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„[...] Every Second You're Unhappy is a Waste of Time.
And that's a Sin": Challenging Traditional Concepts of
Irish Female Identities.

An Examination of Mary Lavin's "Sarah", Edna O'Brien's "A Scandalous
Woman", and Elizabeth Gill's *Goldfish Memory*
in Relation to Gender, Sexuality, and Irish Culture

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1. Introduction

“In a lot of ways I feel a cripple. The body was as sacred as a tabernacle and everything a potential occasion of sin”. This is how Edna O’Brien, being interviewed by Philip Roth, recalls part of her childhood in Ireland. Still, she “[...] ha[s] [not]” – as Roth puts it – “lost the freedom of mind to be *able* to write [.]” On the contrary, Edna O’Brien as well as Mary Lavin and Liz Gill have mastered to challenge traditional understandings of Irish (female) sexuality. In what ways these female Irish artists transgress the boundaries of good moral conduct in selected texts will be explored in this thesis.

First of all, the focus of this thesis needs further elaboration. In this context it is also vital to define key terms. According to Yarhouse and Tan, the term “biological sex” (3) can be understood in terms of maleness or femaleness, whereas the term “gender identity” (3) refers to a person’s identification with the concept of masculinity or femininity. As aptly phrased by Burrell and Hearn, “[...] it is difficult to imagine (within human society at least) sexuality without gender, or gender without sexuality” (2). As gender and sexuality are strongly interrelated concepts (2), they will be treated jointly in the analyses of the short stories and the film. Due to spatial constraints, this thesis focuses on female identity (de)construction only. Taking male identities into consideration would clearly go beyond the scope of this thesis. For this reason it is also only texts written by female writers and a female writer-director that are analysed. A further limitation is the focus on the Republic of Ireland. Given the space available a detailed chronological outline of Ireland’s history cannot be presented. Chapter 2 rather aims to present major landmarks in Irish female identity construction. In accordance with the publication date of the last text (*Goldfish Memory*, 2003) that will be examined, Chapter 2 explores the history of Ireland in terms of gender and sexuality up until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In the following a brief overview of this thesis is presented. Chapter 2 attempts to define what constitutes traditional concepts of Irish female Identities. It forms the basis for this thesis. Only then can the reader fully grasp in what ways the selected texts object to and destabilise traditional concepts. Although the development of the

feminisation of Ireland will not be traced in detail, the core traditions underlying the trope of Ireland as being a female will be briefly indicated, as an understanding of these will illuminate the narrow ways in which Irish femininity was traditionally constructed. Afterwards, the post-Famine years will be explored: the restriction of sexuality and sex are demonstrated to root in this period of Irish history. The role of the Catholic Church and the Irish state in female identity construction will also be closely examined. Towards the end of Chapter 2 not only patterns of change are being discussed but also the remnants of traditional Irish female identities.

Chapter 3 closely examines the ways in which Mary Lavin's "Sarah" as well as Edna O'Brien's "A Scandalous Woman" weaken traditional concepts of Irish female identities. A brief discussion of the short story genre in terms of being a medium of challenging repressive discourses precedes the examination of the texts. "Sarah" is a short story from Mary Lavin's collection *Tales from Bective Bridge*, which appeared in Boston in 1942 (Bowen 74). The version used in this thesis, however, dates back to the publication in 1943 in London (Trevor 566, Bowen 74). Edna O'Brien's short story "A Scandalous Woman", the title story of her collection *A Scandalous Woman: Stories*, was published in 1974. According to O'Byrne, it might be the 1940s in which Lavin places the action of "Sarah". By contrast, the historical setting of O'Brien's "A Scandalous Woman" is the 1950s (1). However, society's restriction and repression of women in terms of silencing their sexuality or physically abusing them, for example, link the two stories thematically (1). Both stories also feature female protagonists that transgress moral boundaries and thus challenge the very concepts of Irish femininity.

Chapter 4 then investigates how Liz Gill's *Goldfish Memory*, released in 2003, undermines traditional concepts of Irish female identities at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Gill portrays the Dublin of 2003 in terms of a sexually liberating and liberated space. It will be illustrated that Gill does not only subvert Irish female identity constructs but also the Irish film tradition as well as the romantic comedy genre. The discussion of the film takes both cinematic and thematic features into account.

Before actually trying to grasp traditional Irish female identity construction, it is crucial to address the danger of gender stereotyping. It would be wrong to assume that it was exclusively women suffering from a sexually repressive environment in Ireland. Nash rightly points to the fact that both Irish masculine and feminine identities are constructs. Although men have experienced both pain and pleasure from acting in the stereotypical ways society required them to, Irish women have been more constrained and disadvantaged in comparison with their male counterparts. The bigger drawbacks women have been facing indicate wider structures of being unequal in rights, status and advantages due to their gender (110).

One also needs to be cautious about viewing female (sexual) repression solely as an Irish issue. According to Manning, the fact that politics used to be little influenced by women and the fact that women occupied an inferior position in society are not particular Irish phenomena. This was, for example, also the case in the United States of America till the 1960s (100). But what makes the difference then? Manning identifies “[...] the nature of a conservative, authoritarian and traditionalist society which saw the home or the convent as the natural and only places for women” (100) as one of the factors that reinforced these issues in Ireland. In what ways and why women have been disadvantaged is discussed in the following chapter of this thesis. At the backdrop of Chapter 2, Mary Lavin’s, Edna O’Brien’s, and Elizabeth Gill’s objection to the traditionally narrow scope of Irish female identities in terms of gender and sexuality is explored.

2. Irish Women and their Bodies: the History of Gender and Sexuality in a Nutshell

2.1. Excursion: The Trope of Mother Ireland - a Feminised Ireland and its Effects on Women

As pointed out by Nash, Ireland has been portrayed as a female nation for an extensive period of time. Consequently, particular forms of identities concerning gender and sexuality have been stipulated for men and women in Ireland by particular portrayals of national identity. These feminised images of the country as well as the portrayals of Irish masculinities and femininities affect the way in which Irish people are living. They have an impact on peoples' chances and limitations not only with regard to employment, schooling and involvement in politics, but also on connections on an interpersonal level and on the Irish' understandings of themselves (108).

With the aim of grasping, grouping and giving justification to the connections between nations and the entitlements to terrains, as Nash continues to explain, Ireland was represented as being feminine. This led to the reverting to and reinforcement of notions concerning what is to be considered masculine and feminine as well as images regarding particular ways in which Irish men and women are related to each other. Hence, the gendered image of the Irish nation has been made use of for determining Irish cultural identity, the social position of Irish people, their identities as well as their behaviours, rights and duties (111).

According to Nash, Ireland already used to be portrayed as a woman in the pre-Christian era. The feminised images of sovereignty and the kingdom's ground were produced through nationalist discourses within the traditions of the Celtic language of Ireland (112). As remarked by Cullingford, the sovereignty goddess turned "[...] old, ugly, and crazed [...]" (58) if she did not consider her partner virtuous enough to engage in sexual intercourse with. However, a man's intrepidness could make him the right one for her. She would then seduce him sexually and make him the king

and, consequently, she would turn young and beautiful again (58). Nash concludes that it was the goddess who was in the position of approving whether the man was worthy of ruling over the country. Deterioration or amelioration of the state that the goddess was in was representative of the land's state at the same time, and was thus an indicator of a man's political power and worthiness (112).

