contain magical elements. These include Saleem's telepathy, his superhuman sense of smell, and the similarly miraculous and supernatural abilities of fellow children born on or near the exact moment India gained its independence — the “Midnight Children”. Yet Rushdie also seeks to reveal the reality of hidden suffering and repression in post-colonial India and Pakistan by mixing the fantastic, fabricated tale of these children with the real story of post-independence. Gabriel García Márquez had also employed this technique in his imaginative take on Latin American history, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). His novel centres on the Buendía family and a fictive town in an unnamed South American country, incorporating many magical and bizarre happenings – such as the appearance of ghosts, a comic plague of insomnia, magic performances and a character perpetually followed by a swarm of butterflies – but through the interpolation of real events and the novel's exploration of tyranny, it nonetheless achieves the same kind of power, and curiously profound realism, as Rushdie's outlandish novel. In allowing the novelist to rebuff the criticism that he/she is distorting “reality” (because he/she does not pretend to accurately represent it), magic realism thus irks those who might expect a more conventionally realist approach. Like other magic realist works, *A Star* is highly self-reflexive and engages the postmodern confrontation between assumptions of representational transparency and an acute, de-naturalising awareness of the processes of narrative creation. The “codology” of history – and its related histrionics – is what postmodernism and magic realism both find “grotesque”.

Henry Smart's protean story foregrounds an interpretative quandary that is characteristic of the kind of difficulty posed, as Linda Hutcheon notes, by postmodernist writing in general:

The problem seems to reside in its manner, in the self-consciousness of the fictionality, the lack of the familiar pretence of transparency, and the calling into question of the factual grounding of history writing [...] the mixing of the reflexively fictional with the verifiably historical might be doubly upsetting for some critics.²³

A *Star* "slips and slides all over the page [...] neither completely believable nor completely unbelievable", as Jeffers observes, and this might explain why it is "doubly upsetting" for some.²⁴ The slippery, counter-intuitive form of the novel precisely endeavours to "blur and skew our sense-making capabilities".²⁵ As Doyle himself puts it, "magic things happen in *A Star Called Henry*".²⁶ Consequently, Dermot McCarthy may justifiably caution that "veridical concerns" are "inappropriate" when interpreting it.²⁷ The reader's task must lie with extrapolating the subtext of the novel, with looking beyond while presumably enjoying the outrageous literary fabulation it presents, with divining instinctively to the underground streams of theme that flow beneath the slippery surface of the text — as Henry's symbolic forays beneath the city's surface, into the sewers of Dublin, subtly suggest. Self-conscious reader participation is implicitly invited and Doyle is, as he has himself advised, taking "liberties with reality".²⁸ The reader is thus made aware of his or her own hermeneutic agency in the process of *creating* historical meaning. Could de Valera have "smelt of shite" (139) and have worn red socks at the moment of his dramatic arrest by British soldiers, the novel asks? Why would one consider such a prospect unlikely? And, after all, why should it

²³ Linda Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire", in *Past the Last Post*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 33-34.

²⁴ Jennifer M. Jeffers, *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century: Gender, Bodies, and Power* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 131.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Costello, *The Irish Soul in Dialogue*, p. 90.

²⁷ Dermot McCarthy, *Roddy Doyle: Raining on the Parade* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003), p. 198.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 199.

matter? As Umberto Eco puts it, the postmodernist novel should ideally “rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism”.²⁹ *A Star* does exactly that.

The novel suggests that the tendentious and ideologically constructed discourses that underpin historical writing have elided many of the “little narratives”, many of the “lesser” tales of human experience. As Tony Davies observes, realism has long been “a contested space, the scene of an unfinished argument”, and *A Star* points to its redundancy in historical terms.³⁰ Thomas Kilroy makes a similar point in his play, *Talbot's Box* (1973), in which the memory of Matt Talbot is contested by contradictory accounts of his life from the Church, capitalists, socialists and Talbot himself. Talbot, for his own part, professes to be a far simpler man than the posthumous controversies would allow: “To tell yus the truth, I never wanted anything but to work wid timber,” he admits.³¹ The point is reiterated when Countess Markievicz appears in the play complaining that the Church “manipulated the home, manipulated the family to oppress” women, and one character complains that she “never said that!”.³² History, Kilroy suggests, is whatever we want it to be. This is why the working-class Henry, who “wasn't important” – for whom history has “no room” (138, 139) – is airbrushed from a photograph of Eamon de Valera's surrender. Doyle indeed flaunts his disregard for historical linearity with the inscription of part of an Irving Berlin lyric (*Cheek to Cheek*, 1935) as the epigraph to his novel, and tantalises those expecting veracity with a bibliography (a most untypical feature in a novel) citing many straightforward historical texts. Such “deliberately awkward” paratextual conventions are, as Hutcheon again notes, common in postmodernist writing and it is as if, to mischievously rile irate historians, Doyle is claiming to have produced a historically accurate work.³³ *A Star* thus parodies the “fetishising of the archive” of history, destabilising the supposed dichotomy between the fictive and the real and unpacking and “denaturalising” the authority of history, including its potential to elide the history of the working class.

²⁹ Umberto Eco, “Irony and ‘Double Coding’: Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable”, in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, ed. Brian Nicol (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002), p. 112.

³⁰ Tony Davies, “Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing”, in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984), p. 162.

³¹ Thomas Kilroy, *Talbot's Box* (Dublin: Gallery, 1979), p. 58.

³² *Ibid.* 31.

³³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 79.

Doyle treats history in terms of possibilities, not certainties, but this is not to suggest that the novel eschews political concerns.

Anomalous violence: Representing revolution

Violence has possibly been the most central political concern in Irish studies for the past century or more. “With the possible exception of greenness,” writes David Lloyd, “no quality has more frequently and repetitiously been attributed to Ireland than violence”.³⁴ Depicting the country’s most revered era of anti-colonial struggle, *A Star* is replete with violence, and it is in what is shown to motivate this violence that we are most aware of the compellingly political thrust of the novel. The author proffers many motivations for the insurgent violence from 1916 to 1923: poverty, gangsterism, egomania, conservatism, xenophobia, greed and abstract idealism are just some of them. Henry Smart, though well meaning, becomes an unwitting conduit for all of these native ills — as a dupe, a child of the slums made violent by circumstance and led astray by the sinister machinations of others. A foil for the politically inspired revolutionaries of the history books, he unthinkingly succumbs to the romance of being a nationalist icon (or being told he is by the propagandist Jack Dalton), and unquestioningly follows orders that are secretly issued by his life-long nemesis, the gangster TD Alfie Gandon. Seeking to extirpate the injustice of the old regime, he tragically and ironically buttresses it in the new one.

The novel’s form indeed reflects and compounds this dramatic conclusion with what Doyle himself has termed its “circular quality”.³⁵ In a subversive deployment of that grand novelistic tradition George Lukács termed the “glorious ‘middle way’” — whereby the bourgeois hero typically restores order from chaos — the status quo is imperilled, in this case by the novel’s proletarian protagonist and his comrades, only to be re-confirmed by the plot’s ultimately cynical conclusion.³⁶ Henry brands his father a

³⁴ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), p. 124.

³⁵ Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), p. 107.

³⁶ Georg Lukács, “The Historical Novel”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 292.

“slave” and a “gobshite”, a “puppet [...] Pinocchio Smart” with a “stupid, saturated heart” (43, 61, 43, 49), for slavishly serving Gandon, his capitalist master, but the younger Smart unwittingly follows in his father’s footsteps, becoming another “puppet” for the very same master. Symbolically, both Henrys wield the same weapon and phallic emblem of disability, their trusted wooden leg, and for them violence is both a weapon and a metaphoric crutch — a means of defence and a symbol of their disability. Correlating Henry’s nationalist violence with the gangsterism of his father, Doyle underscores an ironic parity between the IRA’s new regime and the old one it has ostensibly sought to overthrow, by portraying Alfie Gandon – the quintessence of capitalist cruelty – as the nexus that links them both. Gerry Smyth has noted, as a characteristic outcome of the Oedipal trope in Irish writing, that “the child’s rebellion against the authority of the parent inevitably ends up re-installing the principle of authority in some other guise or mode”, and this too is the case for the Smarts.³⁷ Both Henry Sr’s servility and his son’s rebellion ironically buttress Gandon’s corrupt authority and abstract ideology and politics are depicted as irrelevant to the needs of the poor.

Conditioning and ideology: “Ireland was something in songs”

From the outset, Henry’s rebellion against the capitalist system his father so sycophantically serves is based, not on any ideological perspective, but on his experiences as a youth growing up in grinding poverty and social disadvantage. A neglected “Street Arab”, he “fell in with the crowd”, and was made “at home in the rags and scarcity, dirt and weakness”. “We looked and learned”, Henry relates, he and his brother Victor becoming “little packs of enterprise and cunning” (45, 63) by habituating themselves to a tough life of petty crime. Foreshadowing his future as a violent insurrectionist, Henry steadily becomes inured to various barbarisms, killing rats and cows, reduced, like his father, to violence by the vicissitudes of economic necessity:

³⁷ Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 57.

I felt [a cow's] scorching blood on my head before I got away and I heard the life charge out of it and felt the weight of death as it fell. I made lines of the blood down my cheeks with my fingers and Victor copied me. (68)

Like the savage children of William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), the Smarts are socially conditioned in a way that makes them prone to violence.

As an untainted "glowing baby", Henry exuded a sense of optimism that drew lines of local mothers to marvel at his beauty — rather like Rushdie's Saleem. But now, exposed to Dublin's rough streets, he becomes corrupted and barbarised by experience. He develops a curious, exaggerated aversion towards anything outside of his immediate struggle for survival, which itself makes an important political point. While awe-struck men watch Halley's Comet, for Henry it is "just a big star" (67). He ignores the celestial spectacle but is alert to its potential rewards, and instead conducts the more terrestrial business of picking star-gazers' pockets. While he and his fellow Street Arabs contract their expertise in animal cruelty to nationalists who commission them to maim the cattle of "absentee bastards who were pushing the small men off the land" (70), they are nevertheless uncomprehending of the politics for which their cruelty is employed:

— Do you love Ireland, lads? Said one of them.

They got no answer.

We didn't understand the question. Ireland was something in songs that drunken old men wept about [...] I loved Victor and my memories of some other people. That was all I understood about love. (69)

Henry equally rails against his mother's abstract and excessive sentimentality — her devotion to another star "called Henry", a real star, which she associates with his dead brother of the same name. This obsession is at the expense of the tangible Henry by her side, Doyle conveys, for while Melody fixates on her imagined, celestial son, blood flows from the nose of the living infant beside her, "in a rush that failed to shock her" (34). Melody is oblivious to the sufferings of the "pale and red-eyed" Henry, "held together by rashes and sores", with "a stomach crying to be filled, bare feet aching like an old man's" (1), and her delusory obsession eventually drives the Smart family apart. Henry Sr. becomes embittered towards the newly born Henry for reminding his wife of

her dead child, and the young Henry increasingly resents his dead brother, for whom he becomes a mere “shocking substitute”. He tries desperately and in vain to divert his mother’s attention from the “twinkling bollox”: “I beat her. I climbed onto her hair. I pressed into the breasts that were no longer mine,” he declares; “I scratched my sores and bled for her” (35, 34). But he eventually becomes completely estranged from her, rejecting the otherworldly fiction into which she pours her tears.

As in other magic realist works, there is an implicit parallel between family and nation. Melody, as Mother Ireland, is obsessed with the dead past, oblivious to the offspring that is alive, the neglected, attention-seeking baby that “puffed and shook and spat” (34). Abstraction, whether it be that of the nationalist agrarian activists who “love Ireland”, or that of a neurotic mother driven insane by her traumatic loss, is portrayed as implicitly at odds with the interests of the working-class. Henry does not love “Ireland”, but Victor; his mother fails to love him, but obsesses about an image of her past. Doyle correlates the devotional, sentimental nonsense of nationalism with Melody’s excessive grief. Both deflect attention from the “here-and-now” of working-class conditions.

Henry is acutely conscious of these conditions, of the strictly material world in which he lives, but this consciousness is portrayed in a reductive manner that also questions his capacity for complicated political thought. In his early interchanges with his school-teacher, Miss O’Shea (who will later, preposterously, become his wife), Henry’s inability to conceive of the abstract except in terms of the material is vividly emphasised when she broaches some basic arithmetic:

— Twenty-seven and twenty-seven

— What?

— Bottles.

— What’s in them?

— Porter.

— Fifty-four. (73)

He cannot add *abstract* numbers, this episode and others convey, but is a “genius” (73) when calculating *tangible*, useful things, like bottles of porter. Likewise Henry explains that an immaterial concept like Home Rule means “nothing to us who had no homes”

(70). “Imagined communities,” as Benedict Anderson has argued, are the preserve of those *with* property, *with* a stake in society and nationality means nothing to those without it — like Henry and Victor, who sleep beneath a sheet of tarpaulin by a canal.³⁸

This dramatic conflict between abstract ideology and concrete poverty is typified in the allegory Doyle constructs around the visit of the English monarch, King Edward VII, to the second city of his empire. When the King jaunts past Dublin’s obsequious tenement dwellers, the uproarious sequence of events that unfolds recalls another literary attack on abstraction — that of Hans Christian Anderson’s classic fairy-tale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes* (1837). Henry is intuitively averse to the king, the “fat man”, the “eejit” who “didn’t belong”, and he ejaculates a “treacherous roar” that sets the adoring crowd against him. “Fuck off!” he tells the monarch, “fuck off with your hat”, prompting “the king’s loyal subjects” to scramble to “box the ears” of the treasonous “angry little man” and his brother. Like the sagacious fairy-tale boy, however, Henry’s objection reminds his pursuers of what they secretly know, and consequently he reflects that they “admired our guts” (51). As a child, he has yet to acquire the culturally instilled reverence for pomp and ceremony that they have introjected, but if Doyle tantalises the reader by the suggestion that this plucky rebellion foreshadows Henry’s future republicanism, he is quick to dismiss it. “Was I a tiny Fenian? A Sinn Feiner?” Henry rhetorically asks: “Not at all. I didn’t even know I was Irish” (52).

He may not know he is part of an “imagined community”, but Henry is acutely aware of the reality of his social and economic exclusion. He simply looks and instinctively scorns “the fat man at the centre of it”. He reviles “the wealth and colour, the shining red face, the moustache and beard that were better groomed than the horses” (52). He may be unaware that this magnificent magnate, who anyhow “didn’t come from Dublin”, is the “king, or that the floozy beside him was the queen”, but he intuitively brands him an “eejit”. The monarch “didn’t belong”, not because of any abstract, republican notion of sovereignty, but because the vista of obscene opulence inside his carriage galls the child by its stark contrast with “the cart that had carried us from house to house to basement” (53). Aside from his somewhat parochial observation

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

that the “fat foreigner” is not from Dublin, it is neither the King’s quintessential Britishness, nor Henry’s as-yet-unknown Irishness that is at the crux of his concerns. Abstract ideals are like the proverbial “emperor’s new clothes”, imaginary adornments, superficial dressings, which attempt to clothe reality in fantasy, to obscure socio-economic disparity with an elegant lie.

If this allegorical lesson seeks to prioritise the true conditions of the working class, however, Doyle’s portrayal of Henry’s social conditioning undermines the possibility of a truly conscious reaction to those conditions from within that class. Henry is portrayed as a reactionary, not a revolutionary; a boy capable of understanding and reacting *only* to those issues directly pertaining to his individuated, material world. He cannot understand complex political ideas that pertain to the macro-economic, to the national or even to his own class consciousness. In Gramsci’s specific use of the term, he is a true subaltern, failing to grasp the nature of his own class interests in a substantive way. “Not capable of discerning situations”, for him “there is no possibility of measuring the distance to normal, rational meaning”, as Jeffers argues.³⁹ Veena Das of the Indian Subaltern Studies movement has argued that such distancing of the subaltern from “normal rational meaning” should be seen as a regressive representation of the colonised. In any focus on “the historical moment of rebellion”, she avers, it is imperative that “the subjects of [colonial] power are not treated as passive beings, but are shown at the moments in which they try to defy this alienating power”.⁴⁰ Henry, however, is repeatedly portrayed as just such a passive being, incapable of “discerning”, reacting to and pre-programmed by personal grievances and traumas.

The 1916 Rising, to which Doyle flashes forward *in media res* following Victor’s death, must thus be conveyed as a function of the narrator’s personal experience. It is indeed telling that Doyle elides the seven-year period leading up to the Rising, emphasising the link, for Henry, between Victor’s premature death from neglect (only a few pages earlier) and his own later role in the insurgency, as well as creating a sense

³⁹ Jeffers, *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century*, p. 132.

⁴⁰ Cited in Stephen Slemon, “Post-Colonial Critical Theories”, in *Postcolonial Discourse: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 110; original in Veena Das, “Subaltern as Perspective”, in *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings in South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1989), p. 314.

of the spontaneity of the Rising itself. Ranajit Guha, another Subaltern Studies critic, notes that many historical narratives of colonial insurrections evince such a sense of spontaneity, giving “the lie to the myth, retailed so often by careless and impressionistic writing on the subject” of such insurrections “being purely spontaneous and unpremeditated affairs”.⁴¹ Doyle elides the reality of decades of working-class agitation, collective urban strikes, protests, agrarian campaigns and social upheavals, instead proffering multifarious localisable roots of the Rising in individual grudges and complaints. Like Michael Davitt’s support for military action in Moody’s analysis, his political militancy can even be reduced to a figury or mood.