The way nationalist discourse and the poetics of the time determined traditional feminine identity construction is interesting to be considered: as pointed out by Nash, being connected to land and soil has been depicted as constituting a fixed component of Irish feminine identity and Irish identity in general. Women, in particular, have been seen to be strongly related to nature because they can carry and give birth to children. Like land and soil, women are fertile and reproductive. Thus, womanhood was equated with motherhood. In this way, the opportunities of Irish women have been limited and their identities have almost been reduced to reproduction. Traditions like these have been made use of to attach qualities such as passivity, maternity and asexuality to Irish women's characters (120).

Besides nationalist versions of a feminised Ireland, "[t]he representation of Ireland as a woman is [also] a particular example of the gendering of nations in colonial projects of subordination and national strategies of resistance" (Nash 112). To illustrate her point, Nash explains to her readers that the way in which both the Irish people and their colonisers reacted to colonisation played a decisive role in creating a discourse about Irish nationalism. To assume only an uninterrupted tradition would thus be wrong. It is important to consider that the colonisers tried to stick certain identities to Ireland and its people (112). Innes, however, reminds us not to forget that Ireland's representation "[...] as a lady in distress" (15) can be found with an even higher frequency in Irish nationalists' and unionists' discourses than in the English colonisers'.

Still, the notion of Ireland being envisioned as a promiscuous, shameless and disgusting woman in need of taming in the course of colonial discourse of "the early modern period" (112), as Nash draws her reader's attention to, is worth being taken into consideration. The necessity for exploring and demystifying the yet undiscovered

land constituted the underlying notion of the mindset. This discursive pattern, however, is not unique to an Irish context. In fact, the Irish nation and many other colonies underwent, allegorically speaking, a kind of feminisation that established colonisers' penetrating into and regulating of the territories (112). Imagining Ireland as a woman has also implications for the gendering of the ruling nation: the English were considered "[...] a 'masculine and virile race' [...]" (Innes 9). In general, the English viewed peoples like Celts and Africans as "[...] feminine and childlike races [...]" (9), a view which served the English as a justification for having the right to restrain and rule over them.

The traditional scope of identities that feminised images of Ireland would allow Irish women to embody was more than limited: "[i]n [...] [nationalist and colonial] discourses, Ireland is raped, seduced or married and in turn features alternatively as virgin, wanton woman, bride, mother or old woman" (Nash 116). As the author continues to explain, neither women's deeds nor their efforts seemed to be influential for female identity construction back then. Women's identities were rather determined by the ways they were related to men in terms of sexuality and family. Apparently, both the nationalists and the colonisers created a feminised version of Ireland that attached the image of weakness and dependence upon men to intervene to Irish women's identities. Men were the main producers of the feminised images of Ireland. They sought to become and remain powerful over the feminine and to fix forms of masculinity (116).

At the same time, it is interesting to consider that the trope of Ireland as a woman constructed through colonial and nationalist discourse not only produces female, but also male identities in that it assigns strict roles to men: according to Nash, they need to protect, rule or liberate the Irish land and the Irish women. Be it female unruliness and the subsequent taming of Ireland and its women with respect to the image produced by colonisers or initial age, ugliness and sadness replaced by the endowment with youth, beauty and happiness as depicted by the nationalist discourse of Ireland personified as a woman, Ireland and with it the Irish women have been portrayed in need of male help (116).

2.2. The Post-Famine Years: the Roots of Chastity and Sexual Repression

As has been demonstrated in the previous section, the notion that Irish women and the Irish country are intrinsically linked to fertility and reproduction dates back to pre-Christian times. Obviously, this does not indicate a sexually repressed Ireland. Still, Ireland seems to be perceived as such in retrospect:

Sex was outside the realm of normal, everyday language. [...] I remember; you remember; we all remember those days of guilt and sexual repression. It was a time of modesty, chastity and purity of mind and body. Temptation lurked around every corner. It was crucial to avoid bad thoughts and occasions of sin. (Inglis 1998a: 100)

In his article “From Sexual Repression to Liberation?” Irish sociologist Tom Inglis shares memories of his youth with the readers. His description illustrates that sexuality was a taboo subject, simply ignored and silenced (101). Apparently, Ireland was ruled by sexual repression, restricting both men’s and women’s sexuality. The question arises why chastity before marriage and the regulation of sexuality governed Irish life. Lee gives us a crucial hint in suggesting that “[p]re-Famine Irish society was renowned for its chastity, but prudery was conspicuously absent” (40).

Indeed, the answer to the roots of a sexually regulated, almost prude lifestyle can be found in the post-Famine years. Brown claims that “the social organization of the countryside” (9) gave rise to two events from the 1840s onwards at the very latest: firstly, the average Irish person was inclined to marry when he/she was relatively old. This trend co-occurred with abstemiousness from sex until marriage. Secondly, Ireland faced a serious loss of people due to the enormous number emigrating (9). Brown rejects the notion of Celts being born with fixed perverse ideas of “marital abstemiousness and emigration” (11) as an explanation. Brown rather gives credit to social historians who identified both economic and social reasons which are going to be discussed in the following (11).

In the post-Famine years, as Brown explains to the reader, Irish small farmers faced an uncertain economic future. The land could no longer be carelessly distributed among the family's sons in order to meet their aspirations regarding, amongst other things, marriage as earlier on. Fathers were sensitive to what getting married meant economically for them. Thus, the land was given to their children at the latest stage. What is more, their offspring was encouraged to marry late (11). The implications for the status of women arising from this are interesting to be considered. As pointed out by Lee, men used to marry when they had already been relatively old in comparison to their spouses. Due to their more advanced age, men were able to maintain that their spouses lacked experience, a claim which contributed to make women appear inferior to their husbands. In addition, husbands occupied an authoritative position as they assumed the breadwinner role in general in the years following the Famine (38).

Prior to that, women, Lee explains to us, had been able to contribute to the household's income since they had worked in "domestic industry" (38) and in agriculture and had thus been relatively economically independent. In this way, the couple had been able to lead a humble life – a life of greater independence from their parents. Not only did women become more dependent on their husbands due to their poor economic position: the dependency on their fathers was also evident. Women had to treat their own desires as secondary to their fathers' as the dowry became more important in the post-Famine years. Whether a woman could marry hinged on the amount of money or goods that her father would give to her before the marriage to a significant extent (38).

In the course of trying to find the origins of a culture of repressed sexuality, it is also intriguing to take into consideration the transfer of the beliefs and the social arrangements based on family relationships typical of the farming space to the shops and the towns (Brown). It was, as Brown continues to explain, made secure that the power in relation to culture and politics of the town's grocers and traders increased the rural area's farmers' one. Independent Ireland's "political, social, and cultural moulds" (16) were substantially shaped by the joined influence of the farmers and the traders. The role of their children, who were likely to be employed in these types of work, should also not be underestimated in this context. During the first era

independent Ireland was formed by the farmers' and traders' economically prudent beliefs, their restraining traditions concerning sexuality, and their "nationalistic conservatism" (16). Similarly, Lee illustrates the implications of the economic conditions in Éire:

It was [...] crucial to maintain the economic dominance of the new order that all thoughts of marriage in Ireland should be banished from the minds of the majority of Irish youth. Temptation must not be placed in their way. Sex, therefore, must be denounced as a satanic snare [...]. Sex posed a far more subversive threat than the landlord to the security and status of the family. Boys and girls must be kept apart at all costs. (39)

The economic aspects, however, cannot wholly explain Irish people's general premarital abstemiousness from sex. Brown concedes that the Church was the organisation supporting ideas of the excision of sexual desire or lust from life in Ireland (16-7). Similarly, Inglis (2005) proffers a strong interrelation between the economy and Catholicism as a possible explanation for the control of sexual relationships in Ireland back then. The tenant farmers identified themselves with the Catholic doctrines. "[...] [T]he development of cultural, social and symbolic capital [...]" (65) was crucial for their farms' development. The realm of religion provided them with the opportunity of achieving each capital. If one desired to keep one's "economic capital" (65), one had to master marriages and thus sexual relationships. Adhering to the Catholic Church entailed living a disciplined life in relation to one's body and emotions as well as living abstemiously; tenets all of which started to be crucial in order to obtain "religious" and thus "cultural capital" as "religious capital" (65) developed into its authoritative embodiment (65).