Memories of earlier physical and mental suffering pervade Henry’s depiction of the Rising. His desperately impoverished state is stressed in the first part of the novel, and likewise the Rising is refracted through the individuated prism of Henry’s privations. The once barefoot boy symbolically reserves his first bullet for Tyler’s shoe shop, more specifically “its special corner for children’s boots” (99), and continues with a barrage on a cake-shop, tobacconist, clothes shop, servant’s registry office and the Pillar Café. All of these outlets become metaphors for his marginalisation. Of the latter he remarks, “I’d been thrown out of there before I was properly in the door, me and Victor”; a memory which, amidst the chaos of insurrection, is nonetheless powerfully redolent – he can “still smell the manageress’s breath” (105). Insurrection becomes “a sort of reflex action [...] an instinctive and almost mindless response to physical suffering of one kind or another”.⁴² Past degradations – the injuries of his class – are the primary, if not the only, motivation for Henry’s particular armed struggle and he “shoots” and “kills” “all that I had been denied, all the commerce and snobbery that had been mocking me and other hundreds of thousands behind glass and locks” (119). This analysis finds affinity in Denis Johnston’s *The Scythe and the Sunset* (1958) — which is, propitiously, set in the Pillar Café that Henry shoots at during the same events. When a rebel, Emer, expresses exasperation at the failure of an assembled crowd to cheer the reading of the Proclamation by Patrick Pearse – “Don’t they know

⁴¹ Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter Insurgency”, in *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 120.

⁴² *Ibid.* 121.

they're free," she asks – a bemused Doctor MacCarthy infers the real concerns of the working class just as they hear a crack of glass and "scattered cheering" at a nearby sweet shop. "What's that?" a restaurant assistant asks, to which MacCarthy wittily quips, "the Birth of a Nation".⁴³

As with these looters, shops and what they symbolise are Henry Smart's enemy, but the proletariat is not his cause. Henry's crusade is, emphatically, a personal one and "while the lads [take] chunks out of the military" he shoots at "all the injustice, unfairness and shoes" of his individual world. This does not mean he is selflessly challenging such "injustice" either. "The Empire was collapsing in front of us," he relates, but reminds us that it is still alive in his pockets. With "the last of the [stolen] money" from the post office secretly deposited in them, he hilariously declines to "join in the victory dance; I didn't want it to jangle" (106). Ostensibly serving the "august destiny" (as the 1916 Proclamation has it) of the Republic, the working-class rebel is quite literally weighed down by his less than august concerns. He is portrayed, not as an active vehicle for historical change, but as a highly-determined and self-absorbed product of environmental factors. An unthinking malcontent who wants "to shoot and wreck and kill and ruin" (109), he – and by implication his working-class comrades – are depoliticised. The non-explanation of personal grudges and a bad childhood replaces the intricacies of history and the complexities of ideology.

A materialist view: "The greatest fuckin' eejit ever born"

Henry Smart's simplicity may indeed proceed from a "materialist view of history", but Doyle's is a sharply reductive, determinist type of materialism.⁴⁴ He certainly stresses the impact of material conditions on political events, but does so from within a rigid conception of the relationship between the two. It is as if Henry has no mind of his own – a depiction that is certainly at odds with the dialectical materialism propounded by Marx. Marx, as Cliff Slaughter puts it, "could not proceed from a theory which simply saw men as the product of something called 'the environment'"; indeed, his "scientific

⁴³ Denis Johnston, *Collected Plays: Volume 1* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p. 30.

⁴⁴ McCarthy, *Raining on the Parade*, p. 217.

socialism meant a break from mechanical materialism”.⁴⁵ This issue of the “role of ideas” in working-class consciousness and in relation to Marxist materialism has indeed constituted one of Marxism’s greatest debates since the nineteenth century. However, as Anthony Giddens has noted, a position which “apparently removes man from his own history [...] leads to the endemic difficulties faced by orthodox dialectical materialism in recognising the active and voluntaristic character of human conduct”.⁴⁶ Human consciousness, and particularly that of working-class people – who often appear in literature as the section of society most determined by their social conditions – is undermined by a strict, mechanical determinism. This fails to recognise that, in Erik Olin Wright’s contention, while “the limits of social structures are real [...] they are transformable by the conscious actions of human agents”.⁴⁷ Giddens in part popularised the idea in sociology that structure should not be seen as having complete control over agency, but both must be seen as interlinked, dialectical phenomena, whose relations are complex, and only partially symbiotic. This, as I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis, is an argument expanded upon considerably by E.P. Thompson and Pierre Bourdieu.

In Liam O’Flaherty’s evocative 1925 novel, *The Informer*, Gypo Nolan, the eponymous IRA informer, inhabits an impoverished Dublin where there is little social mobility or choice for those on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder, but there is “resplendent idealism in damp cellars, saints starving in garrets”, “thigh to thigh, breast to breast” with “the most lurid examples of debauchery and vice”.⁴⁸ Slum idealism is something O’Flaherty, as a founder member of the Irish Communist Party, would have been acutely aware of; he portrays it cheek-by-jowl with the desperation more familiar in Doyle’s novel, of “the most degraded types of those who dwell in the crowded warrens on either bank of the Liffey”. In *The Informer*, women fall into prostitution, men into debauchery, Gypo into treachery, but there is still the articulate and visionary idealism of the working class — the disdain for the “publicans and

⁴⁵ Cliff Slaughter, *Marxism, Ideology and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 26.

⁴⁶ Anthony Giddens, “Class Structuration and Class Consciousness”, in *Classes, Power and Conflict*, ed. Anthony Giddens and David Held (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 164.

⁴⁷ Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative studies in class analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), p. 388.

⁴⁸ Liam O’Flaherty, *The Informer* (London: New English Library, 1980), p. 169.

bishops that were always top dog in this country”, the self-sacrifice for and intellectual commitment to the “Irish Worker’s Republic” of “sincere revolutionist” and socialist “workman” Bartly Mulholland, who dreams of an Ireland of “no slums, no hunger, no sick wives, no children that got the mumps and the rickets and the whooping-cough with devilish regularity”. In fact, Mulholland’s lofty idealism is the extreme opposite of Henry’s simplistic materialism (or the simian Gypo’s brute selfishness, for that matter); it “never worried him” to think of his impoverished family’s material want, because “the ‘cause’ was above everything” and “it was his wife who often urged him on to give all his time to the ‘cause’ whenever he became slightly despondent”.⁴⁹

For Henry material want is all there is, and Doyle’s lack of analysis stands in stark contrast to the idealism of Dublin train driver Dan in Ken Loach and Paul Laverty’s recent film, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006). As the IRA begins to embrace middle-class supporters, Dan reminds fellow volunteers that they are “paupers just like me”; “the IRA are backing the landlords and crushing people like you and me”.⁵⁰ The set-piece scene is the culmination of Dan’s role as trade unionist turned revolutionary, and it not only portends of capitalism’s sway over the emerging state, but also reveals the sway of reasoned ideology over Dublin’s radicalised working class. Bartly and Dan are thinkers, *in spite of* the material privations that their ideology brings them. Henry is a revolutionary in spite of himself.

The “endemic difficulties” Giddens identifies in orthodox materialism are evident in Henry’s socially conditioned behaviour, and compounded by Doyle’s portrayal of Gandon, Dalton and the other representatives of bourgeois Ireland as sinister, but quick-witted, active and controlling agents in Irish society. Doyle’s bourgeois nationalists have not been deprived of an “active and voluntaristic” consciousness. Dalton, the nationalist propagandist, befriends Henry and converts him from the socialist Irish Citizens’ Army to the more narrowly republican cause of the IRA. As a proponent of “green” nationalism, his calculating cynicism correlates unmistakably with the reductive gangster typecasting of “Troubles” discourse, which film critic John Hill identifies as part of a general “bias against understanding” – or

⁴⁹ Ibid. 107, 82, 108, 107, 50, 108.

⁵⁰ *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. Dir. Ken Loach. BIM Distribuzione. 2006.

what we might term ‘depoliticisation’ – in depictions of conflict in Ireland.⁵¹ Martin McLoone sees this as a means of accusing the Irish of an innate tendency towards violence which evades political explication, using “dominant negative stereotypes to deny the politics of the situation and to blame the Irish themselves for their own proclivity to violence”.⁵² It is their “pathological fault” that they fight, not the consequence of imperial intervention.⁵³ Such logic is inherent in many “Troubles” films, such as the revealingly entitled *Nothing Personal* (1995) and *The Devil’s Own* (1997), both of which portray combatants as cynical and psychopathic killers. Dalton’s psychopathic disposition is of a type that is prepared to kill RIC members while admitting that they are “all decent men” (254), and he has the cynical audacity to write a Machiavellian article in Gandon’s name, outrageously claiming that the late convert to republicanism fought in the GPO. He treats foreign journalists to staged tours of the city that demonise the British forces and his deeply sinister aptitude for “spin” ensures that the grisly murder of a Mr Smith with seven children will be “made heroic by night-time” (247). The Neil Jordan film *The Crying Game* exemplified this paradigmatic Troubles reductivism by using the classic fable of “The Scorpion and the Frog” to illustrate how evil is “in [the scorpion’s] nature” and terrorism, analogously, is in the terrorist’s nature.⁵⁴ In Troubles parlance, Dalton is a “scorpion” *par excellence*, and Henry becomes Dalton’s frog, an unsuspecting dupe who assists a creature of greater sagacity and malevolence through the hazards of war, later confessing himself to have been a “slave, the greatest fuckin’ eejit ever born” (318).⁵⁵

Dalton, for all his villainy, is acutely aware of what is going on, of how to manipulate the press and the working class, suggesting that the middle-class has a purchase on politics which evades their poorer Orwellian proles. Dalton’s world of “wheels within wheels” eludes the witless Henry for most of the novel. He is always an intangible villain, and such themes of “vulnerable individuals” falling foul of “an

⁵¹ John Hill, “Images of Violence”, p. 184.

⁵² Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, p. 62.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Neil Jordan, *The Crying Game* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 16.

⁵⁵ One is reminded too of O’Flaherty’s cynical rebel leader’s words of contumely for his soldiers, the “stupid carrot heads [...] Theirs is the bravery of the dull-witted ox”; but he also opines paradoxically that “a man must be intelligent to be brave”; Liam O’Flaherty, *The Informer*, p. 162.

amorphous and superficially drawn terrorist presence” are, again, as Eve Patten notes, paradigmatic in Troubles writing. This narrative paradigm, which “has supplanted the novel’s function of critique with a kind of literary compensation”, has also “obliterated the need to examine the complexity and ambiguity of social conflict, while an elevation of the individual sufferings has largely obscured the exploration of community, identity and motivation”.⁵⁶ Brian Moore’s *Lies of Silence* (1990) and Benedict Kiely’s *Proxopera* (1977), both thrillers that focus on hostage situations, are illustrative in this regard, with their action-based narratives of individual sufferings perpetrated by malevolent terrorist forces.

But as Richard Hoggart noted, “the corollary of successful ‘personalisation’ is constant and considerable simplification” and Henry, as we have seen, is constantly simplified.⁵⁷ Later in the novel, he succumbs to egomania, Dalton’s lyrical flattery – “*the pride of all Gaels was young Henry Smart*” – luring him into fighting for the cause of separatism, for “a version of Ireland that had little or nothing to do with the [socialist] Ireland I’d gone out to die for the last time” (170, 171). These irrational impulses are implicitly comparable to those of his father. Asserting his fervour for killing policemen, Henry reminds us that this proclivity is (as the title of that “Troubles” film goes) “nothing personal”.⁵⁸ “I came from a long line of cop killers [...] They were never people, the rozzers” (193). One of Doyle’s rebels, Ivan Reynolds, becomes, and is actively fostered by his superiors as, the quintessence of psychopathic native brutality – yet another cliché of the “Troubles” canon, what Martin McLoone terms the “Paddy”, “the simian primitive – a violent and irrational character who came to represent the Irish as a whole”.⁵⁹ This stereotype has formed part of propaganda of subordination, contrived “to absolve Britain of any responsibility for political violence in Ireland and to put the blame securely on the Irish themselves”.⁶⁰ Owing to a dearth of enthusiasm for the IRA’s campaign, Doyle’s guerrilla army is forced to adopt a

⁵⁶ Eve Patten, “Fiction in Conflict: Northern Ireland’s prodigal novelists”, in *Peripheral Visions of Irish Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. I.A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), p. 129.

⁵⁷ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 198.

⁵⁸ *Nothing Personal*. Dir. Thaddeus O’Sullivan. British Screen Productions. 1995.

⁵⁹ McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

conscious strategy of promoting and intensifying terrorist savagery: “Collins himself said that there were never more than three thousand fighting. So, savages like Ivan did the work of hundreds” (235). Evening-up the odds with his titanic barbarity, “Ivan the Terrible”, “later to become Ivan Reynolds T.D.” (236), is thus a typical simian rebel – one of “our own Mad Mullahs” (253) – committing and commissioning countless acts of horrific degeneracy. As a “local warlord” (311) he breaks the knees of a twelve-year-old spy – an overt reference to more recent acts of IRA vigilantism – and Ivan is not alone in his seemingly instinctive proclivity for violent acts. Dan Breen – author of the book *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (1924) – is said by Jack to have “half the population terrified” (252). In a rare moment of moral quandary, even Jack admits that although he has “to have a new ballad written about the bastard by the weekend,” he abhors “writing songs about gurriers like him” (252). Similarly, Doyle’s hatchet-carrying dockers, “who came into work armed with blades, iron bars, bale-hooks, their own knuckledusters” (159), are of a far more brutal breed than those politically conscious 1913 Lockout activists of Plunkett’s *Strumpet City* (1969). In yet another evocation of undifferentiated thuggery, even the police are the same as the pimps: “Costello cracked Dublin heads for a living. So did my father.” (14) Violent acts in the novel are denied any depth of meaning, their perpetrators any political intelligence or remorse. It is salutary to note that the only political ideology of any kind associated with Doyle’s most monstrous and psychopathic creation, criminal and wife-beater Charlo Spencer, is militant republicanism: “Charlo was big into the H Blocks. He knew all the names [...] He’d have loved to have been in there with them”.⁶¹ This in some ways typifies the logic of Doyle’s representation of political violence; his support for the IRA is the logical extension of Charlo’s criminality and his violence in the home. What we are left with in *A Star* is yet another glib resistance to the historically particular and a typically universalising liberal humanist denunciation of *all* violent acts.

But Doyle’s denunciation of political violence is a political intervention in itself, one that buttresses the imperial view of anti-colonial resistance as something beyond logic and beneath integrity, as perpetrated by “creatures” let “loose on the country” (252). As the term “terrorism” suggests, the violence would seem to thrive on

⁶¹ Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 180.

its own merits, as an over-arching ideology in itself – a doctrine of terror – rather than the result of any historically situated, ideological conflict. In the “freezing, dripping darkness” (56) of a sewer, Henry seeks comfort in his father’s blood-soaked coat, even though it stinks of death. He smelt and “liked the smell of animals and blood”, we are told; “I didn’t know that I was inhaling years of violence and murder” (56). Later, with the “worst scum of the slums”, he would kill cows and smear blood on his face, boil baby rats and smear the “soup” (66) of their decaying bodies on his hands to madden their trapped parents. Having paid for that “bleeding” – that initiation into savagery – he is loath to pass it on and, rejecting his father’s legacy, Henry denies his newly born daughter a taste of *his* coat, the blood-drenched war vestment within which the child is symbolically “looking for a nipple” (330): “I held her out before she could suck at its history [...] I stood up and took off the old coat. I took it to the door and threw it in the yard” (330). One is reminded of Yeats’s description of political zealotry as a “fanatic heart” that he took from his “mother’s womb”.⁶² Ireland’s legacy of violence, Doyle’s reductive symbolism suggests, might be explained away by a “taste for blood” — an animalistic, visceral barbarism induced by the most specious of circumstances, the most individuated conditions.

As Deane has noted of revisionist historiography, “theory always seems to be apart from, not of the Rising. The other stock opposite to theory – instinct – is also invoked.”⁶³ More universally, the omission of a thinking insurrectionary is, Guha discerns, “dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunderstorms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics”.⁶⁴ While Henry’s revolt is not a peasant uprising, but a proletarian one, it too seems to infect like an epidemic. Unlike him, Saoirse, his daughter, will be truly “free” from this malaise. Only in the rejection of an old, barbarised Ireland, it is implied, may a new narrative of peace begin. But the reality of colonialism is conspicuously absent.

⁶² W. B. Yeats, “Remorse for Intemperate Speech”, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 58-59.

⁶³ Deane, “Wherever Green is Read”, p. 236.

⁶⁴ Guha, “The Prose of Counter Insurgency”, p. 121.

As Deane also rather acerbically deduces, “sometimes Henry Smart seems like one of those stalwart heroes from a Dick Francis thriller; sometimes he’s just another blarney-blathering id that believes it’s an ego”.⁶⁵ Mere ‘ids’, he and many of his comrades are half-conscious simians driven by instinctual reactions. As his crutch suggests, they are crippled by some fundamental absence, and it is with a similar logic that Joey ‘The Lips’ of *The Commitments* (1988) could opine that “the feuding Brothers in Northern Ireland [...] wouldn’t be shooting the asses off each other if they had soul.”⁶⁶ Just like the crassest caricatures of “Troubles” writing, Doyle’s proletarian revolutionaries are emotionally and intellectually deficient clichés — bereft of “soul”. As Imhof puts it, while Doyle “may have been aiming at transcending certain stereotypes [...] he set up new ones that have greatly appealed to an undiscerning mass readership”.⁶⁷ His stereotypes confirm widely propagated non-explanations of “senseless violence”, reducing the labyrinthine complexity of history to the facile retelling of counter-insurgency propaganda.

Kleptocracy, catholicism, nationalism

In another sense, there is a nonetheless profoundly proletarian thrust to this novel, as with much of Doyle’s work, and there can be little doubt that his repudiation of Irish nationalism, and its all too comfortable relationship with capitalism and Catholicism, conveys more of his ire for the claustrophobic political milieu he has lived in than for the formative period that the novel depicts. Doyle has made no secret of his distaste for the conservatism of the state in which he lives — if the second divorce referendum of the 1990s was not passed he threatened to leave it, and his harrowing television series *Family* (1994) played a significant part in public debate on the issue at the time.⁶⁸ He has also been a regular contributor to the immigrant newspaper *Metro Éireann*, with a book of short stories he wrote for it published as *The Deportees* (2007). A collaborative

⁶⁵ Seamus Deane, “Roddy’s Troubles: Who needs blarney in the middle of a civil war?”, *The Guardian*, 9 September 1999, p. 8

⁶⁶ Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 24.

⁶⁷ Imhof, *The Modern Irish Novel*, p. 238.

⁶⁸ For contemporary commentary on *Family* see for example the *Irish Times* editorial of Saturday May 28 1994, p. 11. See also Helena Sheehan, *The Continuing Story of Irish Television Drama: Tracking the Tiger* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 72-75.

centenary retelling, with Bisi Adigun, of J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), in which Christy Mahon becomes Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian, was staged in the same year — both obvious efforts to begin the integration of immigrants' stories into the fabric of Irish literature. Doyle has indeed consistently championed the causes of Dublin's most disadvantaged and marginalised communities, having worked as a teacher in one of them for many years. He joined the Socialist Labour Party at one point, "read a lot of Trotsky" and currently identifies himself as a socialist.⁶⁹ Indeed, for him Dublin's working-class culture is something implicitly at odds with the establishment norms of Irish life; he tries to "capture and celebrate crudity, loudness, linguistic flair and slang, which is the property of working class people".⁷⁰

In *The Snapper* (1990) he explores the shame and social embarrassment suffered by working-class teen Sharon Rabbitte and her father, Jimmy, when she becomes pregnant by a local married man whose identity she refuses to reveal. Jimmy battles with his own shame, but eventually surmounts it, rejecting the religious and cultural conventions that have induced his anxiety. In *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996) Doyle deals with domestic violence and a society in which women are disempowered. In *The Commitments* (1988), working-class Northsiders embrace soul music, finding — as the "niggers o' Dublin" — affinity with the US's alienated black community: "Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud," Jimmy Rabbitte, the novel's chief protagonist, exclaims.⁷¹ Indeed, the film version (1991) directed by Alan Parker, which had a huge impact in popularising working-class culture, stressed the importance of ideology to the fabric of working-class life, *regardless* of whether it brought material success. When the soul band falls apart, Joey the Lips reminds his dejected "soul" brothers and sisters:

The success of the band was irrelevant! You raised their expectations of life, you lifted their horizons. Sure, we could have been famous and made albums and stuff, but that would've been predictable. This way it's poetry.⁷²

⁶⁹ Costello, *The Irish Soul in Dialogue*, p. 93.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 91.

⁷¹ Doyle, *The Commitments*, p. 9.

⁷² *The Commitments*. Dir. Alan Parker. Beacon. 1991.

In all of Doyle's work, there is a sense of irreverence towards and radical alienation from hegemonic values that chimes with all of the writing I have assessed in this thesis.

A Star evinces the sense of betrayal that exasperated many erstwhile working-class revolutionaries with the bourgeois character of the Republic. Doyle's narrative underscores the process by which their stories have been historically elided. Consequently, his history, the one in which Henry plays The Last Post at O'Donovan Rossa's grave, in which de Valera "smelt of shite" (139), is one that is intentionally at variance with official record. In the real world, Henry and others like him are written out of history, whereas the "gurrrier" Dan Breen, "who lived long enough to write the book and so became the man who fired the first shot for Irish freedom" (128), is written in. As an uneducated proletarian and "one of Collins' anointed", he may be useful fodder, but Henry is "actually [...] excluded from everything" (208). A new political dispensation finds little use for the proletarian activists who risked life and limb in the military engagement that brought it about. Unlike the bourgeois and rural Gandon and Ivan, they have "no stake in the country [...] never had, never will" (327). The regime once "needed trouble makers", Dalton explains, but "very soon we'll have to be rid of them" (327). The purge is presaged by the strictly hierarchical system of Sinn Féin electioneering, whereby Henry and "none of the other men of the slums and hovels ever made it on to the [candidacy] list" (208). Subjected to some of the more unpalatable expediencies of revolutionary warfare, they "carry their cross for Ireland" (to paraphrase a frequent mantra from Doyle's sequel *Oh! Play That Thing* (2004)) while bourgeois opportunists cynically capitalise on their gains. "Gandon got Commercial Affairs and the Sea," Henry wryly remarks, while "Henry Smart got wet" (209). O'Flaherty's McDara also feels such anger on behalf of the soldiers "of the common people [...] the nameless ones", who are eschewed as "the backwash of revolution".⁷³ "Nameless and expendable", Henry and his fellow "decoys and patsies" (208) are unceremoniously extirpated from the Irish body politic, and the omission of their histories poses one of the central questions that the novel's technique also elicits: if conventional history has elided the working class, why should this unconventional novel of the working class pay tribute to conventional history?

⁷³ O'Flaherty, *The Assassin* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1998), p. 51, 55.

Ironically however, there is much affinity in nationalism's dismissal of Henry and the "men of the slums and hovels" as "patsies" (208), and the novel's dismissal of the entire republican leadership and the Volunteers. Not one saving grace may be adduced in Doyle's sometimes juvenile diatribe against nationalism's most hallowed figures. Henry "hates" the Volunteers, and, in the GPO episode, unremittingly vents his distaste for "the poets and the farm boys, the fuckin' shopkeepers" (103). Although such "farm boys" indeed constituted a highly radicalised part of the Dublin working class of the time, and were said, by famed trade unionist Jim Larkin, to suffer poverty equal to or greater than that of their urban comrades, here they are almost exclusively middle-class, curiously anathematised as the enemies of the urban proletariat.⁷⁴ They have no experience of the destitution to which Henry was subjected: "When was the last time Collins had been hungry?" (103) a bitter Henry asks. Like O'Casey's stock rebels, who despise the "slum lice", or Costelloe the policeman, who hated "the people, the place, their accents and their dirt" (14), Doyle's Volunteers "detested the slummers – the accents and the dirt, the Dublinness of them" (103).⁷⁵ Note again the similar linguistic register and disposition of incoming and outgoing regimes.

Doyle cleaves neat lines of conflict in what is often presented as an historic moment of consensus, suggesting an ideological chasm behind the facade of nationalist solidarity. As the Proclamation of the Republic is read by Pearse, its lofty aspirations are symbolically and comically undercut by the interjections of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) men. As Pearse reads of the rebels' hope that "no one who serves that cause [armed republicanism] will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity or rapine" (97), the proletarian Paddy Swanzey conveys the ICA rebels' insensibility to his words, querying "what's rapine when it's at home?" "Messing around with women," his ICA comrade Charlie Murtagh mirthfully responds — "with a bit of robbery thrown in" (97). When Pearse proclaims the Republic's guarantee of "religious and civil liberty", he is told by assembled working-class Dubliners to "go home" (96), and when Paddy complains that

⁷⁴ See Cormac Murphy, "Revolution and radicalism in County Dublin, 1913-21", in *Aspects of Irish Studies*, ed. Myrtle Hill *et al.* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1990), pp. 17-24. Murphy cites Jim Larkin as having felt, in 1913, that "the harshness and misery of the agricultural labourer's lot rivalled in intensity the worst experiences of his inner-city colleague"; *Ibid.* 21. This drove many of them into political activity.

⁷⁵ Seán O'Casey, *Three Plays* (London: Papermac, 1994), p. 194.

he has “heard nothing in all that about the workers’ state”, Charlie’s reply, that this will “come after”, forecasts a future split in the republican ranks. “Hold on to your rifle,” (98) he portentously advises. “The Republic,” it is suggested, is less a state than a shambles in waiting.

In this invocation of the theme of history “from below”, Doyle attempts to cleave a neat division between socialism and nationalism, between the altruists “from below” he wishes to lionise and the bourgeois radicals “from above” he wishes to vilify and debase. James Connolly’s socialist politics – which were renowned and often lambasted for their affinity with nationalism – must thus be revised in light of the novel’s particular ideological standpoint. In personal terms, Connolly is portrayed as an antitype of Pearse, nationalism’s most revered icon. While Pearse parallels the star-gazing Melody, pontificating absently from a podium or mumbling aloofly from a high chair in the midst of carnage, his abstract disposition is a foil for Connolly’s unpretentious, practical humanity. Connolly “wasn’t just a man,” Henry explains, “he was all of us” (127). A tangible, humane figure, he profoundly impacts upon Henry’s youthful development, teaching him to read and write and, most importantly, explaining the relevance of social revolution – “why we were poor and why we didn’t have to be” (127). He and Larkin are portrayed in an almost Messianic light: Henry, “Paddy and Felix were the same, and the rest of the Citizen Army men. They’d all been *made* by Connolly and Larkin” (emphasis added, 127). Stressing Connolly as a socialist, not a nationalist, is perhaps understandable in light of how he “lives on in official memory as a Fenian martyr rather than as a Marxist revolutionary”, but Doyle’s depiction is ultimately light on politics, and rather more given to accentuating his “human condition”.⁷⁶

He therefore eschews the actual politics that Connolly espoused, in which nationalism and socialism, “the two currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland [...] were not antagonistic but complementary”.⁷⁷ The revolutionary who would declare “to all the world, that the working class of Dublin stands for the cause of Ireland, and the cause of Ireland is the cause of a separate and distinct nationality”, is conveniently

⁷⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, “Working Classes and Nations”, *Saothar* 8 (1982), p. 85.

⁷⁷ James Connolly, *Erin’s Hope* (1909)

<<http://www.ex.ac.uk/Projects/meia/connolly/Archive/jceh00.htm>> [accessed 20 February 2005].

remoulded, like so many other aspects of the Rising, to accord with Doyle's revisionist views.⁷⁸ In doing so, the author is ironically open to the very charge he makes against the emergent nationalist hegemony, that of rendering Connolly, who was "dangerous alive", "more useful washed and dead" (318). The novel traduces Connolly's political vision, supplanting it with a liberal humanist ethic of eternal verities – of a benevolent essence that he comes to characterise. Here we have an instance of what Cliff Slaughter identifies as an "increasing influence on world literature", the "philosophical resignation to what is taken to be 'the human condition'".⁷⁹ Connolly's "humanity" conveniently transcends politics, becoming an innate "condition", rather than the product of a complicated ideological vision.

The novel suggests that such political complexity is somewhat irrelevant to Henry, who is ultimately a mere cog in the overarching and imperturbable capitalist system. Capitalism in the novel can manipulate political unrest, killing Climanis or torturing Miss O'Shea, ostensibly for political expediency, but really because their behaviour is "interfering with free trade" (316), and, one by one, the capitalist criminals of Doyle's pre-revolutionary Dublin opportunistically embrace the incoming regime. Once a clandestine gangster, Alfie Gandon becomes a noted political activist, then a TD, retrospectively placed among the rebels at the GPO. Like the stevedore who demands sexual favours from employees, or Henry's newly-converted republican landlord, he now becomes assimilated as "one of us" (169). A "Home Ruler and a Catholic", he is purportedly "not like one of the tail-coated fuckers who robbed the people blind and called it business" (165). The revolution has changed Gandon's style, not his substance, has changed Ireland's flag, but not its financiers. "Sinn Féin had very quickly become respectable," our narrator recalls, "the party of the parish priests and those middle-class men [like Gandon] cute enough to know when the wind was changing" (207). They are curiously "outlawed by the British, but cosy" (207), representing the kind of schizoid quality that Gandon, as both gangster and politician, so chillingly personifies. Ivan too personifies this triumph of human avarice over idealism. He articulates the calculating cynicism that Henry has unwittingly assisted all

⁷⁸ James Connolly, *Collected Works, Volume Two* (Dublin: New Books, 1987), p. 13.

⁷⁹ Slaughter, *Marxism, Ideology and Literature*, p. 11.

along, candidly advising that “all the best soldiers are businessmen”, that “there had to be a reason for the killing and the late nights, and it wasn’t Ireland”. “Control of the island” has surely been the point of all this mayhem, he reasons, “not the harps and martyrs and the freedom to swing a hurley” (314). His acquisitive vision echoes that of the Volunteers in the GPO who are concerned at the fate of money left unattended by fleeing staff. It compounds the thematic conclusion that Henry was not so “Smart” after all. The volunteers and ICA men alternately dreamed of stamping money with harps or starry ploughs, but while they haggled over symbolism, the capitalist system of monetary exchange remained unquestioned. Rejecting that “old Jewish shite” (172) called socialism, the new state rushes to affirm that capitalism’s practices “will go on without the English. And that they’ll go on even better without them” (178).

All of this disappointment leaves Henry feeling a “complete and utter fool” (317), and emphatically revises the “revolution” as a capitalist coup in which stupid proletarians caused trouble for no good reason. Our protagonist has murdered many supposed enemies, yet now he wonders if any of his victims “really [were] spies” (327). In a moment of depressing clarity, the zealot who would have even killed Connolly, had he been given his “name on a piece of paper” (318), now begins to question his years of “revolutionary” warfare. Doyle’s conclusion is not quite as much a critique of conservative politics as a capitulation to them. For him, it is Henry’s idealism that was unwise, not the logic of the conservatives and capitalists. Reviewing his years of warfare, Henry articulates a rather bleak evaluation of the results of his toil that summarily depoliticises a period of profound political importance:

Everything I’d done, every bullet and assassination, all the blood and brains, prison, the torture, the last four years and everything in them, everything had been done for Ivan and the other Ivans, the boys whose time had come (318).

Invoking the sloganeering of more recent Troubles – in a parodied invocation of the PIRA maxim “*tiocfaidh ár lá*” (our day will come) – Doyle suggests the continuing futility of political violence. Derek Hand came to this conclusion in his review of the novel, arguing that Doyle’s analysis finds “that all ideology – be it nationalist or socialist – is in the end quite useless in altering the facts of working people’s lives”. The novel “is more concerned about reading the Irish past from a very present-centred

perspective”.⁸⁰ But if Doyle focuses on the personal amidst the political, the microcosm of several lives overshadowing the macrocosm of great historic change, his obfuscation of political discourse is a political intervention in itself.

Alternatively a comic farce or a deeply sinister capitalist *coup d'état*, *A Star's* “revolution” resists any sense of the little man, Henry Smart, having had any significant or substantive political impact. Foreign tyranny is replaced by native tyranny, the possibility of proletarian political resistance – “from below” – is undercut by the reality of irrevocable dominance “from above”. In Dermot Bolger’s *Night Shift* (1985), Donal ponders on how “there were no statues of how those who didn’t make it into the corridors of power looked twenty years after the truce”, and how pathetic such statues might have looked, of men “squabbling over the details of inflated attacks in pubs”. Henry is perhaps the unmoulded statue of one of these unheeded proletarians, “staring out from dead-end jobs over a stagnant Free State”.⁸¹ In a typically postmodern fashion, the “facts” of history become provisional and slippery, comparable, as E.H. Carr has put it, to “fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use.”⁸² *A Star* is not merely a novel about the revolutionary period, it is also about the present in which the authority of history and the history of authority has become increasingly destabilised. It is a novel that yearns for a future in which Ireland’s “obstinacy”, as Michael Hartnett called it, “its constant connection with the past”, may be broken, or at least reconfigured with a sense of ironic detachment.⁸³ But ironically it would seem to affirm that the possibility of such detachment has not yet arrived, for, in its invocation of some of the most depoliticising thematics of “Troubles” writing, *A Star* admits its own constant connection with the past and its own choice, in Carr’s metaphor, of a particular part of the ideological ocean in which to “fish”. It fails to attend to the nuances of political conflict, preferring instead to take the well-worn path of obfuscation and stereotype.

⁸⁰ Derek Hand, “A Star Called Henry: Volume One of The Last Roundup”, *Saothar* 25 (2000), p. 91.

⁸¹ Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 35.

⁸² E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 23.

⁸³ Qtd. in Patricia Craig’s review of “Michael Harnett’s *Collected Poems*”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 May 2002, p. 24.

Political violence becomes the dehistoricised by-product of personal suffering, avarice, egotism and instinct and, moreover, it is the proletarian protagonist and his working-class comrades who are denied the cerebral capacities of their bourgeois betters. This suggests a rather depressing belief in a very rigid materialist determinism that curiously only applies to the working classes. Correlating the mistakes of criminal father and rebel son, Doyle parrots a depoliticised discourse of undifferentiated barbarity and infers the pointlessness of proletarian political agency. To Yeats' question, "Was it needless death after all?" he rejoins with a resounding "yes".⁸⁴

⁸⁴ W.B. Yeats, "Easter 1916", *W. B. Yeats – A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 87.

Conclusion

Doyle has remarked that being invited to see Paul Mercier's play *Wasters* (1985) was a decisive moment in his own artistic development. The 1985 production was "fast and funny and wonderful but that wasn't it: for the first time in my life I saw characters I recognized, people I met every day, the language I heard every day [...] I'll never forget it."¹ His sense of excitement at seeing contemporary working-class Dublin depicted on the stage was a measure of how little that community was served by literature and popular culture. It echoes the frustration of another, earlier writer, Brendan Behan, who quipped in 1951 that "cultural activity in present-day Dublin is largely agricultural". Behan complained of the "feeling of isolation one suffers writing in a Corporation housing scheme", while relating that contemporary Irish authors wrote "mostly about their hungry bogs and the great scarcity of crumpet". "I am a city rat," he continued. "Joyce is dead and O'Casey is in Devon. The people writing here now have as much interest for me as an epic poet in Finnish or a Lapland novelist."² Both he and Doyle started out as writers in environments that afforded them little encouragement for their own brand of art, and yet they would achieve a great deal in representing the Dublin they knew but rarely found in contemporary texts. Both writers expressed the sense of a lacuna in Irish culture, and it is out of a similar concern that this thesis has emerged.

My reading of thirteen individual texts has explored issues of gender, nationalism, class "injuries", culture, industry, work, imprisonment, sexual repression, historiography and political agency. It has engaged these issues in order to explore how the fiction and plays of working-class Dublin sustain common themes, and found that a number of central ideas emerge. It has also discovered many parallels in other works – particularly those of Seán O'Casey – but also in the fiction and plays of writers like A.P. Wilson, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Robert Collis, Joe O'Byrne, Paul Mercier, Sebastian Barry, Thomas Kilroy, Ken Harmon and Enda Walsh, whose writing on

¹ Roddy Doyle, "Introduction" to *Brown Bread and War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 1.