The importance of getting "religious capital" is intriguing to consider with regard to women. This form of capital appears to be pivotal for obtaining society's respect as a woman:

Attaining religious capital through being spiritual and moral became an important source of power for women, particularly mothers, who did not have access to other forms of capital. Religious capital enabled them to attain honour and respect – symbolic capital – which legitimated their position within the family and community. It was this dependency by women on religious capital which was central to the Catholic church dominating social fields such

as education, health and social welfare. The Catholic church's dominance of these fields declined from the 1960s as more women gained access to other forms of capital and were less dependent on religious capital. (Inglis 2005: 66, see also Inglis 1998b: 178-200)

As can be inferred from Kelly's observations in the next section, motherhood, however, appears to be even more crucial for becoming a respected member of society as an Irish woman.

2.3. The Woman in the Maternal Role in the “[O]ld Ireland”

Reproduction seemed to be a decisive factor in traditional Irish female identity construction: in what Walsh (2003) denotes the “old Ireland” (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 570), people began to talk negatively about the newly married woman if she did not become pregnant before the end of the second year of her matrimony at the very latest. This, one could argue, strongly hints at the notion that woman's traditional gender role is confined to motherhood and domesticity. Marriage and possibly motherhood, and the fulfilment of a woman's own sexual needs, however, seemed to constitute glaring contrasts: Walsh (2003) refers to the statements of an old Irish priest remembering that wives used to admit - for the purpose of a confession - that they had an orgasm during sexual activity with their spouses. Wives were expected to please their husbands during sexual intercourse, while their own sexual needs were not only inferior to their husbands', but also completely neglected (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 570).

From this it could be concluded that women's happiness and fulfilment of their own (sexual) desires were negligible in traditional concepts of Irish female identities. According to Walsh (2003), Irish women were deprived of sexual fantasies and wishes that needed to be fulfilled. As a consequence, women equated having an orgasm with having a bad, sinful ghost raging within them. To fight this ghost, or to put it in other words, to be redeemed from sin, these women considered confession necessary in order to obtain forgiveness (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 570). Apparently, the traditional Irish female sexual identity can basically be understood in terms of women being sexually subordinated to male desire and deprived of sexual satisfaction or

even sexual desire as such. Yet, as made clear by Walsh (2003), this mindset appeared to be strange to the next generation - the younger Irish of the beginning of the twenty-first century (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 570-1).

The denial of female lust provides the basis for the traditional picture of the Irish woman being in control of her emotions and her body: this concept gave rise to the view that women were able to master men's sexually aggressive behaviour and prevent men from engaging in sex with them (Walsh 2003). Consequently, as Walsh (2003) continues to explain, women were – according to all the instances reported by the preachers - traditionally seen as the sole culprit in the event of extramarital sexual intercourse (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 571). In this light the deeply rooted men's view that "Boys will be boys and girls will be sluts" (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 571) makes sense and sheds light upon women's traditional female identity in relation to gender and sexuality. Irish women were not only deprived of sexual fantasies and satisfaction, but, as can be concluded from this common opinion, were also depicted as sexually rational, defensive, and passive.

2.4. The Irish Catholic Church and the State as Regulators of the Feminine

2.4.1. The Role of the Irish Catholic Church: Advocating Asexuality, Domesticity, and Maternity

Nash stresses the link between alterations regarding the possessions of land and customs of heritage in the years following the Famine and alterations in views on nuptials and sexuality. These changing views, as the author continues to explain, were supported by the Catholic Church that emphasised the importance of the control of sexual activity, a chaste lifestyle for women and motherhood. As has already been pointed to in the previous section and as encapsulated by Nash, sexual activity was restricted to reproducing oneself after marriage in the post-Famine years. Thus sexuality was incontrovertibly linked to being heterosexual and to be willing to reproduce oneself within the framework of the family (115).

In the years preceding and following 1900, as Kilfeather draws the reader's attention to, a reinvigoration of the Virgin Mary's cult was evident. This was triggered by reports claiming that the Virgin Mary appeared at Lourdes, Fatima and Knock, situated in Co. Mayo. Catholic women in Ireland were highly influenced by the cult (105-6). According to Nash, the idealisation of and devotion to the Virgin Mary reinforced the creation of female identity: asexuality, maternity and domesticity were stipulated for Irish women. Overemphasised stereotypical masculine behaviour and the control of the socio-economical as well as of sexuality were all dependent on this construct (115).

Innes sheds light on the cult's underlying ideology. The beliefs and principles of the Catholic Church in Rome had an enormous impact on those of nineteenth century Ireland since a large number of Irish men who wanted to become priests were trained in Rome. After the promulgation of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and of Papal Infallibility (1878) as Articles Doctrine, every Catholic had to accept these doctrines (38). Marina Warner reminds us that "[...] motherhood in its fullness and perfection" (192) is embodied by the Virgin Mary according to the tenets of the Catholic Church. This can clearly be read as an oxymoron in the light of the Catholic Church picturing the Virgin in her role "[...] as mother [...] [as] exempt by special privilege from intercourse, from labour, and from other physical processes of ordinary childbearing" (192). Furthermore, Marina Warner links the impossibility of living up to the ideals of the Virgin Mary with women's inferior position:

Mary is mother and virgin [...] [...] [She] establishes the child as the destiny of woman, but escapes the sexual intercourse necessary for all other women to fulfil this destiny. Thus the very purpose of women established by the myth with one hand is slighted with the other. [...] The twin ideal the Virgin represents is of course unobtainable. [...] By setting up an impossible ideal the cult of the Virgin does drive the adherent into a position of acknowledged and hopeless yearning and inferiority [...]. (Marina Warner 336-7)

Like Marina Warner, Innes emphasises that Irish women had also to be humble, obedient and suffering submissively according to the Virgin's myth (40). Facing the impossibility of emulating the ideal of the Virgin Mary successfully, the question arises in what ways women could obtain social prestige and eventual salvation. The answer appears to be straight-forward: there were, according to Bhreathnach-Lynch,

only two identities women could embody traditionally according to the tenets of the Catholic Church regarding the Virgin Mary. The first option was to remain a virgin. The second one was to become a mother since bearing children secured Irish people's continued existence (84). Innes takes this notion one step further. She makes an interesting link to matrimony with regard to traditional female identity construction: those women who did not want or did not have the opportunity to marry and become mothers could choose to go to a convent and become nuns – an option which would make it equally possible to them to earn society's respect. Hence, they could either become a man's or – metaphorically speaking - Jesus' bride (39-40).