² Brendan Behan, *The Letters of Brendan Behan*, ed. E.H. Mikhail (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1992), p. 45.

working-class Dublin suggests great scope for further scholarly work. Most of the works examined here have received little or no academic attention to date. Despite their striking resemblances, they have heretofore failed to secure the status they clearly deserve as part of a distinct literary canon, which represents the “people [that Doyle and others] met every day”.

My central concern, of charting a continuity of writing that is embedded in the lived experience of working-class people, is mirrored in the preoccupations of the writing itself. The failure of predominant aesthetic practices to reflect the lives of the poor remains a central theme since the earliest writing. In Act 3 of Oliver St. John Gogarty’s *Blight* (1917), a meeting of Dublin Corporation’s Hospital Board is used to contrast the aesthetic aloofness of the middle class with the material realities of proletarian life. The councillors opt to avoid reading a letter from the Local Government Board “calling attention to the urgent necessity of adopting some scheme for preventing the spread of the hidden plague” in the tenements because of “considerations of good taste”.³ Instead, they pointedly turn their attention to lofty musings about Dublin’s architecture and the building of a beautiful mortuary chapel.⁴ Gogarty’s message could hardly be clearer: in Dublin’s corridors of power, the aesthetics of death are more important than the proletariat’s misery in life. The dichotomy he draws between the reality of working-class experience and the aloofness of bourgeois aesthetics is not just a figurative comment on social divisions, but also a challenge to the world of culture. The term aesthetic itself is “shorthand for a whole project of hegemony, the massive introjections of abstract reason by the life of the senses”, as Terry Eagleton writes.⁵ Predominant aesthetic practices affect how we express ourselves through art, and how hegemony expresses itself in everyday “abstract reason”.

Consider, for instance, James Wickham’s contention that working-class Dubliners have been on the receiving end of forms of “cultural discrimination”, which pervade basic assumptions about behaviour and status, and result in their social invisibility. Wickham observed nearly thirty years ago “the paradox that while it is

³ Oliver St. John Gogarty, *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty* (Delaware: Proscenium, 1973), p. 47.

⁴ *Ibid.* 49.

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 42.

often claimed that there are no class accents in Ireland, nobody expects someone with a 'Dublin accent' to come from Foxrock: working class language apparently does not exist".⁶ His contention is still valid today. Yes, there has been immense progress in this regard since Donagh MacDonagh thought it necessary to include a glossary containing 69 words of working-class Dublineze at the end of his farce play *Happy as Larry* (1946).⁷ MacDonagh explained vernacular words like "bowsey", "gas" and "hoosh", and other idiomatic expressions such as "fair enough", "ball of malt" and "ould ones".⁸ Evidently, he felt hearing and seeing these words would be a new experience for much of his audience. Later writers, particularly Roddy Doyle, have shown far greater confidence that their demotic will be comprehensible to readers. Doyle's novels are replete with working-class language. But in the 1990s he related that this idiom still occupied an uncomfortable space in Irish culture. In *The Snapper* (1993), Jimmy Rabbitte's working-class accent impedes his chances of becoming a radio presenter. His attempts to develop a (bourgeois, Southside) radio voice – "Hoy there [...] This is Jommy Robbitte, That's Rockin' Robbitte" – may make him "sound like a dope", but his attendance at elocution lessons to develop a ridiculous middle-class twang is indispensable in his view:

- I've a gig in a few weeks; Soturday, he told Sharon.
- Stop talking' like tha', will yeh.
- I'm tryin' to get used to it.
- It makes yeh sound like a fuckin' eejit.
- Here maybe, but not on the radio, said Jimmy.⁹

Becoming acceptable in society is partly about losing the markers of a working-class upbringing, Doyle suggests. This sense of shame is apparent again in Catherine Dunne's *A Name for Himself* (1999), when Farrell checks his accent in front of a middle-class friend:

Christ. He was making himself sound like a common labourer [...] suddenly, painfully conscious of his dark blue overalls and his Dublin accent. No matter

⁶ James Wickham, "The New Irish Working Class?", *Saothar* 6 (1980), p. 85.

⁷ Donagh MacDonagh, *Happy as Larry* (London: Maurice Fridberg, 1946).

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 65-66.

⁹ Roddy Doyle, *The Snapper* (London: Minerva, 1993), pp. 188-189.

how careful he tried to be, broad, unguarded vowels still slipped to the surface of his speech in moments of stress.¹⁰

Anxieties of this kind are a curious part of the suppression of proletarian culture through elitist practices and predispositions. Helena Sheehan would note the almost surreal elision of working-class people from RTÉ's flagship soap opera, *Glenroe* (1987-2002), in which "nobody even worked for a wage" for the first five years of its production history.¹¹ While the Dublin-based soap *Fair City* (1989-present) did much to redress this concern, Sheehan observed the paradox that "although most characters were supposed to be of working class origins, hardly any of them have been wage labourers"; indeed, "an extraordinary number of characters have owned their own local businesses".¹² This baffling aversion to the working class, in everything from accent to soap operas, is a curious comment on Irish culture. It is part of what Peter Sheridan identifies as a "certain orthodoxy":

Particularly if you look at the whole legacy of de Valera and this rural idyllic notion he had of Ireland being a place of 'comely maidens dancing at the crossroads', a kind of rural utopia. For those of us who were coming from a working-class background this was so far out from where we were coming from, where, obviously [...] whole communities were abandoned [...] What a thing for a country to do to people — to take away who they are!¹³

His writing is partly about a historic and cultural retrieval of "who they are", and the writers I have examined all try to unearth the submerged narratives of a Dublin that became a no-place in national culture.

¹⁰ Catherine Dunne, *A Name for Himself* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 7.

¹¹ Helena Sheehan, *Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories* (Dublin: RTÉ, 1987; re-published in a revised edition on CD-ROM, 2004), p. 204. The national broadcaster's inadequacy in terms of representing working class life was not lost on the public or those working within it, Sheehan observed: "This was the source of a great deal of dissatisfaction with RTÉ. Although everyone in RTÉ saw the problem, there was difficulty in generating an effective response to it. Both inside and outside RTÉ, it was asked: Why, in a time of rising unemployment, was there no Irish *Boys from the Blackstuff*? Why, in a period of mounting crime and social indiscipline, was there no Irish *Hill Street Blues*? Why, with all the interesting storylines inherent in earning a living, raising a family, understanding the world and coming to terms with the complexities of urban life, could RTÉ generate no Irish equivalent to *East Enders* or *Brookside*?"; *Ibid.*

¹² Helena Sheehan, *The Continuing Story of Irish Television Drama: Tracking the Tiger* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), p. 41.

¹³ Interview conducted by the present author with Peter Sheridan on Friday, 9 September, 2005.

Retrieval, revision and renaissance

To be sure, retrospection and disclosure go hand-in-hand in the fiction and plays of working-class Dublin. Works such as Christy Browne's *Down All the Days* (1970), Bolger's *The Woman's Daughter* (1987), *April Bright* (1995) and *The Passion of Jerome* (1999), Mannix Flynn's *James X* (2003), Peter Sheridan's *Big Fat Love* (2003) and Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007) all retrieve meaning from past events which they perceive as historically distorted or unaccounted for. Historiography and its misrepresentation is an abiding theme, as my readings of Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999), James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969) and Paul Smith's *Summer Sang in Me* (1972), in particular, sought to show. In his surrealist play on the "worker saint" Matt Talbot, *Talbot's Box* (1979), Thomas Kilroy intimates the role of texts in the diminution of working-class history. He parallels the historical revisionism attendant on Matt Talbot's memory – which either diminishes his reputation locally as a "scab" and "strike breaker", or lauds him among businessmen as a "model" to "all Christian workers", who "never complained" – with the historical revisionism of capitalist state hegemony.¹⁴ The "Priest Figure" of the play brings forward Talbot's book collection, which Kilroy uses to emphasise the shared interests of capitalism and the Catholic Church:

PRIEST FIGURE The remarkable library of a simple saint, found after his death. (*Title.*) *Socialism* by Rev. Robert O'Kane, S.J. Several books by Mr. Belloc on the Church and Socialism. Studies of the illustrious Father McKenna, S.J. on the workers' problems ...

FIRST MAN [businessman Mr D.] That will be all, father. Thank you, the point is made. (PRIEST FIGURE *retreats.*) Meanwhile, the Servant of God digested these works of Christian direction and advised his fellow workers on their rightful place in society.

SECOND MAN [worker] Ay. Down on their uppers!

¹⁴ Thomas Kilroy, *Talbot's Box* (Dublin: Gallery, 1979), pp. 30-31.

FIRST MAN

Well, now. That's it. Law and order restored. It didn't work. Consult your history books. Police exonerated. Disturbances exaggerated. The usual protesters. They're all down in me little book. Enemies of Church and State.¹⁵

History books exonerate the powerful of wrongdoing, while fostering meekness, acceptance and social stagnation in the working class.

Kilroy suggests a process of silencing through discourse, which was highlighted in my study of women's stories in Chapter 3, in which Sheridan's Philo and Smith's Molly speak for all those working-class women whose histories have been forgotten. Both writers show how the institutions of the state are particularly cruel to working-class women with little social power. Hiding the truth of institutional abuse was a key concern for writers like Sheridan, James McKenna and James Plunkett, as my analysis has shown. Working-class people were particularly prone to ending up in state institutions because of their lack of access to legal and social power, and for some, like Mannix Flynn's James X, the truth of this is simply too painful, a site of anxiety and ambiguity.¹⁶ "Somebody tell someone. They make us squeal and dance like little pigs," James writes of his sufferings at the hands of the Christian Brothers. His uncertainty mirrors his society's own conflicted attitude to institutional malpractice: "Let me hide away from my memory, remember? It happened! It happened! It happened! It happened! Didn't, did, didn't. Did so! No! No! Yes OK".¹⁷ James proclaims his sense of classed cultural exclusion while part of a punk band. At a gig, he evidently feels alienated from the crowd "and their fucking student cards", and from the Arts Centre itself, "this poncy middle of the middle of the road, middle class's centre".¹⁸ His surname, "X", is a register of his enduring anonymity. The scars that society inflicts on its most vulnerable, and the role of class inequality in dehumanising working-class people, was again a potent theme in the prison dramas of Chapter 5, in which the prison

¹⁵ Ibid. 31-32.

¹⁶ Maura Laverty had raised this issue earlier with her novel *Liffey Lane* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947), in which a poor family is forced to send a child to the Finglas Industrial School due to their inability to care for him.

¹⁷ Gerard Mannix Flynn, *James X* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003), p. 28.

¹⁸ Ibid. 48.

is a microcosm that reflects macrocosmic human relations under capitalism, and brings those from the margins of society centre stage.

In my introduction I drew attention to a comment by Michel Peillon, in which he characterised the Dublin working-class as a radical community that opposed hegemonic norms — “a pole of differentiation in Irish society”.¹⁹ The sense of this social stratum as an alienated cohort, in both cultural and socio-economic terms, dovetails with the radical outlook Peillon identified, and creates what I have termed an “alienation of the centre”. In the literature I have examined, Dublin’s working class is simultaneously at the forefront of national social change and excluded from the epicentres of superstructural power. This phenomenon is identified in more general terms by Ferdia Mac Anna, who grounds his “Dublin Renaissance” in a counter-hegemonic reaction from the city. Like Sheridan, he argues that the emphasis on rural life in Irish culture caused an “exile” of the capital city and young Dubliners felt culturally displaced; it “was like living inside a fossil”.²⁰ Against this, he traces the arrival of a renaissance in literature which would act as a cultural vanguard in the city and the country’s modernisation and makes a salient point: that “most of the truly effective writing about modern Dublin that emerged in the 60s and 70s” came from “non-academic types such as Dunne, Magee and the rockstar Lynott”.²¹ Mac Anna pays particular attention to the obsession of “Renaissance” writers with the “ignored or officially invisible suburbs”, the “gurrier chic” which provoked much public criticism and debate.²² Writers were “now indicting the society that spawned them, a society rooted in corruption, laziness and indifference to the problems of contemporary Ireland”.²³ Their “Dirty Dublin Poetic Realism”, in which the “myth of a single Ireland is no longer true”, marked the emergence of a literary challenge to hegemonic modes of thought.²⁴ What is most important about Mac Anna’s appraisal, for the purposes of this present study, is his identification of a number of common ideas and themes in

¹⁹ Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982), p. 35.

²⁰ Ferdia Mac Anna, “The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin writers”, *The Irish Review*, 10 (Spring 1991), p. 15.

²¹ *Ibid.* 19.

²² *Ibid.* 23, 24.

²³ *Ibid.* 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

“Renaissance” writing: pointed social disenchantment, the desire to unearth hidden narratives of impoverished Dublin life and an almost obligatory attack on the orthodoxies and norms of bourgeois Ireland.²⁵ However, his failure to specify *class* as a key factor of the paradigm is remiss, even if it is strongly inferred.

In Doyle’s *Brownbread* (1992), a typical “Renaissance” work, young working-class Dubliners are depicted in a surreal confrontation with rural Ireland and the religious and cultural ideals it espouses when they kidnap a bishop and goad rural gardaí with cries of “go home, you, and milk your cows!”²⁶ One of the kidnapers, Donkey, has a “tattoo he did on himself at the back of the class” which proclaims an “Eire nua. Eire bleedin’ nua”.²⁷ But Donkey tellingly eschews patriotism:

John You’d die for Ireland, wouldn’t yeh?

Donkey I would in me brown.²⁸

He wants a new Ireland, but Donkey is not a nationalist. His new Ireland, the plot suggests, is one in which rural superiority and Catholic teachings no longer subordinate the working-class. Marshall W. Fishwick writes, in his study of popular culture, that the proletariat is “chiefly marked by being cut out from the vital functions of his own society. He is the aggregate of outsiders, the fringe-dwellers.”²⁹ The ironic sense of being a “fringe dweller” in one’s capital city is a major theme of writing of Dublin’s working class — in Bolger’s *The Journey Home* (1990), McKenna’s *The Scatterin’* (1959), Dunne’s *Goodbye to the Hill* (novel 1965, play 1976) and Heno Magee’s *Hatchet* (1978), to name but a few examples. These Dubliners occupy an estranged space in the nation state, but act as a vanguard of modernisation. They are alienated from national culture, “this glorious shagging kingdom you were excluded from”, in Bolger’s words, despite their enormous role within it.³⁰ Paula Meehan, in her poem “A Child’s Map of Dublin”, captures this exasperated feeling of exclusion in symbolic

²⁵ Mac Anna extrapolates the important tenets of this writing as follows: that it is “primarily a literature of social disenchantment” (without mentioning class), that its “sources are essentially non-traditional, even anti-literary” and that there is a characteristically “ferocious unrelenting energy that is focused directly on stripping away the façade to get at the realities of life in modern Dublin”; *Ibid.* 29.

²⁶ Doyle, *Brownbread and War*, p. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Marshall W. Fishwick, *Seven Pillars of Popular Culture* (London: Greenwood, 1985), p. 25.

³⁰ Bolger, *The Journey Home*, p. 195.

terms: “I wanted to find you Connolly’s Starry Plough, / the flag I have lived under since birth or since / I first scanned the night skies and learned the nature of work”, she tells the porter at a museum. “That hasn’t been on show in years” the porter replies; “They’re revising at the National Museum”. In the “revised” history of Ireland, Connolly, his Plough, his progressive politics and the people he represented, are displaced.³¹

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the forms employed by working-class writers are often as subversive as their themes. Sheridan again highlights the dichotomy between the De Valeraesque fantasy of hegemonic Ireland and the disenchanting reality of its inner city dwellers’ lives in *Finders Keepers* (2004). The play starts out as a realist work. Its central complication is the dilemma of young would-be dock worker, Pancho, regarding his father’s drunken sale of a “button” — the work permit passed on by dockers to their sons, which secured their “inheritance” of a job. If Pancho has no button, he may need to emigrate, but the late transformation of his headmaster into the form of a frog emphasises the ironic improbability of Sheridan’s happy ending. Moreover, it suggests the farcical inappropriateness of the conventional, fairy-tale, coming-of-age narrative to the precarious poverty of working-class life.

This juxtaposition of utopian fantasy and dystopian reality recalls many other works: it is apparent in working-class writing of the city since James Stephens’ *The Charwoman’s Daughter* (1917), with its unlikely *deus-ex-machina* ending for the implausibly lucky “Makebelieves”. In Plunkett’s *Strumpet City*, Father Giffley’s drunken attempt to revive a parishioner, Lazarus-style, from his coffin, is a satiric comment on the irrelevance of religion, and its fantastic claims, to the tragedies of working-class life. The contrast is again apparent in Sheridan’s fairy-tale ending for *Big Fat Love* (2003, as discussed in Chapter 3), and in Paula Meehan’s *Mrs Sweeney* (1997), where Mr Sweeney recoils from the horror of his daughter’s death through heroin abuse by transforming himself into a mock-legendary bird-king. In Paul Mercier’s play *Drowning* (1984), working-class fantasist Luke imagines himself as “Ozzy Stench”, the lead singer in a rock band, but his recurrent dreams of fame are comically interrupted by the realities of his family’s horrible, impoverished

³¹ Paula Meehan, *Mysteries of the Home* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1996), p. 38.

circumstances.³² In Philip Casey's novel *The Fabulists* (1994), unemployed lovers Tess and Mungo regale each other with fabricated stories of foreign travel that mask the boredom of living on the dole. Throughout the writing, subversive literary forms and reflexive metacommentaries are deployed with striking frequency to show how culture and literature share a difficult relationship with working-class reality. Lee Dunne's *Goodbye to the Hill* had inferred this with its contrast between the glossy images of cultural production (films, books and magazines) and the Maguire's sad existence, as I have shown. Smith's *Summer Sang in Me*, Bolger's *The Journey Home*, Behan's *The Quare Fellow*, Sheridan's *The Liberty Suit* and Meehan's *Cell* estrange the familiar in order to show how cultural representation has failed to reflect proletarian life.

New writing

While recent writing of Dublin's working-class shows that the fabric of communal life has been damaged by social and economic change, the persistence of old themes and ideas is evidence of the continuing relevance of class analysis to the study of Irish literature. Alienation has grown as a theme: Sheridan's happy ending in *Big Fat Love* is undercut with worries about how redevelopment in Sheriff Street will affect the community its demolished flats contained. This concern returns in Bolger's *From These Green Heights* (2005), regarding the redevelopment of Ballymun, in which uncertainty about what the future holds for another deprived community is the central theme. His recent play, *The Consequences of Lightning* (2008), also based in Ballymun, shows how poverty and social deprivation continue to have consequences for its characters, and also that an old community is dying; the play, like *Big Fat Love*, ends with the death of a central character who personifies his community. Such concerns about the breakdown of social ties are evident again in Conor McPherson's *Dublin Carol* (2000), where Mark and John, who work in an undertakers' office during the Christmas period, exemplify how human relations are increasingly problematic in the city at the beginning of the new millennium:

JOHN. You know if you're listening to the radio and there's all static and you put your hand on it.

³² Paul Mercier, *Drowning* (1984, unpublished mss. provided by the author), p. 3, 9.

MARK. Yeah, you earth it.

JOHN. Yeah and there's a clear signal. It'd be great to be able to do that, wouldn't it? To people, I mean. To people.³³

Yet it is also important to acknowledge the desire to counter popular discourses of breakdown and alienation in working-class life. bell hooks identifies a problem of representation in *Outlaw Culture* (1994), whereby when "intellectuals, journalists or politicians speak about nihilism and the despair of the underclass they do not link those states to representations of poverty in the mass media". In order to "change the face of poverty so that it becomes once again, a site for the formation of values, of dignity and integrity, as any other class positionality in this society, we would need to intervene in existing systems of representation".³⁴

In Joe O'Byrne's *It Come Up Sun* (2000), in which an Eastern European woman emerges from a container in the Docklands, Joe, a security guard, is faced with the dilemma of whether he should report the illegal immigrant to the authorities, or help her in her effort to gain entry to the country.³⁵ In this way, he must also decide whether to align himself with his employers and the state, or with the dispossessed and the foreign. His common class interest with the woman is inferred a number of times:

ANA Like country, no want to leave.

JOE No want to leave. Your brother, he left.

ANA Life hard. He leave, yes, brother, he leave.

JOE Life hard. Who're ye tellin'! You think I want to be doing this job? You can have it! If it wasn't for my three kids ...³⁶

Joe's feeling of worthlessness is derived partly from the tedium of his job, and partly from the dissolution of his family. His children "make fun of" him and his wife is "disappointed" in him.³⁷ But his decision to help the refugee is part of a cultural shift, the genesis of a new Ireland which Billy, Joe's friend, hints at when he meets Ana: "it's

³³ Conor McPherson, *Plays: Two* (London: Nick Hern, 2004), p. 127.

³⁴ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 171.

³⁵ In the original production, the actress was Polish, but O'Byrne's lack of specificity infers that the part could be played by an immigrant from another country.

³⁶ Joe O'Byrne, *It Come Up Sun* (2000, unpublished mss. supplied by the author), p. 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 24, 25.

like you just, you know took one of your ribs and made her”.³⁸ Joe finds validation in asserting his common class interests and taking the woman’s side, refusing to report her even though the “security” of capitalist property is his job.

In Ken Harmon’s *Done Up Like a Kipper* (2002), the Tallaght working-class family of a taxi driver, Gino, enjoys the affluence of the economic boom. There is much talk of sun tans and holidays, Dyson washing machines and recreational drug use, but the local community is also damaged by drug abuse and anti-social behaviour from “good for nothing cunts. Have the place gone mad. With scumbags. Overrunning the kip”.³⁹ Despite newfound wealth, old class injuries remain; Gino’s son Eugene, studying psychology, assesses his father: “You know what your underlying fear is, under all your working-class bullshit – you’re terrified that people don’t take you seriously as a person. And the truth is that people don’t”.⁴⁰ Gino’s family is falling apart, and he fears about his daughter’s alliance with a black man, Nathan. However, with the revelation of Gino’s horrific stabbing with a syringe, the family rallies round. The play ends with Nathan singing “Dublin in the Rare Oul Times”, symbolising again the integration of a new working-class into the “rare old” one.⁴¹ The family finds affirmation in “stick[ing] together”, and Gino pointedly renounces his own newfound consumerism when his Mercedes Benz is burnt out: “It’s only a fuckin car anyway”.⁴² Both O’Byrne and Harmon use the arrival of immigrants to stress enduring commonalities of class, and disdain for bourgeois values.⁴³

In Bolger’s 1999 play *The Passion of Jerome*, there is barely veiled anger at the middle-class Clara’s contempt for the people of Ballymun as “only consumers at the lowest end of the market”, not a genuine community, part of a real social class.⁴⁴ Her lover Jerome’s stigmata, caused by a ghostly boy who committed suicide in the flats,

³⁸ Ibid. 36.

³⁹ Ken Harmon, *Done Up Like a Kipper* (Dublin: Arts Council, 2002), p. 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 64.

⁴¹ Ibid. 86.

⁴² Ibid. 66, 86.

⁴³ The diversification of Dublin’s working-class recurs as a theme in Roddy Doyle’s recent collection of short stories *The Deportees* (2007), and in his collaboration with Bisi Adigun on a rewrite of *The Playboy of the Western World* (2007), in which Christy Mahon is replaced by Nigerian Christopher Malomo seeking refuge in a Dublin pub. This theme recurs also in Lance Daly’s recent film *Kisses* (2008), where abused Tallaght children Kylie and Dylan enlist the help of a Brazilian boatman in their joint escape from dysfunctional homes.

⁴⁴ Dermot Bolger, *The Passion of Jerome* (London: Methuen, 1999), p. 39.

symbolises the return of that community's suffering as a spectral indictment of middle-class Ireland, and it also shows how that community, and its hidden narratives, refuse to go away. The writers I have explored in this thesis carry O'Casey's legacy: his insistence on the essential place of the working class in history and literature. To return to Herbert Goldstone's point, they continue to assert his sense of "commitment" to a neglected community.⁴⁵ Peter Hitchcock identifies a similar impetus in working-class writing generally, which he extrapolates from Mikhail Bakhtin's early essays that use "answerability or responsibility to describe the relation between art and life: they should be answerable to each other or else both run the risk of being ineffectual". This concept adds "an ethical dimension to aesthetics [...] a form of social responsibility that allows workers to 'speak' to one another across a range of discourses, discourses of memory, of experience, of alienation, of solidarity". Answerability, as an aesthetic precept, "underlines that working-class Being is more than the content of such lives or the aura of dispossession that this content implies".⁴⁶

O'Casey's use of agitprop, his depiction of a counter-culture, his desire to reveal the hidden relations of society and to counter the elision of working-class history, endure as central themes in the writing that I have analysed, affirming a sustained sense of "answerability". His desire to reveal the shared interests of working-class people, and to forge with them a hegemony of their own – a "working-class Being" – is a project that continues. The fiction and plays of working-class Dublin, 1954-2004, represent an enduring, sublimated lineage of class struggle through art, a disruption, contestation and subversion of the established order. While this is not an exhaustive study of the working-class literature of Ireland's capital city – and my research conveys the possibilities for a great deal more scholarly work in this area – it has identified a continuity of writing and marks a new departure in Irish Studies.

⁴⁵ Herbert Goldstone, *In Search of Community: The Achievement of Seán O'Casey* (Dublin: Mercier, 1972), pp. 5-6.

⁴⁶ Peter Hitchcock, "They Must Be Represented? Problems in Theories of Working-Class Representation", *PMLA*, 115.1 (January 2000), pp. 27-28.

Bibliography

- Aalen, F. H. A., "A Review of Recent Irish Population Trends", *Population Studies*, 17.1 (July 1963), 73-78
- Ahlstrom, Dick, "'Hatchet' at the Embankment, Tallaght", *The Irish Times*, 28 July 1981, p. 8
- Allen, Kieran, "The Celtic Tiger, inequality and social partnership", *Administration* 47.2 (Summer 1999), 31-55
- *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000)
- Althusser, Louis, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp. 153-164
- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991)
- Anon., "Williams' play banned", *The Irish Times*, 14 June 1962, p. 11
- Anon., "An Irishman's Diary", *The Irish Times*, 1 September 1978, p. 8
- Anon., "An Irishman's Diary", *The Irish Times*, 10 April 1970, p. 11
- Anon., "An Irishman's Diary", *The Irish Times*, 25 August 1960, p. 8
- Anon., "An Irishman's Diary", *The Irish Times*, 28 September 1968, p. 9
- Anon., "Arts Council ignores his work", *Sunday Independent*, 16 December 1973, p. 9
- Anon., "Festival Playwrights", *The Irish Times*, 17 September 1960, p. 8
- Anon., "James McKenna: Sculptor, playwright and poet with a total commitment to the arts", *The Irish Times*, 21 October 2000, p. 16
- Anon., "The 'angry' fifties", *Sunday Independent*, 18 November 1973, p. 17
- Anon., "The Resurgence In Irish Drama", *The Times*, 28 September, 1960, p. 15
- Appignanesi, Richard *et al.*, *Introducing Postmodernism* (London: Icon, 2003)
- Archer, Kane, "'Hatchet' at the Embankment", *The Irish Times*, 16 October 1975, p. 10
- Ardagh, John, *Ireland and the Irish: Portrait of a Changing Society* (London: Penguin, 1995)

- Avrich, Paul, "The Legacy of Bakunin", *Russian Review*, 29.2 (April, 1970), 129-142
- Badinter, Elisabeth, *XY: On Masculine Identity*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Columbia UP, 1995)
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)" in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee and ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1986), pp. 10-59
- Balibar, Etienne, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism", in *Reading Capital*, ed. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar (London: New Left, 1972), pp. 199-308
- Barker, Pat, *A Century's Daughter* (London: Virago, 1986)
- *Union Street* (London: Virago, 2001)
- *The Eye in the Door* (London: Penguin, 1994)
- Barry, Sebastian, *A Long, Long Way* (London: Faber, 2006)
- Barry, Ursula, "The Republic of Ireland: The Politics of Sexuality" in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke et al. (New York: Field Day, 2002)
- Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993)
- Barton, Ruth, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Battersby, Eileen, "Death of a Realist", *Irish Times, Weekend*, (18 January 1997), p. 9
- Beale, Jenny, *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986)
- Behan, Brendan, *After the Wake: twenty-one prose works including previously unpublished material* (Dublin: O'Brien, 1981)
- *An Giall: Poems and a play in Irish* (Dublin: Gallery, 1981)
- *Behan: The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2000)
- *Borstal Boy* (London: Hutchinson, 1958)
- *Brendan Behan's Island: an Irish sketch-book* (London: Hutchinson, 1962)
- *Brendan Behan's New York* (London: Hutchinson, 1964)
- *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (London: Arrow, 1990)
- *Hold Your Hour and Have Another* (London: Hutchinson, 1963)
- *Moving Out and A Garden Party: Two plays* (Dixon, California: Proscenium, 1967)

- *Richard's Cork Leg* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973)
- *The Dubbalin Man* (Dublin: A. & A. Farmar, 1997)
- *The Hostage* (London: Methuen, 1958)
- *The King of Ireland's Son* (London: Andersen, 1996)
- *The Letters of Brendan Behan*, ed. E. H. Mikhail (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1992)
- *The Square Fellow: A comedy-drama* (London: Methuen, 1956)
- *The Scarperer* (New York: Doubleday, 1964)
- *The Wit of Brendan Behan*, compiled by Sean McCann (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968)
- Behan, Brian with Aubrey Dillon Malone, *The Brothers Behan* (Dublin: Blackhall, 1998)
- Behan, Dominic, *Teems of Times and Happy Returns* (London: Heinemann, 1961)
- *Tell Dublin I Miss Her* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1962)
- Benyon, John, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University, 2002)
- Beresford-Ellis, Peter, "Revisionism in Irish Historical Writing: The new anti-nationalist school of historians" (1989)
<<http://www.etext.org/Politics/INAC/historical.revisionism>> [accessed 4 April 2005]
- *A History of the Irish Working Class* (Dublin: Pluto, 1989)
- Bew, Paul, "The National Question, Land, and 'Revisionism': Some reflections" in *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, ed. D. George Boyce, and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 90-99
- Bhabha, Homi K., "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), pp. 112-123
- *The Location Of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994)
- Boggs, Carl, *Gramsci's Marxism* (London: Pluto, 1976)
- Boland, Eavan, "Dublin's Advocate" *This Week* (Dublin: 12 October 1972) 40-42
- Bolger, Dermot, *A Dublin Quartet: 'Blinded by Light', 'In High Germany', 'The Holy Ground', and 'One Last White Horse'* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

- *Emily's Shoes* (London: Viking/Penguin, 1992)
 - ed. *Finbar's Hotel* (Dublin: New Island, 1997)
 - *Finglas Lilies* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1980)
 - *In High Germany* (Dublin: New Island, 1989)
 - *Internal Exiles* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1986)
 - ed. *Invisible Cities: The New Dubliners: A Journey through Unofficial Dublin* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1998)
 - *Invisible Dublin: A Journey through Dublin's Suburbs* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1991)
 - *Leinster Street Ghosts* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1989)
 - *Never a Dull Moment* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1979)
 - *Night Shift* (London: Penguin, 1993)
 - *No Waiting America* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1982)
 - *The Chosen Moment* (Dublin: New Island, 2004)
 - *The Crack in the Emerald: New Irish Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 1994)
 - *The Habit of Flesh* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1979)
 - *The Journey Home* (London: Flamingo, 2003)
 - *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1989)
 - *The Passion of Jerome* (London: Methuen, 1999)
 - *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (London: Picador, 1993)
 - *The Reed Bed* (Oldcastle: Gallery, 2000)
 - *The Woman's Daughter* (London: Viking/Penguin, 1991)
 - *Two Plays: April Bright & Blinded by the Light* (Dublin: New Island, 1997)
- Booker, Keith M. "Late Capitalism Comes to Dublin: 'American' Popular Culture in the Novels of Roddy Doyle" *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* (July 1997), 27-45
- "The Bicycle and Descartes: Epistemology in the Fiction of Beckett and O'Brien", *Eire-Ireland: A Journal Of Irish Studies*, 26.1 (Spring 1991), 76-94
- Boomtown Rats, Rat Trap, A Tonic for the Troops, (Ensign, 1978)
 <<http://www.lyricstime.com/boomtown-rats-rat-trap-lyrics.html>> [accessed 1 April, 2008]

- Borel, Françoise, “‘I Am Without a Name’, The Fiction of Christy Brown” in *The Irish Novel in Our Time*, ed. Patrick Rafroidi and Maurice Harmon (Lille: l’Université de Lille, 1976), pp. 287-295
- Böss, Michael, “Home from Europe: Modernity and the Reappropriation of the Past in Bolger’s Early Novels”, in *Engaging Modernity: Readings of Irish Politics, Culture and Literature at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Michael Böss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), pp. 153-166
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1998)
- *Masculine Domination* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001)
- *Outline of Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Cambridge UP, 1977)
- *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000)
- *et al. The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (Cambridge: Polity, 2002)
- Bowen, Elizabeth, *The Last September* (London: Vintage, 1998)
- Boyce, D. George and Alan O’Day, eds. *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1996)
- Bradshaw, Brendan, “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Conor Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 122-145
- Bradshaw, Nick, “Doyle’s Dubliners” *Details*, (February 1994), 128-130
- Brady, Ciaran, “‘Constructive and Instrumental’: The Dilemma of Ireland’s first ‘New Historians’” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 3-31
- Bramsbäck, Birgit, *James Stephens: A Literary and Bibliographical Study* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1959)
- Brannick, Teresa, Francis Devine and Aidan Kelly, “Social Statistics for Labour Historians: Strike Statistics, 1922-99”, *Saothar* 25 (2000), 114-120
- Brannigan, John, *Brendan Behan: Cultural Nationalism and the Revisionist Writer* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002)

- Breen, Richard and Christopher T. Whelan, *Social mobility and Social Class in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996)
- Bromley, Roger, "The Theme That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Class and Recent British Film", in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 51-68
- Brown, Christy, *A Shadow on Summer* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973)
- *Background Music: Poems* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973)
- *Collected Poems: Christy Brown* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982)
- *Come Softly to My Wake* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971)
- *Down All the Days* (London: Pan, 1972)
- *My Left Foot* (Cork: Mercier, 1964)
- *Of Snails and Skylarks* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978)
- *Wild Grow the Lilies* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976)
- Brown, Kenneth D., "Trade Unionism in Ireland", *Saothar* 5 (1979), 56-60
- Brown, Terence, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004)
- Burgess, Anthony, "In the twilight zone", *The Observer*, 18 November 1962, p. 25
- Cahalan, James, "Review of Farewell Companions", *Eire-Ireland* 13.2 (Summer 1978), 127-130
- "The Making of *Strumpet City*: James Plunkett and the Historical Vision" *Éire-Ireland* 13.4 (Winter 1978), 81-100
- Cain, William E., *Figures of Finance Capitalism: Writing, Class, and Capital in the Age of Dickens* (New York: Routledge, 2003)
- Carpentiere, Godeleine, "Dublin and the Drama of Larkinism: James Plunkett's *Strumpet City*", in *The Irish Novel in Our Time*, ed. Patrick Rafroidi and Maurice Harmon (Lille: l'Université de Lille, 1975), pp. 209-17
- Carr, E. H. *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1987)
- Chaplin, Sid, *The Day of the Sardine* (London: Panther, 1965)
- Chomsky, Noam, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World* (London: Pluto, 2002)