As has been illustrated, the scope of identities Irish women could embody used to be more than restricted. T. P. Kelly illustrates the restrictiveness and dangers for Irish women arising from the cult. Referring to a comment by Walsh (1997), T. P. Kelly draws attention to the cult's high prevalence in Ireland. Walsh compares Mary's depiction to Cinderella's. Similar to Cinderella, Mary's aspirations and desires are restricted to the domestic, or to be more precise, to the kitchen space (qtd. in T. P. Kelly 570).

Interestingly, the cult was not only used to limit the scope of female identities but to preserve images of a pure Ireland. According to Kilfeather, the Catholic Church's promotion of the Gaelic revival and its insistence that Ireland and its people were different were evident. Still, the Church frequently brought in the theological study of the Virgin Mary: in this way, connections in small areas “[...] to older and potentially more subversive modes of religious observance [...]” (106) were weakened. Forms connected with wakes, for example, were undermined. Kilfeather presumes that the Church might have been afraid of the forming of opinions towards secularism and opposition to the influence of the clergy in political affairs triggered by a rebellious discourse. To combat this potential problem, the Irish Catholic Church presented itself as being intrinsically Irish. Moreover, it made attractive liberalistic and socialistic notions seem entirely evil in representing them as being “‘foreign’” (106) to the core. It is crucial to consider the meaning of this word and its intimidating potential in this context. Kilfeather points out that “[...] the ‘foreign’ was always a form of English power” (106).

The attitude that it is wrong to allow religion, Kilfeather reports, to take part in society's organisation was fought by the Catholic Church with respect to the regulation of sexuality. This became evident in the Church's exertion of influence on the Censorship board not only in terms of forbidding Marie Stopes's oeuvre, a woman known to advocate the attaining of the number of children a family really wants to have by using contraceptive devices, but also in relation to banning Catholic doctors' texts discussing "the 'rhythm method'" (106) that can be used for pregnancy prevention. Moreover, the Church's controlling of sexuality manifested itself in its attack on "[...] dance halls and films as the site of foreign vices [...]" (106), to name but a few facts. In doing so, the persons that were in charge of the Irish Catholic Church, as encapsulated by Kilfeather, "[...] entwined discourses of racial purity, national pride and patriarchal authority" (106) many times.

In addition, the existence of the Magdalen laundries in Ireland further stresses this assumption (Kilfeather 106), as will be demonstrated in the following. In this institution, as Scanlan explains to us, the restricting policy on Irish women's sexuality was pursued not only by the Church, but also by the state. Establishments like the Magdalen laundry served the state as a protection of what was seen the perfect pattern of how a family should look like in Ireland (70). Initially, "temporary shelters" for prostitutes were, according to Deane, meant to be provided by the Magdalene asylums in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland. In the middle of the nineteenth century a general discouragement of the "inmates" to return to their lives outside of the institution became evident. Some even faced detainment till the very end of their lives. Moreover, it was no longer exclusively prostitutes that were considered as so-called fallen women. Women that had given birth to a baby out of wedlock as well as young women who had been subjected to abuse were also among those that could be sent to the asylum. Another reason for women's confinement was the fact that they suffered from a mental illness. "[H]arsh living and working conditions" ("Magdalens") were imposed on the imprisoned women. It was only in 1996, as Scanlan points out, that the Magdalen laundry in Gloucester Street in Dublin was shut down. The asylums "[...] had become a symbol of the culture's most repressive features" (71) no later than that.

2.4.2. Woman's Place in the Home by Law and the State's Banning of Divorce, Contraception, and Abortion

The roots of women's traditional role as the mother figure – stemming primarily from society's organisation and the Catholic Church's teachings – have already been explored in the previous subchapter. A law institutionalising this status of women in Ireland was enacted in 1937. The importance of the family as the central unit and the fixed role of the woman as a caring, self-sacrificial mother of that family bound to the domestic sphere have been constituted by Eamon de Valera in the Bunreacht na hÉireann - the Constitution of the Irish Republic - in 1937:

THE FAMILY ARTICLE 41

1 1° The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.

2° The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.

2 1° In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2° The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Bunreacht na hÉireann 160, 162)

T. P. Kelly emphasises that the regulation of 2.1° and the opinions at its basis have been made use of for refusing females an equal status in Irish society. Furthermore, T. P. Kelly stresses the definiteness and separateness in terms of gender roles for men and women. This notion is still noticeable in all parts of Irish life (569-70). Like T. P. Kelly, Bhreathnach-Lynch points out that the notion of women's domesticity was reinforced by the Constitution of 1937 (80).

Although the role of the Church in regulating the lives of Irish women is treated separately in this thesis, its influence appears to be vital in the context of the

Constitution. As pointed out by Redlich, the Catholic Church had a huge impact on society. It can be said to have functioned as a reinforcement of the laws enacted by the Constitution in that the gender role models produced by the Church - which also held that women should become mothers and work only in the domestic sphere - were in accordance with the ones yielded by the state (86).

In contrast to many other critics, Sawyer takes in different perspectives on the issue of women's rights and their bodies. He is convinced that viewing the state's and the Irish Church's regulations - such as the banning of contraceptives as well as social issues resulting from the Constitution of 1937 - solely in terms of oppressing women is misanthropic (114). The point that is most striking, however, is his suggestion that inferiority and subservience are not undoubtedly stipulated to females by the Church. Advocating that women become mothers and take on their responsibilities as wives in order to "[...] fulfil the natural role prescribed for them by God does not necessarily demote them from their elevated position in Irish mythology" (119-20).

In fact, Sawyer even gives credit to viewing the Irish Republic "[...] as having placed women on a pedestal" (114) to some extent. Referring to the referendum of 1986, the author remarks that Irish women considered the regulations made by the state and the Church as having supported family bonds. Although he admits that "[i]n certain aspects of life the Catholic Church may have screwed the lid down too tightly", he stresses the benefits that arose from the Church's tenets and the state's laws in terms of forming a basis for preserving the Irish family that "[...] survives, whilst all around standards are falling" (114). With regard to firm and stable Irish "standards", Coulter also gives credit to the notion of the Irish country suffering to a smaller extent from societal fragmentation and inhumanity compared to countries such as Britain or the USA. In fact, she believes that "[f]amily bonds are still close [in Ireland], and the extended family still a source of strength to most people" (277). In addition to arguing for the societal benefits arising from the state's rules and the Church's teachings, Sawyer also believes that a large number of Irish women opt voluntarily for a place in the domestic sphere¹: they are happy that their spouses are working, while they are taking care of the household – occupying a "lead[ing]" (114) position at home.

¹ Sawyer's observation refers to the early 1990s.

Similarly, Clear points out that the portrayal of the years under de Valera “[...] as a graveyard of women’s rights” (108) is not correct as it was in this time that these rights underwent continual debate, definition, and defence and were thus not dead at all. Article 41.2, as the author assumes, was introduced by Eamon de Valera in retrospect in an attempt to justify the Conditions of Employment Act and the marriage bar that impacted on the employment opportunities of Irish women public servants (108). Clear explicitly states that she does not intend to deny the “[...] substantial infringements on women’s rights in the years 1932-48” (107). Still, Clear warns us not to “[...] assess [Irish] women in the past as a monolithic group [...]” (114).

Describing the kind of life women may have faced in Éire at the times of de Valera solely in terms of “[...] an oppressive, stagnant, uncomfortable social environment [...]” (104) is – according to the author – insufficient since the issue of women and the domestic space cannot be discussed in general (113-4). Indeed, Irish women employed in industry or service at the lower income levels, as pointed out by Fahey, were not really affected by the marriage bar. In fact, women’s opportunities of working in the public or the private sector were restrained by this regulation. The marriage bar was introduced in the 1930s in the Republic of Ireland as well as in a variety of other nations at the time. It basically stipulated that women were forced to give up their jobs after marriage. This was brought in at a time when many had been unemployed (Fahey).

Although Sawyer - in arguing for the benefits such as family integrity that may indeed root in the state’s laws and the Church’s tenets – and Clear – in drawing our attention to the question of different “domestic sphere[s]” (113) - may be right, one could – in the face of many critics such as Scanlan – still read the Constitution of 1937 as particularly restrictive in terms of women’s rights compared to other European states at the time, a position that provides the basis for traditional Irish female identity construction as defined in this thesis:

Article 41 failed to protect women economically, but it did provide a rationale for organizing society along conservative, patriarchal lines. Declaring families the foundation of the state justified keeping divorce, homosexuality, birth control, and abortion illegal long after they were readily available elsewhere. (70)

With the banning of divorce, contraception, and abortion, the State demonstrated to be particularly in control of the Irish women as will now be discussed in detail. The importance of the family as the fundamental unit is emphasised with regard to divorce. It was banned in 1925 (Bhreathnach-Lynch 80). The following paragraph of the Constitution of 1937 stresses the importance of protecting marriage all the more:

Article 41

- 3 1° The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack. (Bunreacht na hÉireann 162)

Moreover, Article 41.3.2° stipulated that “No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage” ([Joint] Committee on Marriage Breakdown) till its repeal in 1995 (Bunreacht na hÉireann viii). Additionally, the following article stresses what has been said:

Article 41

- 3 3° No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage so dissolved. (Bunreacht na hÉireann 164)

Apparently, this affected both Irish men and women. With regard to contraceptives, however, women were facing direct constraints in terms of their bodies. Interestingly, from 1920 to 1935 birth control, as Jackson draws our attention to, used to be lawful. With section 17 of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill of 1935, however, it was no longer allowed to sell contraceptive devices or to advertise or import them for the purpose of making them available to be bought (210). According to Sawyer, there was no ban on actually using contraceptive devices. He also adds that “[...] nobody who really wanted them had problems, other than those of conscience” (115). This, of course, may change the view on how the Irish coped with issues related to contraception unofficially. The striking point, however, as one could argue, is that it was in fact illegal.

Intriguingly, as Jackson explains to us, anyone who made use of contraceptive devices was penalised more severely than anyone who prostituted oneself in that one had to pay twenty-five times more than a prostitute (210). This mirrors “[...] an assumption that controlling one’s reproductive capacities was more grievous than controlling the sale of one’s body” (210). The criminalisation of contraception, as one could suggest, implies that Irish women did only have limited rights of self-determination over their bodies traditionally. In fact, women were not even permitted to inform themselves about contraception by the censorship act of 1929 (Bhreathnach-Lynch 80).

While divorce, abortion, homosexuality, and contraceptive devices were legalised in some nations in Europe, Kilfeather reports, feminists have not been able to transform Éire into a more liberalised country without problems since the 70s of the previous century: the importance of maintaining the Catholic moral standards typical of Ireland was stressed by Pope John Paul II in the course of his visit to Éire in 1979. Action for reformation of the Irish country was opposed by groups of people against change that rallied in the 1980s and 1990s. In their view, the secularisation and liberalisation of the country had to be fought against. Indeed, they succeeded in that an amendment, which had been approved by a referendum, was adopted in 1983. It secured the baby’s life in its mother’s womb constitutionally (110):

ARTICLE 40

3 3° The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.
(Bunreacht na hÉireann 152)

Sawyer points out that some people regard abortion as having “[...] exclusively to do with ‘a woman’s right to choose’” (114). Without intending to argue in favour of abortion, one could also suggest a link between these two. Irish women’s right in terms of abortion is obviously subordinated to the right of the unborn to a significant extent. Ireland made this decision a long time ago. According to T. P. Kelly, the Offences against the Person Act 1861 banned abortion in Ireland. Today, abortion is still against the law in Ireland except if pregnancy, according to the Supreme Court ruling in 1992, threatens the woman’s life significantly (577-8).

2.5. Patterns of Change

I graduated from university in the late 1980s and [...] emigrated immediately. I returned to live in Ireland only four years later [...]. [...] I found that a divorce referendum which proved to be successful (only just) was looming, homosexuality had been decriminalised, we had learned to cope with references to menstruation on TV and were sophisticated enough to buy rubber sheaths when we chose to. Those were not inconsequential liberties in themselves but it can be argued that even more important was the change in values that they reflected. (Michael O'Connell 13-4)

Apparently, values appeared to be radically different in the beginning of the 1990s. But what triggered the transformation? According to Inglis (2005), a trend occurred in the 1970s with more and more Irish people ceasing to adhere - in "legal-orthodox" (73) terms – to the tenets of the Catholic Church. There was, for example, a significant decline in the number of Catholic believers going to Mass on Sunday: in 1974 it used to be 91 per cent of Irish Catholics. In the end of the 1990s, however, it was only slightly more than 60 per cent that attended Mass on Sunday. Likewise, an increasing number of Irish people stopped adhering to the moral doctrines on sexuality of the Church (73). From this, a clear link between the influence of the Catholic Church and sexuality in Ireland can be concluded. Indeed, Michael O'Connell suggests that conventions concerning sexuality and religion underwent transformation correspondingly. The author claims that this is no surprise: one can only grasp the ways in which Irish people viewed and approached sexuality in the light of the influential role the Catholic Church played (77). Ironically, the Church's "[...] tone [was] naturally more apologetic than imperious" (73) in the light of the reports of scandalous incidents in the late 1990s (73). This hints at the idea that its influence had decreased. In fact, Coulter reports that the Irish society generally became a more and more secularised one. In a variety of societal realms people no longer took into consideration what the Church preached. The reality of the mid-nineties was that many young people were having sex before marriage and that an estimated five thousand Irish females per year travelled to other countries in order to have an abortion there, to name but a few facts. This clearly gives evidence to the Church's diminished influence (276).

Indeed, Irish women's lives underwent significant change in the 1960s and 1970s: there were, as Coulter continues to explain to the reader, more favourable conditions that facilitated the improvement of Irish people's educational status. What is more, Irish women were more likely to find employment in these times (277). It was in 1973 that the rescission of the marriage bar in the public sector was decided (Fahey). This was not by chance. With Ireland becoming a member of the former EEC (European Economic Community) – what is now the EU (European Union) – in that year, the regulation was removed (Barry). In fact, Barry insists that “[u]p until this time, gender equality and equal opportunities had not been addressed within the Irish legal framework” (2). Only primary teachers had already been able to work in 1957 as there was a lack of teachers at the time (Fahey). What is more, since 1977 it is no longer legal to discriminate against people at work because of their sex (Fahey).