- Cixous, Hélène, "Castration of Decapitation?" *Signs* 7.1, trans. Annette Kuhn (1981), 41-55
- Clancy, Patrick, "College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education" (Dublin: HEA, 2001) <<http://extranet.heai.ie/uploads/pdf/Clancymaster%20.pdf>> [accessed 2 December 2008].
- "Education Policy", in *Contemporary Irish Social Policy*, ed. Suzanne Quin, Patricia Kennedy, Gabriel Kiely and Anne O'Donnell (Dublin: UCD, 1999), pp. 72-107
- Clarke, Austin, "Tales from Dublin", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 6 September 1963, p. 674
- Clarke, Desmond, *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folklore* (Cork: Royal Carbery, 1985)
- Clear, Caitriona, *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1926-1961* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000)
- Cohen, Nick, *What's Left? How Liberals Lost their Way* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007)
- Colgan, Gerry, "Return to the Hill", *The Irish Times*, 29 August 1995, p. 10
- Collis, Robert, *Marrowbone Lane: A Play in Three Acts* (Dublin: Runa, 1943)
- The Commitments*. Dir. Alan Parker. Beacon. 1991.
- Connolly, James, *Collected Works, Volume Two* (Dublin: New Books, 1987)
- *Erin's Hope* (1909) <<http://www.ex.ac.uk/Projects/meia/connolly/Archive/jceh00.htm>> [accessed 20 February 2005]
- Cooley, Paula M., *Religious Imagination and the Body: A Feminist Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994)
- Cook, Guy, *The Discourse of Advertising* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- Cook, John, "Culture, Class and Taste", in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 97-112
- Cook, Sylvia Jenkins, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1976)

- Cookman, Anthony Victor, "A Master of the Theatre", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 August 1960, p. 22
- Corcoran, Neil, *After Yeats and Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997)
- Corkery, Daniel, *The Hidden Ireland: a Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1967, orig. 1924)
- Cosgrove, Brian, "Roddy Doyle's Backward Look: Tradition and Modernity in *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*", in *Studies*, 85.339, 231-242
- Costello, Stephen J., *The Irish Soul in Dialogue* (Dublin: Liffey, 2001)
- Coulter, Colin and Steve Coleman, eds. *The End of Irish History? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003)
- Craig, Patricia, "Ireland", in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), pp. 221-237
- "Michael Harnett's Collected Poems", *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 May 2002, p. 24
- Crist, Raymond E., "Migration and Population Change in the Irish Republic", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 30.3 (July, 1971), 253-258
- Crompton, Rosemary and Gareth Jones, *White-Collar Proletariat: Deskillling and Gender in Clerical Work* (London: Macmillan, 1984)
- Cronin, Anthony, *An Irish Eye* (Dingle: Brandon, 1985), p. 27
- *Dead as Doornails: A Chronicle of Life* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1976)
- Crosbie, Paddy, *'Your dinner's poured out!': Boyhood in the twenties in a Dublin that has disappeared* (Dublin: O'Brien, 1981)
- Crosland, Charles Anthony Raven, *The Future of Socialism* (London: Cape, 1957)
- Cruise O'Brien, Conor, "When the Catholic Church ruled us all", *Sunday Independent*, 5 January 2003, p. 19
- *States of Ireland* (St. Alban's: Panther, 1974)
- Cuddon, John Anthony, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Deutsch, 1979)
- Cullen, Bill, *It's a Long Way From Penny Apples* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002)
- Cusack, Cyril, "In the Beginning Was O'Casey", *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* (October, 1980), 17-24

- Daly, Mary E., *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 2006)
- Das, Veena, "Subaltern as Perspective", in *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings in South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1989), pp. 310-328
- Davies, Tony, "Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing" in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984), pp. 20-35
- De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953)
- De Botton, Alain, *Status Anxiety* (New York: Pantheon, 2004)
- De Búrca, Séamus, *Brendan Behan: A Memoir* (Dublin: P. J. Bourke, 1985)
- Dean, Joan FitzPatrick, "Irish stage censorship in the 1950s", *Theatre Survey*, 42.2 (November, 2001), 137-164
- Deane, Seamus, *Celtic Revivals* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985)
- *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: Nationalism, Irony and Commitment* (Derry: Field Day, 1988)
- "O'Casey and Yeats: Exemplary Dramatists", in *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber 1985), pp.108-122
- *Reading in the Dark* (London: Vintage, 1997)
- "Roddy's Troubles: Who needs blarney in the middle of a civil war", *The Guardian* section Saturday Review, 4 September 1999, p. 8
- *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998)
- "Wherever Green is Read", in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 234-244
- Deevy, Patricia, "Goodbye to the anger", *Sunday Independent*, section People, 16 August 1992, p. 6
- Delaney, Frank, *James Joyce's Odyssey: A Guide to the Dublin of Ulysses* (New York: Holt, 1982)

- Delanty, G. and P. O'Mahony, *Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998)
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1988)
- Derrida, Jacques, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992)
- Devlin, Edith Newman, *Speaking Volumes: A Dublin Childhood* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2000)
- Dickinson, Page Lawrence, *The Dublin of Yesterday* (London: Methuen, 1929)
- Donnelly, Brian, "Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO", *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* (Spring-Summer, 2000), 17-31
- Donoghue, Denis, "Another Country", *New York Review of Books*, 3 February 1994, pp. 3-6
- "Dublin Letter", *The Hudson Review* 13.4 (Winter, 1960-1961), 579-585
- Doyle, Paul A., *Liam O'Flaherty* (New York: Twayne, 1971)
- Doyle, Roddy, *A Star Called Henry* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999)
- *Brownbread and War* (London: Penguin, 1994)
- "Chapter One" in *Yeats is Dead! A Mystery by Fifteen Irish Writers*, ed. Joseph O'Connor (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), pp. 3-20
- *The Commitments* (London: Vintage, 1998)
- *The Deportees and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007)
- "The Dinner" in *The New Yorker* (23 February, 2001), pp. 72-81
- *Family*, BBC, 1994, teleplay
- *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001)
- *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Minerva, 1994)
- *Rory & Ita* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002)
- *The Snapper* (London: Heinemann, 1988)
- *The Van* (London: Vintage, 1998)
- *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (London: Penguin, 1997)
- Dunn, Nell, *Up the Junction* (London: Virago, 1998)
- Dunne, Catherine, *A Name for Himself* (London: Vintage, 1999)

- Dunne, Lee, *A Bed in the Sticks* (London: Hutchinson 1968)
- *Barleycorn Blues* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2004)
- *Does Your Mother* (London: Arrow, 1970)
- *Goodbye to the Hill* (London: Hutchinson, 1965)
- “Is there such a thing as serendipity?” *The Irish Times*, 29 July 1985, p. 13
- *Maggie’s Story* (London: Futura, 1975)
- *Midnight Cabbie* (London: Coronet, 1974)
- *No Time for Innocence* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2000)
- *Paddy Maguire is Dead* (London: Arrow, 1972)
- *Paddy Maguire is Dead: the curious adventures of an Irishman abroad* (London: Arrow, 1972)
- Dunne, Tom, “New Histories: Beyond revisionism”, *The Irish Review*, 12 (1992), 1-12
- Durcan, Paul, *A Snail in My Prime* (London: Blackstaff, 1993)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork UP, 1998)
- *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)
- *Saints and Scholars* (London: Futura, 1990)
- *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)
- Eco, Umberto, “Irony and ‘Double Coding’: Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable” in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, ed. Bran Nicol (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002), pp. 110-112
- Edwards, Ruth Dudley, “Though Rich and Famous He Still Cares”, *Literary Review* (September 1999), 47-48
- Egan, Desmond, “Achievement of James McKenna, Irish Stone Sculptor” <<http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/sculptor/achievement.html>> [accessed 15 April 2008]
- “Appreciation: James McKenna”, *The Irish Times*, 14 November 2000, p. 17
- Engels, Frederick, *The Peasant War in Germany* (New York: International Publishers, 2000)
- Enslar, Eve, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition* (New York: Villard, 2001)

- Fagan, Honor, *Culture, Politics and Irish School Dropouts* (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1995)
- Fagan, Terry, *All around the Diamond* (Dublin: North Inner City Folklore Project, 1994)
- *Down by the Docksides: Reminiscences from Sheriff Street* (Dublin: North Inner City Folklore Project, 1995)
- *Monto - Madams, Murder and Black Coddle* (Dublin: North Inner City Folklore Project, 2000)
- *Those Were the Days* (Dublin: North Inner City Folklore Project, 1992)
- Fallon, Brian, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998)
- Fanning, Ronan, “‘The Great Enchantment’: Uses and Abuses of Modern Irish History” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Conor Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 146-158
- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2001)
- Farrell, Brian, “The Context of Three Elections” in *Ireland at the Polls, 1981, 1982, and 1987: A Study of Four General Elections*, ed. Howard Penniman and Brian Farrell (Durham: Duke UP, 1987), pp. 1-30
- Fay, Liam, “What’s the Story?” Interview with Roddy Doyle in *Hot Press*, 3 April 1996, p. 12
- Fennell, Desmond, “Against Revisionism” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Ciarán Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 183-190
- Ferriter, Diarmaid, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2004)
- Fetterly, Judith, “On the Politics of Literature”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden: Blackwell, 1998) pp. 561-569
- Fetterly, Judith, "On the Politics of Literature." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*.
- Fishwick, Marshall W., *Seven Pillars of Popular Culture* (London: Greenwood, 1985)
- Fitzgerald, Mary, “How the Abbey Said No: Readers’ Reports and the Rejection of The Silver Tassie” in *O’Casey Annual, No. 1*, ed. Robert G. Lowery (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1982)
- Flood, Vincent, *The Last Corporation Man* (Dublin: Bobdog, 1998)

- Flynn, Gerard Mannix, *James X* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003)
- *Nothing to Say* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2003)
- Flynn, Seán and Gráinne Faller, “Over 60% of top schools limit admission to certain groups”, *Irish Times*, 4 December 2008, p. 1
- Foran, Charles, “The Troubles of Roddy Doyle” *Saturday Night* (April 1996), 58-62
- Foster, R. F., *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989)
- “Roddy and the Ragged-Trousered Revolutionary”, *The Guardian*, 29 August, 1999 <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,6121,97001,00.html>> [accessed 14 June 2005]
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Penguin: London, 1991)
- Fox, Pamela, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945*, (London: Duke UP, 1994)
- Fraiman, Susan, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993)
- Francis, Becky, “Lads, Lasses and (New) Labour: 14-16-Year-Old Students’ Responses to the ‘Laddish Behaviour and Boys’ Underachievement’ Debate”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20.3 (September 1999), 355-371
- Frayne, John P., *Sean O’Casey* (New York: Columbia UP, 1976)
- French, Billy, *The Journeyman: A Builder’s Life* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 2002)
- Friberg, Hedda, *An Old Order and a New: The Split World of Liam O’Flaherty’s Novels* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1996)
- Fuery, Patrick, and Nick Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*. 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK, New York: Oxford UP, 2000)
- Garvin, Tom, “A Quiet Revolution: The Remaking of Irish Political Culture”, in *Writing in the Irish Republic*, ed. Ray Ryan (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 187-203
- *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987)
- “Revolution? Revolutions are what Happens to Wheels - the Phenomenon of Revolution, Irish Style” in *The Irish Revolution 1913-23*, ed. Joost Augusteijn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002)

- Gaskell, Elizabeth, *North and South*, ed. Dorothy Collin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970)
- Geary, Dick, "Working-Class Identities in Europe, 1850s-1930s", *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45.1 (1999), 24-25
- Genet, Jean, *The Maids and Deathwatch: Two Plays*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove, 1962)
- Giddens, Anthony, "Class Structuration and Class Consciousness" in *Classes, Power and Conflict*, ed. Anthony Giddens and David Held (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 157-174
- *The Constitution of Society* (Oxford: Polity, 1984)
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar's study, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979)
- Girvin, Brian, "Industrialisation and the Irish Working Class Since 1922", *Saothar* 10 (1986), 31-42
- Gkotzaridis, Evi, *Trials of Irish History: Genesis and Evolution of a Reappraisal, 1938-2000* (London: Routledge, 2006)
- Gleeson, Brendan, *Breaking Up* (Dublin: Passion Machine, 1988)
- Gogarty, Oliver St. John, *As I was going down Sackville Street: A phantasy in fact* (London: Sphere, 1980)
- *The Plays of Oliver St. John Gogarty* (Delaware: Proscenium, 1973)
- Goldstone, Herbert, *In Search of Community: The Achievement of Seán O'Casey* (Dublin: Mercier, 1972)
- Gonzalez, Alexander, "Liam O'Flaherty's Urban Short Stories", *Etudes Irlandaises: Revue Francaise d' Histoire, Civilisation et Litterature de l' Irlande* (June 1987) 85-91
- Gonzalez, Rosa, "James Plunkett", in *Ireland in Writing: Interviews with Writers and Academics*, ed. Jacqueline Hurlley *et al.* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 1998) pp. 110-122
- "Writing out of One's Own Experience': An Interview with James Plunkett" *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* (November 1992), 185-194

- Gray, Ken, "An Outstanding Play", *The Irish Times*, 10 December 1973, p. 10
- "Fiction", *The Irish Times*, 9 October 1965, p. 8
- Greenwood, Walter, *Love on the Dole* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)
- Greene, Nicholas, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999)
- Guha, Ranajit, "The Prose of Counter Insurgency" in *Postcolonial Discourses, An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 119-150
- Hall, John R., "The Reworking of Class Analysis", in *Reworking Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell UP, 1997), pp. 1-37
- Halper, Thomas, "The Poor as Pawns: The New 'Deserving Poor' & the Old Author(s)", *Polity*, 6.1 (Autumn 1973), 71-86
- Hambleton, Georgina Louise, *Christy Brown – The Life that Inspired My Left Foot* (London: Mainstream, 2007)
- Hamilton, Richard F., *The Bourgeois Epoch: Marx and Engels on Britain, France, and Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1991)
- Hanafin, Joan and Anne Lynch, "Peripheral Voices: Parental Involvement, Social Class, and Educational Disadvantage", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23.1 (March 2002), 35-49
- Harding, Desmond, *Writing the City: Urban Visions & Literary Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2003)
- Harmon, Ken, *Done Up Like a Kipper* (Dublin: Arts Council, 2002)
- Haywood, Ian, *Working-Class Fiction: From Chartism to 'Trainspotting'* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997)
- Heaney, Seamus, *On Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)
- Hein, Norvin, "The Rām Līlā", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 71.281, Traditional India: Structure and Change (July-September 1958), 279-304
- Heslop, Harold, *The Gate of a Strange Field* (London: Brentano, 1929)
- Hickey, Des, "Mr. McKenna among the Teds", *Sunday Independent*, 6 December 1959, p. 20

- “No more begging bowls for Heno Magee”, *Sunday Independent*, 31 August 1975, p. 11
- “Success for the boy who ran away at eight”, *Sunday Independent*, 14 September 1975, p. 8
- Hill, John, “Images of Violence”, in *Cinema in Ireland*, ed. Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 147-193
- Hill, Myrtle, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003)
- Hitchcock, Peter, “They Must Be Represented? Problems in Theories of Working-Class Representation”, *PMLA* 115.1 (January 2000), 20-32
- Hobsbawm, E. J., “Working Classes and Nations”, *Saothar* 8 (1982), 75-85
- Hogan, Robert, *The Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History IV: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1979)
- Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy: Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1961)
- hooks, bell, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End, 1984)
- *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (London: Routledge, 1994)
- “Postmodern Blackness” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), pp. 421-427
- Hornsby-Smith, Michael P. and Angela Dale, “The Assimilation of Irish Immigrants in England”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 39.4. (December 1988), 519-544
- Huddart, David, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Hughes, P. T., “Slum life in the troubled twenties”, *Sunday Independent*, 18 February, 1962, p. 15
- Humphries, Alexander, *New Dubliners* (New York: Fordham UP, 1966)
- Hunter, Charles, “Heno Magee and the mean streets of ‘Hatchet’”, *The Irish Times*, 2 April 1988, p. 12
- Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988)
- “Circling the Downspout of Empire”, in *Past the Last Post*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 29-41
- *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002)

- Hutchinson, John, "Irish Nationalism", in *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 100-119
- Imhof, Rüdiger, *The Modern Irish Novel: Irish Novelists After 1945* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 2002)
- Inglis, Tom, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality* (Dublin: UCD, 1998)
- Irigaray, Luce, "Commodities Amongst Themselves", in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 574-577
- *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985)
- "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine", in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 570-573
- "The Sex Which is Not One", trans. C. Reeder, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), pp. 99-110
- Jackson, Ellen-Raïssa, "Gender, Violence and Hybridity: Reading the Postcolonial in Three Irish Novels", *Irish Studies Review* (August 1999), 221-231
- Jameson, Frederic, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, ed. Brian Nicol (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002), pp. 20-39
- "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", in *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), 65-88
- Jeffers, Jennifer M., *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2002)
- Johnson, James H., "Population Changes in Ireland, 1951-1961", *The Geographical Journal*, 129.2 (June, 1963), 167-174
- Johnston, Denis, *Collected Plays Volume I* (London: Cape, 1959)
- Johnston, Máirín, *Alive Alive O! Recollections and Visions of Dublin Women* (Dublin: Attic, 1990)
- Jones, Lewis, *We Live* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978)
- Jordan, Anthony J., *Christy Brown's Women* (Dublin: Westport, 1998)