What is more, Kilfeather explains to the reader that a group of radical and activist women met and developed into the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM). In a protest against the forbiddance of contraceptives in the Republic of Ireland, some adherents gathered and travelled to Belfast in 1971. The contraceptive devices that had been bought there were taken to Dublin illegally (108-9). Importing and selling contraceptives in Ireland were only legalised in 1979 (T. P. Kelly 576). Strikingly, as Redlich draws our attention to, it had already been common practise for Irish men and women to make use of contraceptives prior to their legalisation. Similarly, Irish people had been able to inform themselves about issues related to birth control. In the late 1970s women did no longer have to give birth to a seemingly unending multitude of babies and thus, did not have to spend as much time raising babies as earlier on (90).

Topics revolving around unconventional sexualities, privacy, and rights concerning procreation, Kilfeather reports, were publicly discussed on the basis of a set of scandalous incidents in the 1980s and 1990s. Ann Lovett, a girl of 15 years of age, for example, died when giving birth to her child in 1984. Her baby met its death, too. The case of a raped and pregnant 14-year-old-girl, publicly called “X”, caused another stir in Éire in 1992: she wanted to take a trip to England in order to have an

abortion, but the state attempted to thwart her plans (111). Evidence of a change in attitudes was indicated by the lifting of the ban to take a journey to other countries in order to have an abortion as an Irish woman (Walsh 2002 qtd. in T. P. Kelly 575). That the majority – even if it were only 50.4 per cent in total (“Referendum on Twenty-fifth Constitutional Amendment”) – rejected the proposal for the Twenty-fifth Amendment to the Constitution in 2002 further backs up the assumption that opinions on abortion had actually undergone slight change. The Irish people voting were asked to answer the following question:

Do you approve of the proposal to amend the Constitution as set out in the undermentioned Bill?

Twenty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy) Bill. The referendum proposes to add two new sub-sections to Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution. It acknowledges the equal right to life of the mother and the unborn. A new Article 40.3.4 states: “In particular, the life of the unborn in the womb shall be protected in accordance with the provisions of the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Act, 2002.” A new Article 40.3.5 proposes that this Act cannot be changed unless it is approved by the people in a new referendum. The main provisions of the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill are: The threat of suicide, based on the X case, will be removed as a ground for abortion; Abortion will be defined as the intentional destruction by any means of unborn human life after implantation in the womb. (This definition presumes that the IUD and the morning-after pill will have legal protection); A procedure carried out by a medical practitioner at an approved place - to be laid down by the Minister by regulation after the referendum - to prevent a real and substantial risk of the loss of a woman’s life, other than by self-destruction, will not be regarded as an abortion; Anyone aiding or procuring an abortion will be liable for up to 12 years’ imprisonment. The right to information and freedom to travel for an abortion are restated in the Bill. (“Referendum on Twenty-fifth Constitutional Amendment”)

That views changed in Ireland, as Michael O’Connell explains to his reader, was also suggested, among other things, by the permission to take the morning-after pill (88). Moreover, buying condoms was no longer restricted by law (Walsh 2002 qtd. in T. P. Kelly). Patterns of change became also evident in the 50 per cent drop of the natality rate in the period of 1974 to 1992 (Walsh 2002 qtd. in T. P. Kelly 575). Michael O’Connell, referring to the Eurostat Yearbook 2000, points to the former total fertility rates² of Éire: compared to any other EU country in the year 1988 - such as Italy,

² “Total fertility of a calendar year is the average number of children that would be born alive to a woman during her lifetime if she were to experience during her childbearing years the age-specific fertility rates of the respective period” (Eurostat. *A Statistical Eye on Europe: Data 1988-98*. Eurostat Yearbook 2000. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications, 2000, 93, qtd. in Michael O’Connell 79)

Austria or Spain, to name but a few - women in Ireland gave birth to children significantly more often. This gives evidence to the existence of the traditional big Irish family. What is more, a greater amount of mothers who were married bore children in Ireland compared to mothers in other parts of Europe on average in 1988. As encapsulated by Michael O'Connell, mothers gave birth to numerous children after marriage. The years preceding the 1990s were thus indicative of an Irish country in a traditional sense (78-9).

That views towards gender roles and the family, however, did increasingly change becomes evident in the following. In her article "Women and the Family", published in the late seventies of the previous century, Redlich makes us aware that unfulfilled expectations in marriage were not considered acceptable any more: earlier on many Irish women had endured unhappiness in order to ensure their family's well-being, but a lot of women changed their minds in the 1970s. In fact, life had undergone dramatic transformation. A greater amount of stress in people's lives – and thus also in family life – became evident in these times. The author identifies this circumstance and the fact that women were demanding to a greater extent as the main triggers for a large number of judicial separations in the 1970s (83). It is women, as Redlich continues to explain, who suffered from a higher level of stress than men did. The reason for this was the persisting of "[...] traditional values and norms [...]" (91) concerning femininity. These lingering, unchanged standards were, of course, not in any way supportive to those Irish women in the late 1970s who were facing the double challenge of working and being mothers and housekeepers at the same time (91). Though stressful, Redlich considers the opportunity for women to work as a great chance for reaching equality inside the family:

The woman is now a co-breadwinner, like her husband participating in the family and in social production. Having taken her rightful place as participating in society as a whole, she can now emerge as a total being and meet her husband as an equal, as a partner. (90-1)

What is particularly relevant in this context is the fact that it was, as Coulter suggests, only in the 1960s that the Irish started to consider the finding of happiness in wedlock as crucial. Earlier on most Irish people living in the Irish countryside married because of economic reasons and social constraints (277-8). As already referred to above, there was a great amount of judicial separations in the 1970s (Redlich 83). Back

then, divorce was not allowed yet. Formerly, divorce was in fact constitutionally prohibited: “No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage” (T. P. Kelly 574). However, a divorce referendum passed in November 1995 brought about great change in leading to the legalisation of divorce in Ireland (T. P. Kelly 574). Certain criteria, however, need to be fulfilled as the Constitution now says:

ARTICLE 41

3 2° A Court designated by law may grant a dissolution of marriage where, but only where, it is satisfied that –

- i at the date of the institution of the proceedings, the spouses have lived apart from one another for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least four years during the previous five years,
- ii there is no reasonable prospect of a reconciliation between the spouses,
- iii such provision as the Court considers proper having regard to the circumstances exists or will be made for the spouses, any children of either or both of them and any other person prescribed by law, and
- iv any further conditions prescribed by law are complied with.

(Bunreacht na hÉireann 162, 164)

Furthermore, Irish people have been entitled to marry again since 1996 (Michael O’Connell 87). Strikingly, the traditional family unit, as could be inferred from Michael O’Connell’s following observations based on data taken from the Eurostat Yearbook 2000, also underwent change in the 1980s and 1990s. Becoming parents and marrying stopped being almost inseparable concepts (80). The graph under consideration (Eurostat Yearbook 2000, qtd. in Michael O’Connell 81) gives the percentage of “Live Births outside Marriage as % of all Live Births” during a time interval from 1988-1998. According to the graph, Irish people have been more and more inclined to have children out of wedlock from the year 1988 onwards. Michael O’Connell rightly speaks of a general development in Europe in this respect. Still, the line representing Ireland in the graph suggests a dramatic rise compared to the one of the EU average which increases moderately. In fact, Michael O’Connell suggests that “[...] be[ing] fun singletons, not withered spinsters” (81) was the opportunity

opened up for those women who did not marry in the beginning of the twenty-first century.