- Jordan, John, "Slumlands Tragedy", *The Irish Times*, 3 March 1962, p. 9
- Jordan, Neil, *Collected Fiction* (London: Vintage, 1997)
- *The Crying Game* (London: Vintage, 1993)
- Joseph, Jonathan, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1996)
- *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992)
- Kaplan, Cora, "Language and Gender", in *Papers on Patriarchy* (Sussex: Women's Publishing Collective, 1976), pp. 21-37
- Katznelson, Ira and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986)
- Kearney, Colbert, *The Glamour of Grammar: orality and politics and the emergence of Sean O'Casey* (London: Greenwood, 2000)
- *The Writings of Brendan Behan* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997)
- Kearney, Hugh, "The Irish and Their History", in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 246-52
- Kearney, Richard, *Postnationalist Ireland – Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997)
- Kearns, Kevin C., *Dublin's Lost Heroines: Mammies and Grannies in a Vanished City* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004)
- *Dublin Pub Life and Lore: An Oral History* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996)
- *Dublin Street Life and Lore: An Oral History* (Dun Laoghaire: Glendale, 1991)
- *Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994)
- *Dublin Voices: An Oral Folk History* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2001)
- "Industrialization and Regional Development in Ireland, 1958-72", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 33.3 (July, 1974), 299-316
- *Streets Broad and Narrow: Images of Vanishing Dublin* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2000)
- Kelly, Bill, *Me Darlin' Dublin's Dead & Gone* (Swords, Co. Dublin: Ward River, 1983)
- Kelly, Henry, "A Life of Writing", *The Irish Times*, 16 November 1974, p. 6

- Kelly, Shirley, "Shirley Kelly talks to popular comic novelist Roddy Doyle", *Writer's Monthly* (September 1992), 4-8
- Kennedy, Kieran A. Thomas Giblin, and Deirdre McHugh, *The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1988)
- Kennedy, Maev, "Arts and Studies: The sculptor goes electioneering", *The Irish Times*, 15 June 1977, p. 10
- Kennedy, Tom, ed. *Victorian Dublin* (Dublin: Albertine Kennedy, 1980)
- Kennelly, Brendan, "City of Talk", in *Dublines*, ed. Katie Donovan and Brendan Kennelly (Bloodaxe: Newcastle upon Tyne, 1996), pp. 11-13
- and Katie Donovan eds., *Dublines* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1996)
- Kershner, R. Brandon, "History as Nightmare: Joyce's Portrait to Christy Brown", in *Joyce and the Subject of History*, ed. Mark A. Wollaeger, Victor Luftig and Robert Spoo (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1996)
- Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996)
- *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2001)
- Kilmurray, Evanne, *Fight, Starve or Emigrate: A History of the Irish Unemployed Movements in the 1950s* (Dublin: Larkin Unemployed Centre, 1988)
- Kilroy, James F. "Setting the Standards: Writers of the 1920s and 1930s", in *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History*, ed. James F. Kilroy (Boston: Twayne, 1984), pp. 103-104
- Kilroy, Thomas, *Talbot's Box* (Dublin: Gallery, 1979)
- Kindienst, Patricia, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours", originally published in *The Stanford Literature Review* 1 (1984), 25-53
 <<http://www.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/ayliu/research/klindienst.html>> [accessed 5 January, 2006]
- Kinsella, Thomas, *A Dublin Documentary* (Dublin: O'Brien, 2006)
- *Collected Poems 1956-2001* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001)
- Kirby, Peadar, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002)
- Kosok, Heinz, *O'Casey the Dramatist* (London: Smythe, 1985)

- “The Silver Tassie and British Plays of the First World War”, *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* (October, 1985), 91-96
- Krause, David, “Introduction to *The Risen People: A Play by Jim Plunkett*”, *Journal of Irish Literature* (January 1992), 3-10
- ed., *The Letters of Sean O’Casey, IV: 1959-64* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1992)
- La Haine*. Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Canal. 1995
- Lane, Fintan, and Emmet O’Connor, “Speed the Plough”, *Saothar* 26 (2001), 3-4
- Lane, Nancy J., “A Theology of Anger When Living with Disability”, in *The Psychological and Social Impact of Disability*, ed. Robert P. Marinelli and Arthur E. Dell Orto (New York: Springer, 1999), pp. 173-186
- Lash, Scott, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Laverty, Maura, *Liffey Lane* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947)
- Lawler, Steph, “Escape and Escapism: Representing Working-Class Women”, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 113-128
- Leland, Mary, “Goodbye to the Hill”, *The Irish Times*, 6 October 1975, p. 10
- LeMoncheck, Linda, *Loose Women, Lecherous Men: A Feminist Philosophy of Sex* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997)
- Lesjak, Carolyn, *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel* (London: Duke UP, 2006)
- Levitas, Ben, “Plumbing the Depths: Irish Realism and the Working Class from Shaw to O’Casey”, *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* (Spring Summer 2003), 133-149
- Lloyd, David, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993)
- Lokke, Kari E., *Tracing Women’s Romanticism: Gender, History and Transcendence* (New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Luddy, Maria, *Women in Ireland* (Cork: Cork UP, 1995)
- Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London: Merlin, 1971)

- “Tolstoy and the Development of Realism”, from *Studies in European Realism* (1950), reprinted in *Marxist on Literature: An Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Pelican 1977) pp. 283 - 284
- *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1962)
- Lynch, Kathleen, *Equality in Education* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999)
- and Anne Lodge, *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Lynch, Rachel Sealey, “‘Soft Talk’ and ‘An Alien Grip’: Gallagher’s Rhetoric of Control in O’Flaherty’s *The Informer*”, *Journal of Irish Literature* (Fall Winter 1993), 260-68
- Lyons, F. S. L., *Ireland since the Famine* (London: Fontana, 1985)
- “The Meaning of Independence” in *The Irish Parliamentary Tradition*, ed. Brian Farrell (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), p. 223-225
- Lysaght, Patricia, “Caoineadh ós cionn coirp: The lament for the dead in Ireland”, *Folklore*, 108 (1997), 65–82
- Mac Anna, Ferdia, “The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin writers”, *The Irish Review*, 10 (Spring 1991), 14-30
- Mac Donagh, Donagh, *Happy as Larry* (London: Maurice Fridberg, 1946)
- Mac Piarais, Micheál, “Postmodern and Postcolonial Tensions in Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*”, in *New Voices in Irish Literary Criticism: Ireland in Theory*, ed. Cathy McGlynn and Paula Murphy (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 2007), pp. 57-71
- Mac Gill, Patrick, *Children of the Dead End* (London: Jenkins, 1914)
- Mac Intyre, Thomas, “Some Notes on the Stories of James Plunkett”, in *Studies* (Autumn 1958), 323-327
- Magee, Heno, *Hatchet* (Dublin: Gallery, 1978)
- Magee, Patrick, *Gangsters or Guerillas?: Representations of Irish Republicans in ‘Troubles Fiction’* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001)
- Mallet, Serge, *Essays on the New Working Class*, ed. Dick Howard and Dean Savage (St. Louis: Teleos, 1975)

- Maloney, Caitríona, *Irish Women Writers Speak Out: Voices from the Field* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse, 2003)
- Maloney, Ed, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Allen Lane, 2002)
- Margulies, Martin B., *The Early Life of Sean O'Casey* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1971)
- Marmot, Michael, *Status Syndrome* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004)
- Marsh, Ian and Mike Keating, *Sociology: Making Sense of Society* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2006)
- Marshall, Gordon, *Repositioning Class: Social Inequality in Industrial Societies* (London: Sage, 1997)
- Martin, Augustine, *James Stephens: A Critical Study* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977)
- Martinez, Theresa, "Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance", *Sociological Perspectives*, 40.2 (1997), 276-279
- Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. David Fernbach, 3 vols. (London: Penguin, 1993)
- *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Hugh Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000)
- *Capital, The Communist Manifesto and Other Writings*, ed. Max Eastman (New York: The Modern Library, 1959)
- and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2004)
- McAnna, Ferdia, "The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin writers", *The Irish Review*, 10 (Spring 1991), 14-30
- McCann, Sean, *The world of Sean O'Casey* (London: Four Square, 1966)
- McCarthy, Charles, *The Decade of Upheaval: Irish Trade Unions in the Nineteen Sixties* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1973)
- McCarthy, Conor, "Ideology and Geography in Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home*", *Irish University Review*, 27.1 (Spring/Summer 1997), 98-110
- *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000)
- McCarthy, Dermot, *Roddy Doyle: Raining on the Parade* (Dublin: Liffey, 2003)

- McCloone, Martin, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: The British Film Institute, 2000)
- McCullagh, Ciaran, *Crime in Ireland* (Cork: Cork UP, 1996)
- “Getting The Criminals We Want: The social production of the criminal population”, in *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Clancy *et al.* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1999), pp. 410-431
- McDonald, Ronan, “Sean O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy: Disillusionment to Delusion”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 136-149
- McFate, Patricia, *The writings of James Stephens: Variations on a theme of love* (London: Macmillan, 1979)
- McGlynn, Mary, “‘But I Keep on Thinking and I’ll Never Come to a Tidy Ending’: Roddy Doyle’s Useful Nostalgia”, *Literature Interpretation Theory* (July 1999) 10.1, 87-105
- McGuire, Violet, “The Departure”, in *They Go, The Irish*, compiled by Leslie Daiken (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1944), pp. 82-85
- McKenna, James, *Abbey Ambiguities* (n. p: n. pub., May 1980, pamphlet)
- *Poems* (Dublin: Goldsmith, 1973)
- *The Scatterin’* (Kildare: Goldsmith, 1977)
- McKiernan, Joan and Monica McWilliams, “Women Religion and Violence in the Family”, in *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, ed. Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997), pp. 327-341
- McLoone, Martin, “Strumpet City: The urban working class on television”, in *Television and Irish Society: 21 Years of Irish Television*, ed. Martin McLoone and John McMahan (Dublin: RTÉ/IFI, 1984), pp. 53-89
- McMullan, Anna, (ed. and intro.) “Contemporary Women Playwrights” in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing V: Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, Angela Bourke *et al.* eds. (New York: Field Day, 2002), pp. 1234-1246
- McPherson, Conor, *Four Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 1999)
- McWilliams, David, *The Pope’s Children: The Irish Economic Triumph and the Rise of Ireland’s New Elite* (NJ: Wiley, 2008)

- Meaney, Geraldine, (ed. and intro.) "Identity and Opposition: Women's Writing, 1890-1960" in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke et al. (New York: Field Day, 2002), pp. 1069-1073
- Medhurst, Andy, "If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics", in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 19-35
- Meehan, Paula, *Dharmakaya* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000)
- *Cell* (Dublin: New Island, 2000)
- *Mrs Sweeney* (Dublin: New Island, 1999)
- *Mysteries of the Home: A Selection of Poems* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1996)
- *Pillow Talk* (Oldcastle, Meath: Gallery, 2000, orig. 1994)
- *Reading the Sky* (Dublin: Beaver Row, 1986)
- *Return and No Blame* (Dublin: Beaver Row, 1984)
- *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter* (Oldcastle, Meath: Gallery, 1991)
- Meinhardt, Carol, "Books, Films, and Culture: Reading in the Classroom", *English Journal*, 80.1 (January, 1991), 82-87
- Mercier, Paul, *Drowning* (1984), unpublished mss. provided by author
- *Studs* (1986), unpublished mss. supplied by the author
- *Spacers* (1985), unpublished mss. provided by author
- *Wasters* (1985), unpublished mss. supplied by the author
- Mikhail, E. H., *The Art of Brendan Behan* (London: Vision, 1979)
- *Brendan Behan: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1980)
- *Brendan Behan: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1982)
- Milne, Michael, "Soccer and the Dublin Working Class", *Saothar*, 8 (1982), 97-101
- Milner, Andrew, *Class* (London: Sage, 1999)
- Montague, John, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: Gallery, 1995)
- Moody, T. W., "A New History of Ireland", *Irish History Studies*, xvi (1969), 241-257

- “Irish history and Irish mythology”, in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Conor Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 71-86
- “Irish history and Irish mythology” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Conor Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 71-86
- *The Ulster Question: 1603-1973* (Cork: Mercier, 1974)
- Moran , Leslie J., “Homophobic Violence: The Hidden Injuries of Class” in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 206-218
- Morash, Christopher, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002)
- Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Sbragia (New York: Verso, 2000)
- Morris, Lydia, *Dangerous Classes: The Underclass and Social Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 1994)
- Mulkerns, Val, *Very Like a Whale* (London: John Murray, 1986)
- Mullan, Don, *Eyewitness Bloody Sunday: The Truth* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1997)
- Munt, Sally R., Introduction, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 1-16
- Murphy, Cormac, “Revolution and radicalism in County Dublin, 1913-21” in *Aspects of Irish Studies*, ed. Myrtle Hill *et al* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University, 1990), pp. 17-24
- Murphy, Jimmy, *Two Plays, The Kings of the Kilburn High Road, Brothers of the Brush* (London: Oberon, 2001)
- Murray, Christopher, “O’Casey as Critic”, *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* (December 1992), 58-67
- *Sean O’Casey: Writer at Work, A Biography* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004)
- *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1997)
- Mustafa, Shakir. “Saying ‘No’ to Politics: Sean O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy”, in Stephen Watt *et al.* eds. *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), pp. 95-113

- Newsinger, John, “‘In the Hunger-Cry of the Nation’s Poor is Heard the Voice of Ireland’: Sean O’Casey and Politics 1908-1916”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20.2 (April 1985), 221-240
- “Sean O’Casey, Larkinism and Literature”, *Irish Studies Review* (December 2004), 283-292
- “The Priest in the Irish Novel: James Plunkett’s Strumpet City”, *Etudes Irlandaises: Revue Francaise d’Histoire, Civilisation et Litterature de l’Irlande* (December 1989), 65-76
- Nicci, Gerrard, “What keeps Roddy rooted?”, *The Observer*, 15 April 2001, p. 22
 <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,473369,0.html>> [accessed 27 April 2005]
- Nowlan, David, “‘Goodbye to the Hill’ at the Eblana”, *The Irish Times*, 5 September 1978, p. 8
- Ó Coigligh, Seamus, “Irish writing a la Russe”, *The Irish Times*, 21 July 1966, p. 8
- Ó Faoláin, Dónal and Vivian Uibh Eachach, *Féile Zozimus: The man, the myth, the genius: Brendan Behan* (Baile Átha Cliath: Gael-Linn, 1993)
- Ó Tuathaigh, M. A. G., “Irish Historical ‘Revisionism’: State of the Art or Ideological Project?” in *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Conor Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic, 1994), pp. 306-329
- O’Beirne, Michael, *And the moon at night: A Dubliner’s story* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1981)
- *Mister: A Dublin Childhood* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1979)
- O’Brien, Flann, *At Swim-Two Birds* (Dublin: Penguin Books, 1992)
- O’Brien, Tony, “What about Bob ... ?”, *Irish Independent*, 17 August 1994, p. 26
- O’Byrne, Joe, *It Come Up Sun*, 2000, unpublished mss. supplied by author
- *The Clearing Station*, 2001, unpublished mss. supplied by author
- O’Carroll, Brendan, *The Mammy* (Dublin: O’Brien, 1999)
- O’Casey, Seán, *Autobiographies* (London: Pan, 1980)
- Sean, *Autobiography Volume 4: Inishfallen Fare Thee Well* (London: Pan, 1972)
- *Blasts and Benedictions: Articles and stories* (London: Macmillan, 1967)
- *Collected Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1949)

- *Collected Plays, Volume One* (London: Macmillan, 1950)
- *Collected Plays, Volume Two* (London: Macmillan, 1951)
- *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well* (London: Pan, 1972; orig. 1949)
- *Mirror in My House: Autobiographies of Sean O'Casey*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1956)
- *Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)
- *Red Roses for Me: A Play in Four Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1943)
- *The Bishop's Bonfire: A Sad Play Within the Tune of a Polka* (London: Macmillan, 1955)
- *The Complete Plays of Sean O'Casey* (London: Macmillan, 1984)
- *The Flying Wasp* (London: Macmillan, 1937)
- *The Green Crow* (London: W. H. Allen, 1957)
- *The Harvest Festival: A play in three acts* (Gerrard's Cross: Smythe, 1980)
- *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* (London: Journeyman, 1980)
- "They Go, The Irish", in *They Go, The Irish*, compiled by Leslie Daiken (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1944), pp. 7-15
- *Three Plays* (London: Papermac, 1994)
- *Under a Coloured Cap: Articles Merry and Mournful with Comments and a Song* (London: Macmillan, 1963)
- *Within the Gates: A Play of Four Scenes in a London Park* (London: Macmillan, 1934)
- O'Connell, Cathal, *The State and Housing in Ireland: Ideology, Policy and Practice* (New York: Nova, 2007)
- O'Connor, Garry, *Sean O'Casey: A Life* (London: Paladin, 1989)
- O'Connor, Pat, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998)
- O'Connor, Ulick, *Brendan Behan* (London: Coronet, 1970)
- O'Donnell, Hugh, *11 Emerald Street* (London: Vintage, 2005)
- O'Donovan, John, *Life by the Liffey: A Kaleidoscope of Dubliners* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986)

- O'Dowd, Mary, ed. and intro. "Interpreting the Past: Women's History and Women Historians, 1840-1945" in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke et al. (New York: Field Day, 2002), pp. 1102-1105
- O'Faolain, Sean, "Fifty Years of Irish Writing", *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, ed. David Pierce (Cork: Cork UP, 2000), pp. 740-747
- O'Flaherty, Liam, *Insurrection* (London: Landsborough, 1959)
- *Short Stories* (Sevenoaks: Sceptre, 1990)
- *The Assassin* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1998)
- *The Informer* (London: New English, 1980)
- O'Hanlon, Jim, "Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Jim O'Hanlon", in *Theatre talk: voices of Irish theatre practitioners*, ed. Lilian Chambers (Dublin: Carysfort, 2000), pp. 29-42
- O'Hanlon, Thomas J., *The Irish: Portrait of a People* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975)
- O'Hare, Shawn, "An Interview with James Plunkett", *The Journal of Irish Literature*, 23.3 (September 1993), 99-111
- O'Kelly, Séamus, "Theatre Festival", *The Irish Times*, 14 September 1960, p. 6
- O'Riordan, John, "The Garlanded Horror of War: Reflections on The Silver Tassie", *Sean O'Casey Review*, Vol. 5 (1978), 23-28
- O'Sullivan, Denis, "The Ideational Base of Irish Educational Policy", in *Irish Educational Policy: Process and Substance*, ed. D. G. Mulcahy and Denis O'Sullivan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1989), pp. 219-74
- O'Sullivan, Michael G., *Brendan Behan: A Life* (Dublin: Blackwater, 1997)
- O'Toole, Fintan, "Boxers offer a window into our marginalised society", *The Irish Times*, 26 August 2008, p. 13
- "Going West: The Country versus the City in Irish Writing", *Crane Bag*, 9.2 (1985), 111-116
- "Happenings on the Hill", *The Irish Times*, 5 September 1995, p. 19
- *Irish Times Book of the Century* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999)