That Ireland changed became also apparent on a political level. The fact that the Irish elected Mary Robinson - the first woman to become president in Ireland – in 1990, as suggested by Kilfeather, was indicative of the public's increased inclination to welcome the reforming of the Republic at this stage. Prior to her presidency, Robinson fought for feminist matters and for the decriminalisation of homosexuality (111).

T. P. Kelly draws our attention to greater legal equality for homosexuals in 1993 as male homosexuality was decriminalised in that year. This extensive reform was surprising to numerous people as a smaller improvement would have already settled the European Court of Human Rights' judgement in 1988. - Ireland's legislation concerning homosexuality had been considered breaching the European Convention on Human Rights. What is more, particular laws were introduced to ban that homosexuals are discriminated against at work and in societal realms because of their sex or their sexuality (575).

According to Michael O'Connell, it was, however, still the case that homosexuals were ghettoised in Ireland in the beginning of the twenty-first century. What changed, however, was that there was greater variation in and an enlargement of their separated spaces from the other Irish people. Michael O'Connell elaborates on the "ghetto[s]" (87) expansion as well as heterosexuals' reaction to this space in the following:

In December 2000, it was reported that there were now three gay bars in Dublin as well as 12 clubs that have one gay night per week. Cork has two such clubs, as does Limerick, while Galway has one. A number of gay B&Bs have also opened up throughout the country. The existence of these venues has been met with tolerance, or at least indifference, by most of the straight population, something difficult to imagine in the 1970s and 1980s. (87)

What appears to be the most striking point in terms of a changing Ireland with regard to sexuality is that "[a] language has been found for what was once inarticulate" (Inglis 1998a: 103). In the late 1990s, Inglis (1998a) continues to explain to the

reader, sex was viewed and made sense of differently. Issues and problems related to sexuality were explicitly and frankly being addressed in Ireland, be it in articles, on TV or in conversations with friends, to name but a few. Lust was then perfectly accepted in society. Many even started to consider lust to be beneficial to one's health. The times that had been ruled by the denial and silencing of sex had passed. Tolerance and acceptance towards a variety of sexual identities and sexual preferences were being demanded (102-4).

What is more, the Emerald Isle was completely changed by the boom in terms of economy that the Republic of Ireland experienced as well as the Northern Ireland peace process in the 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century (McLoone 2006: 147). A significant re-imagining of the way in which the Irish conceived and constructed their understanding of identification with their nation became evident (McLoone 2006: 147).

Although the next section focuses on the remnants of traditional values at the dawn of twenty-first century Ireland, critics such as Michael O'Connell view Éire's "past" as being "[...] indubitably another country" (91) in terms of sexuality. Compared with how the issue of sexuality had been dealt with in the 1980s and 1990s, it was treated radically different in the beginning of the twenty-first century. In fact, the critic is convinced that this rapidly proceeding transformation of Irish society "[...] will run and run, and many, especially traditionalists who remember how it all used to be, will find the ultimate destination very disturbing" (91).

2.6. The Remnants of Traditional Values in the Beginning of Twenty-First Century Ireland

Michael O'Connell displays an acute awareness of the fact that Ireland was not a sexually liberal country at the turn of the millennium:

That we still remain one of the most conservative societies in Europe tells us a lot about the extreme and bizarre society that existed previously. It was Catholic guilt and body-hatred *par excellence*. This guilt has not been entirely absolved and attitudes, behaviour and laws are still marked by the past. (91)

The remnants of Ireland's conservatism in terms of gender and sexuality will now be discussed. T. P. Kelly – his findings were published in 2004 - points out that the notion of the separateness of roles between Irish men and women still permeated all societal levels of Ireland, the woman being considered as inferior to men. Irish society was governed by patriarchy: being socially powerful was equated with being masculine (569-70).

In regard to notions of sexuality, T. P. Kelly encapsulates the situation in Ireland in the following way: generally, people were socialised to adopt the view that it is, ideally, a married couple, consisting of a man and a woman, who have sex. They had to be able and inclined to participate in coital intercourse. If one of the partners failed to do so, the marriage could be annulled. Moreover, getting no children was equated with selfishness. Many Irish felt – if nothing else - that any extramarital sexual behaviour was bad. In their role as a wife, the fulfilment of an Irish woman's sexual needs was secondary to their husband. Women were supposed to engage in sexual intercourse with their husbands at their demand. To a certain extent society accepted the sexual expressions of unwed couples, given that they were heterosexual. The tolerance for such behaviours was particularly given if it seemed as if they entered into the bond of marriage at some stage (570).

Still, as T. P. Kelly continues to explain, there was a difference made between men and women. While men were pictured as being energetic and having no control over their lust, women were viewed as needing a man to create any agitation in her. Women were also portrayed as being willing to allow men to be sexually in control. Passivity and a poor sexual drive, however, were not the only features that characterised the mainstream view of a distinctive feminine sexuality in the beginning of the twenty-first century. As a woman was viewed as being more restrained, she was expected to take over responsibility for the ways in which she and the man behaved sexually. For the analysis of this thesis it is crucial to consider the power relationship between men and women with regard to sex: men were seen as dominating women and women were not allowed to question this superiority in any way (570).

Similarly, Michael O'Connell pictures the situation of 2001 in relation to the Catholic Church's position. Although the Church advocated – unconvincingly as the author suggests - that sex was a god-given present, it still equated sex with dirtiness and shamefulness. “The damaging legacy”, as Michael O'Connell points out, “of [...] [the Church's] almost medieval ideology still survives today” (77): the optimum could be reached by remaining chaste. Sex was portrayed to be reserved for married couples and even those were not meant to have sexual intercourse regularly. One committed a mortal sin when engaging in any sexual activity taking place out of wedlock (77).

As has already been indicated, heterosexuality was represented as being the sole tolerable mode of expressing sexuality (T. P. Kelly). This notion, T. P. Kelly argues, was strongly connected to the ways in which males and females were broadly related to in Irish life. Heterosexuals that married were encouraged to have a family since it was the family which was portrayed as forming the exclusive justifiable group in Irish society. Homosexuals, be it males or females, were portrayed as a danger. Thus, they were often made felt as if they were unimportant and powerless. They did not only face marginalisation, but also ostracism and discrimination. In the world of work they were more likely to get fired and were not that often promoted compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Even if it came to legal actions they were disadvantaged: because of their sexuality, they could lose custody in the course of a trial and were also not allowed to become the legal parents of an adopted child. Moreover, they were prejudiced against in many other areas of society. Frequently, people approached them in a hostile way or even attacked them bodily (575). Likewise, Michael O'Connell reports that “[d]iscrimination, explicit and subtle, against gay men and lesbians, [was] still rampant and Ireland certainly must [have been] one of the most difficult European societies in which to come out or live an openly gay life” (87).

The extent of the marginalisation transvestites and transsexuals were facing in Irish society in the beginning of the twenty-first century can be assessed in terms of virtual invisibility (T. P. Kelly). Still, as T. P. Kelly continues to explain, the Irish were conscious of such occurrences in society. It also seemed that transvestism was rather widespread. Irish transsexuals had to travel to other countries to change their

gender surgically as this appeared unlikely to be allowed by the majority of Irish hospitals due to moral reasons. T. P. Kelly points out that one could not make any alterations to one's birth certificate with regard to the sex that one was assigned to when one was born (575).