- “Working-Class Dublin on Screen: The Roddy Doyle Films”, *Cineaste: America's Leading Magazine on the Art and Politics of the Cinema*, 24.2-3 (1999), 36-39
- O'Toole, Jason, “From the Hill to Hollywood: A conversation with Lee Dunne”, *The Dublin Quarterly*, (June-August 2005) <http://www.dublinquarterly.com/04/int_ldunne.html> [accessed 17 April 2008]
- O'Brien, Joseph V., *'Dear, Dirty Dublin': A City in Distress, 1899-1916* (London: California UP, 1982)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Higher Education in Ireland: Reviews of National Policies for Education* (Paris: OECD, 2006)
- Ormsby, Frank, “The Short Stories of James Plunkett”, *The Honest Ulsterman* (December 1969), 10-16
- Orwell, George, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York: Berkley, 1961)
- Osborne, John, *Look Back in Anger* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978)
- Ovidius Naso, Publius, *Metamorphoses*, trans. H.T. Riley (London: George Bell and Sons, 1898)
- Parkinson, Aidan, *Going Places* (Dublin: Passion Machine, 1991)
- Paschel, Ulrike, *No mean city? The image of Dublin in the novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle, and Val Mulherns* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1998)
- Patten, Eve, “Fiction in Conflict: Northern Ireland's prodigal novelists” in *Peripheral Visions of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. I. A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1995)
- Payne, G., “Social Mobility”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 40.3 (September 1989), 471-492
- Peach, Linden, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004)
- Peacock, D. Keith, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997)
- Pearson, Geoffrey, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Macmillan, 1988)
- Peillon, Michel, *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982)

- Pelletier, Martine, "Dermot Bolger's Drama" in *Irish Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort, 2000), pp. 34-46
- Perkin, Harold, "The Condescension of Posterity: The Recent Historiography of the English Working Class", *Social Science History*, 3.1 (Autumn 1978), 87-101
 — *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989)
- Persson, Ake, "Polishing the Working Class? A Sociolinguistic Reading of Roddy Doyle's Barrytown Trilogy and Later Fiction", *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2.1 (2003) 47-56
- Peter Stallybrass, "Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat", *Representations*, 31, Special Issue: The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England, (Summer 1990), 69-95
- Petocz, Agnes, *Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999)
- Phillips, Paul, *Marx and Engels on Law and Laws*, (Oxford: Robertson, 1980)
- Pilkington, Lionel, *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- Plotz, Judith, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000)
- Plunkett, James, "A Walk Through the Summer", in *James Plunkett, Collected Short Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2000), pp. 34-63
 — *Big Jim: A Play for Radio* (Dublin: Martin O'Donnell, 1955)
 — *Boy on the Back Wall and Other Essays* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1987)
 — *Collected Short Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1977)
 — *Eagles and the Trumpets and Other Stories* (Dublin: Bell, 1954)
 — *Farewell Companions* (London: Hutchinson, 1977)
 — "Homecoming: A Play for Broadcasting", *The Bell*, (June 1954), 11-32
 — *James Plunkett: Collected Short Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2000)
 — *Strumpet City* (London: Hutchinson, 1969)
 — "The Boy on the Capstan", *Threshold*, (Spring/Summer 1961), 7-14
 — *The Circus Animals* (London: Hutchinson, 1990)

- “The Mad Barber”, *Irish Bookman*, (February 1947), 26-38
- “The Mother”, *The Bell*, (November 1942), 99-108
- “The Parrot of Digges Street”, *Irish Bookman*, (December 1947), 33-45
- *The Risen People* (Dublin: Irish Writers’ Co-op., 1978)
- *The Trusting and the Maimed* (London: Arrow, 1969)
- “Working class”, *The Bell* (October 1943), 96-102
- “Yours Respectfully”, *New Realities* (Dublin 1972), 29-34
- Poulantzas, Nicos, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, trans. D. Fernbach (London: New Left, 1975)
- Pound, Catherine, “No Bibles”, *Cascando*, 5/6 (1996), 66-69
- Quinn, Antoinette, “Ireland/Herland: Women and Literary Nationalism, 1845-1916” in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, Angela Bourke et al. eds. (New York: Field Day, 2002), pp. 895-900
- Quinn, Eithne, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005)
- Quinney, Richard, *Class, State and Crime: On the Theory and Practice of Criminal Justice* (London: Longman, 1978)
- Radio Teilifís Éireann, *Seven Ages* Dir. Seán Ó Mordha (Radio Teilifís Éireann, 2000)
- Reay, Diane, “Children’s Urban Landscapes: Configurations of Class and Place”, in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 151-164
- Redmond, Lar, *A Walk in Alien Corn* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990)
- *Emerald Square* (Dublin: Glendale, 1990)
- *Show us the Moon* (Dingle: Brandon, 1988)
- Rèynolds, Margaret and Jonathan Noakes, *Roddy Doyle: The Barrytown Trilogy: The Commitments, The Snapper, The Van, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, The Woman who Walked into Doors* (London: Vintage, 2004)
- Richmond, Farley, “Some Religious Aspects of Indian Traditional Theatre”, *The Drama Review*, 15.2 (Spring 1971), 123-131
- Ridgman, Jeremy, “Inside the Liberal Heartland: Television and the popular imagination in the 1960s”, in *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in*

- the 1960s*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 139-159
- Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999)
- Roberts, Timothy Paul, "Little Terrors: The child's threat to social order in the Victorian bildungsroman" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of New South Wales, 2005) <<http://www.library.unsw.edu.au/~thesis/adt-NUN/uploads/approved/adt-NUN20060310.114803/public/01front.pdf>> [accessed 3 October 2008]
- Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)
- Rollins, Ronald G, "O'Casey, Yeats, and Behan: A Prismatic View of the 1916 Easter Rising", *Sean O'Casey Review*, Vol. 2 (1976), 196-207
- Rowbotham, Sheila, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London: Pluto, 1973)
- Rupp, Jan C.C., "Rethinking Cultural and Economic Capital" in *Reworking Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell UP, 1997), pp. 221-242
- Russell, George (A. E.), *Some Unpublished Letters from AE to James Stephens* (Dublin: Cuala, 1979)
- Russell, Mary, "'Goodbye to the Hill' and hello to a 'Mousetrap'", *The Irish Times*, 9 July 1992, p. 11
- Ryan, John, *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1987)
- Ryan, Ray, "The Republic and Ireland: Pluralism, Politics, and Narrative Form", in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999*, ed. Ray Ryan (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 82-100
- Said, Edward, "Discrepant Experiences" in *Postcolonial Discourse: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 26-37
- *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003)
- Sangari, Kumkum, *Politics of the Possible* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999)
- Sarukhanyan, Allan, "Irish Literature in Russia", *The Irish Times*, 4 July 1968, p. 13

- Savage, Michael, "Space, Network and Class Formation" in *Social Class and Marxism: Defences and Challenges*, ed. Neville Kirk (Hants, Aldershot: Scolar, 1996)
- Sax, William S, *The Gods at Play: Lila in South East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995)
- Sayer, Andrew, *The Moral Significance of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005)
- Schrank, Bernice, "O'Casey's The Silver Tassie: From Manuscripts to Published Texts", *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, 87:2-3 (1986-1987), 237-250
- "Performing Political Opposition: Sean O'Casey's Late Plays and the Demise of Eamon de Valera", *Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies* (November 2000), 199-216
- "Sean O'Casey (1880-1964)" in *Irish Playwrights, 1880-1995: A Research and Production Sourcebook*, eds. Bernice Schrank and William Demastes (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), pp. xii-454
- Schuler, Carol M., "The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in Pre-Reformation Europe", *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 21.1/2 (1992), 5-28
- Scott, James C., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990)
- Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977)
- Share, Perry, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007)
- Shaw, George Bernard, *Shaw: An Autobiography* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969)
- Sheehan, Helena, *Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories* (Dublin: RTÉ, 1987; re-published in a revised edition on CD-ROM, 2004)
- *The Continuing Story of Irish Television Drama: Tracking the Tiger* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004)
- Sheehan, Paul, *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002)
- Sheridan, Jim, *Mobile Homes* (Dublin: Irish Writers' Co-operative, 1978)
- Sheridan, Peter, *Big Fat Love: A Novel* (Dublin: Tivoli, 2003)

- *Emigrants* (Dublin: Co-op Books, 1979)
- *Forty-Seven Roses: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 2001)
- *Old Money, New Money* (Dublin: New Island, 2000)
- *The Liberty Suit* (Dublin: Co-op Books, 1978)
- *44: A Dublin Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1999)
- Shortt, Damien, “Dermot Bolger: Gender Performance and Society” in *New Voices in Irish Literary Criticism: Ireland in Theory*, ed. Cathy McGlynn and Paula Murphy (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 2007), pp. 151-166
- Showalter, Elaine, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”, *Critical Inquiry*, 8. 2 (Winter 1981), 179-205
- Sillitoe, Alan, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (London: Flamingo, 1993)
- Simpson, Alan, *Beckett and Behan and a theatre in Dublin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962)
- Simpson, Anne, *Blooming Dublin: Choice, change and contradictions* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991)
- Skeggs, Beverly, “Classifying Practices: Representations, Capitals and Recognitions”, in *Class Matters: ‘Working-Class’ Women’s Perspectives on Social Class*, ed. Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek (London: Taylor & Francis, 1997), pp. 123-139
- Slaughter, Cliff, *Marxism, Ideology and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1980)
- Slemon, Stephen, “Modernism’s Last Post” in *Past the Last Post*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 1-11
- “Post-Colonial Critical Theories” in *Postcolonial Discourse: An Anthology*, ed. Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 99-116
- Smith, Dorothy, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1987), p. 107
- Smith, Gus, “Peacock premiere”, *Sunday Independent*, 7 May 1972, p. 15
- “There’s no getting away from violence”, *Sunday Independent*, 9 December 1973, p. 19
- Smith, Paul, “A Dublin Memoir”, *The Irish Times*, 5 November 1975, p. 10
- *Come trailing blood* (London: Quartet, 1977)
- *Stravanga* (London: Heinemann, 1963)

- *Summer Sang in Me* (London: Quartet, 1975)
- *The Countrywoman* (London: Quartet, 1975)
- *The Stubborn Season* (London: Heinemann, 1961)
- Smyth, Emer and Damian F. Hannan, “Education and Inequality”, in *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*, ed. Brian Nolan, Philip J. O’Connell and Christopher T. Whelan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2000), pp. 109–126
- Smyth, Gerry, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1997)
- Somers, Margaret R., “Deconstructing and Reconstructing Class Formation Theory: Narrativity, Relational Analysis, and Social Theory” in *Reconstructing Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell UP, 1997), pp. 73-105
- Somerville-Large, Peter, *Dublin* (London: H. Hamilton, 1979)
- *Dublin: the first thousand years* (Belfast: Appletree, 1988)
- Spring, Brian, *The Charwoman’s Daughter* (Dublin: Helicon, 1979)
- Stephens, James, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1965)
- *Deirdre* (New York: Macmillan, 1970)
- *Desire and Other Stories* (Co. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1980)
- *Here are Ladies* (New York: Macmillan, 1928)
- *James Stephens: A Selection* (London: Macmillan, 1962)
- *Kings and the Moon* (New York: Macmillan, 1938)
- *Letters of James Stephens* (London: Macmillan, 1974)
- *Reincarnations* (London: Macmillan, 1918)
- “Sawdust”, in *The Uncollected Prose of James Stephens: Volume 2*, ed. Patrick McFate (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), pp. 149-153
- *Strict Joy: Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1931)
- *The Adventures of Seumas Beg and The Rocky Road to Dublin* (London: Macmillan, 1916)
- *The Charwoman’s Daughter* (Dublin: Scepter, 1966)
- *The Crock of Gold* (London: Pan, 1965)
- *The Demi-Gods* (Dublin: Butler Sims, 1982)

- *The Hill of Vision* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1912)
- *The Insurrection in Dublin* (Gerrards Cross, Dublin: Colin Smythe, 1992)
- *The Lover Who Lost* (National Library of Ireland: Abbey Theatre Mss., microfiche, n.d.)
- “The Thieves”, in *The Uncollected Prose of James Stephens: Volume 2*, ed. Patrick McFate (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), pp. 170-176
- *The Uncollected Prose of James Stephens* ed. Patrick McFate (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983)
- Stern, James, “The Ordeal of Molly Baines”, *New York Times*, section Book Reviews, 17 September 1961, p. 4
- Stewart, Victoria, *About O’Casey: The playwright and the work* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006)
- Taylor, Charles, “The Salon Interview: Roddy Doyle”, www.salon.com/books/feature/999/10/28/doyle/index2.html [accessed 28 October, 1999]
- Tew, Philip, “The Lexicon of Youth in Mac Lavery, Bolger, and Doyle: Theorizing Contemporary Irish Fiction via Lefebvre’s Tenth Prelude”, *The Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 5:1 (1999:), 181-97
- The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. Dir. Ken Loach. BIM Distribuzione. 2006
- Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin 1980)
- *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin, 1978)
- Thompson, Neville, *Jackie Loves Johnser OK?* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1998)
- *Streetwise: Stories from an Irish prison* (Dublin: Mainstream, 2005)
- *Two birds / one stoned* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1999)
- Tong, Rosemarie Putnam, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Oxford: Westview, 1998)
- Tressell, Robert, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Flamingo, 1993, orig. 1914)
- Trevor, William, “The snarling, yelling world of real Dublin”, *Irish Times*, section Saturday Review, 16 May 1970, p. 1

- Trotsky, Leon, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder, 1971)
- Trotter, David, *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920* (New York: Routledge, 1993)
- U2, *Running to Stand Still, The Joshua Tree* (Island, 1987)
- Valiulis, Maryann, "Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State", *Journal of Women's History*, 6/7 (Winter/Spring 1994-5), 117-136
- Verschoyle, Moira, "Shining Offbeat", *The Irish Times*, 1 December 1962, p. 9
- Von Rosenberg, Ingrid, "The Fiction of Agnes Owens", in *British Industrial Fictions* ed. H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2000), pp. 193-205
- Ward, Margaret, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: A Life* (Cork: Attic, 1997)
- Walkerdine, Valerie, *Schoolgirl Fictions* (London: Verso, 1990)
- Walsh, Enda, *Disco Pigs and Sucking Dublin: Two Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 2006)
- Walshe, Eibhear, "Invisible Irelands: Kate O'Brien's Lesbian and Gay Social Formations in London and Ireland in the Twentieth Century", *SQS*, 1, (January 2006), 39-48
- Walshe, John, "Fee schools stretch lead in race for top courses", *Irish Independent*, 4 December 2008, p. 1
- Welch, Robert, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999)
- Whelan, Christopher T., and Richard Layte, "Opportunities for All in the New Ireland?", in *Best of Times? The Social Impact of the Celtic Tiger*, ed. Tony Fahey, Helen Russell and Christopher T. Whelan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2007), pp. 67-85
- Whelan, Kevin, "Clio agus Caitlín Ní Uallacháin" in *Oghma 2*, ed. Seosamh Ó Murchú *et al.* (Dublin, 1990), pp. 9-19
- "Come All You Staunch Revisionists: Towards a Post-revisionist Agenda for Irish History", *Irish Reporter*, 2 (1991), 23-26
- "The revisionist debate in Ireland", *Boundary 2*, 31:1 (2004), 179-205
- White, Caramine, *Reading Roddy Doyle* (New York: Syracuse, 2001)
- White, John J., *Bertold Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Suffolk: Camden, 2004)

- White, Victoria, "FRONT/row", *The Irish Times*, 18 January 2001, p. 16
- Wickham, James, "The New Irish Working Class?", *Saothar*, 6 (1980), 81-88
- "The Politics of Dependent Capitalism: International Capital and the Nation State", in *Ireland: Divided Nation, Divided Class*, ed. Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (London: Ink Links, 1980), pp. 53-73
- Wilde, Oscar, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 2001)
- Wilkinson, Ellen, *Clash* (London: Virago, 1989)
- Willis, Paul E., *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1993, orig. 1977)
- Wilson Schaef, Ann, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992)
- Wilson, A. P., *Liberty Hall Plays No. 1: Victims and Poached* (Dublin: Liberty Hall Players, n. d.)
- *The Slough* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Papers, 1914; National Library of Ireland Mss. Dept.)
- Wilson, Donald Douglas, *Sean O'Casey's Tragi-Comic Vision* (New York: Revisionist, 1976)
- Woolridge, Sandra, "Tough as old boots", *Southern Star*, 6 March 1993, p. 9
- Wright, Chrissie, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Longman, 1999)
- Wright, Erik Olin, *Class Counts: Comparative studies in class analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997)
- Wright, Erik Olin, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985)
- *Interrogating Inequality: Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism* (London: Verso, 1994)
- "Rethinking, Once Again, the Concept of Class Structure" in *The Debate on Classes*, ed. Erik Olin Wright (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 269-348
- "Rethinking, Once Again, the Concept of Class Structure", abridged by Maureen Sullivan in *Reworking Class*, ed. John R. Hall (London: Cornell UP, 1997), pp. 41-72
- Xaviere Gauthier, "Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?" in *New French Feminisms* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 161-164

- Yeates, Pádraig, *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2000)
- Yeats, W. B., *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955)
- *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, ed. David R. Clark and Rosalind E. Clark, Vol. II (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)
- *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1933)
- *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997)
- Young, Robert J. C., *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001)
- Younge, Gary, “A Star Called Roddy”, *The Guardian*, section Weekend, 29 August 1999, p. 16
- Zimmermann, Georges Denis, *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Irish Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002)