3. Outside of “Decency”: Mary Lavin’s “Sarah” and Edna O’Brien’s “A Scandalous Woman”

3.1. The (Irish) Short Story: A Medium of Challenging Repressive Discourses

In order to present novel topics and ideas that might also carry a stigma, as Pratt points out, writers frequently use the short story as type of discourse. This general statement also applies to a specifically Irish tradition (104). The dominant “genre” among narrative prose, as Pratt continues to explain, “[i]n the establishment of a modern national literature in Ireland [...]” (104) – in the course of Ireland becoming decolonised – is the short story: Irish writers such as Joyce, O’Flaherty, O’Faolain, O’Connor, Moore, or Lavin, for example, use the short story for recording life in Ireland in modern times for the first time (104).

Meyer points the reader’s attention to the fact that the short story used to be a predominantly male dominated genre in Ireland before the 1960s. Female Irish writers such as Edna O’Brien, however, give insights into what life is like for women in Ireland and shed light on their viewpoints through the lenses of feminism (342). Strikingly, Meyer defines a “feminist text[]” as “[...] expos[ing] patriarchal discourses and practices that discriminate against and marginalise women, and privilege female characters, perspectives, actions, and discourses” (342). Lavin’s “Sarah” and O’Brien’s “A Scandalous Woman” can be revealed as such, as will be demonstrated in this thesis. O’Brien, as the critic continues to explain, did not only witness that Catholicism held sway over the Irish nation but also that the public was marked by repression, hypocrisy, and patriarchy (344). Against this background O’Brien’s short stories make the assertion that “[...] within and outside marriage [...]” (344) females do have desires with regard to sexuality. Speaking of O’Brien’s *The Love Object* (1968) Winston remarks that “[...] the collection brings a totalized female perspective that, perhaps with the exception of Mary Lavin, is unprecedented in Irish short fiction” (271).

From Winston's remark it can be concluded that Mary Lavin's short stories offer a female point of view. According to the critic (268) she belongs to those authors that produced the biggest number of short stories in the decades following the war. She was also regarded "[...] as one of the most important new voices in the Irish short story" (268) since she remained constantly productive during the 1950s and 1960s.

In her article "Finding a Voice: Women Writing the Short Story (to 1945)" Coelsch-Foisner addresses the process of women's "[f]inding a voice" (98) through the short story by focussing on specific female writers who were influenced by English modernist ideas and also spread those. The critic makes a connection between "[t]he modernist foregrounding of moment-by-moment experience [...]" (96) under which the short story was supported in its rise and women's arising autonomy as authors – a conception that came into being in the end of the nineteenth century and started to prosper from the beginning until the middle of the twentieth century. Although it would be inadequate to claim, as the critic (96, 98) argues, that "[f]inding a voice" (98) solely implies that female authors of short fiction representative of modernism in England such as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Frances Bellerby, Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Jean Rhys are fighting for an articulation marked by creativity in the sense of femininity or feminism, they all have "[...] a climate of ideas and a literary horizon that encouraged experiment and innovation, both of which shaped the perception of the short story as a distinct and important form" (98) in common. This image was enhanced by the authors mentioned. What is more, short fiction can be seen as central to women's writing during postmodernism which can be traced back to them to a considerable extent (98).

Determining their diverse "voices" (98) in any way turns out to be still difficult. Coelsch-Foisner explains to her reader that "[i]t is in connection with what the aesthetics of the short story, with its brevity and inherent economy along with the modernist call for originality, meant for these widely heterogeneous voices, that their oeuvre may be explored in terms of "finding a voice" (98). The modernist female short story writers mentioned gave voice to what had not been noticed and not been articulated yet. What is more, "style" and "modes of perception" (98) became subject of experimentation. Their readers were introduced to views on living marked by

disruption and alternativeness (98). In fact, the short fiction of female authors in the beginning of the twentieth-century, as Coelsch-Foisner further argues, was groundbreaking. They gave voice to the fact that females were socially and sexually marginalised and illustrated that females were exposed to the power held by men (111). What is more, and this is probably most significant in the context of this thesis, they gave voice to the “[...] ambivalent strategies of submitting to or deconstructing assigned identities [...]” (111) applied by women.

Mary Lavin and Edna O’Brien, as is claimed in this thesis, follow in these writers’ footsteps in that they challenge identities. In particular, they question traditional concepts of Irish female identities with regard to gender and sexuality in “Sarah” and “A Scandalous Woman” respectively, using the short story as a medium of challenging repressive discourses.

3.2. Mary Lavin's "Sarah"

Before the ways in which the eponymous female protagonist of Mary Lavin's short story "Sarah" actually challenges traditional concepts of Irish female identities will be discovered, the realms considered traditional and restrictive are explored first. For this reason the first subchapter examines the environment the short story's female protagonist is living in. Furthermore, those of her character traits that can be identified as conventional will be highlighted before being contrasted with the transgressive ones in the next subchapter.

3.2.1. The Sexually Transgressive Woman in a Traditional Environment

3.2.1.1. Strong Impact of the Catholic Church – Lavin's Ironic Voice

As pointed out by Ingman (2007), rigidity, confinement to tradition, and materialism are characteristic of Lavin's portrayal of the Catholic bourgeoisie during the 1940s and 1950s in her short stories. In numerous short stories of hers Lavin illustrates the restrictions men and women faced at a time that was marked, amongst others, by the power of the Catholic Church over Ireland (14). This topic, as one could argue, is also covered in "Sarah". The Church is depicted to have a major influence on the life of the protagonist, Sarah. Although she underscores vital doctrines she finds it easy to adhere to the Church's mores on the surface level. It is her diligence that allows Sarah to follow particular conventions of the Catholic Church, as Mary Lavin illustrates in detail:

If Sarah had been one to lie in bed on a Sunday and miss Mass, her neighbours might have felt differently about her, there being greater understanding in their hearts for sins against God than for sins against his Holy Church. But Sarah found it easy to keep the Commandments of the church. She never missed Mass. She observed abstinence on all days abstinence was required. She frequently did the Stations of the Cross as well. And on Lady Day when an annual pilgrimage took place to a holy well in the neighbouring village Sarah was an example to all—with her shoes off walking over the sharp flinty stones, doing penance like a nun. ("Sarah" 392)

Sarah appears to be quite pious indeed (Shumaker). According to O'Byrne it is Sarah's "[...] apparently scrupulous religious observance" (6) that helps her to uphold her reputation of piety in public. The fact that she gave birth to illegitimate babies in the private sphere is tolerated by her community to a certain degree (6). Sarah applies the notion of "[...] living [...] a dual life" (6) for challenging the restrictions she is facing. She, as O'Byrne continues to explain, is partly accepted by society because of her performance of "[...] an outward show of traditional Irish womanhood, devotedly Catholic and domestically competent" (7) despite her disobedience to the moral doctrines on sexuality of the Church. O'Byrne points out that one would actually be able to view Sarah's character in the light of hypocrisy given the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres (7). Yet the statement "[...] there being greater understanding in their [i.e. the neighbours'] hearts for sins against God than for sins against his Holy Church" ("Sarah" 392) makes clear that it is not Sarah but the community she is living in that is regarded hypocritical in Lavin's view (O'Byrne 7).

What is more, the comparison of Sarah to a nun is particularly relevant in the light of the identity dichotomy mother/nun. That she does not live up to either role model satisfactorily will be elaborated on at a later point. However, the enormous impact of the Church on the characters is beyond dispute. Pat's assumption that "[...] the talking-to she got from the priest the last time would knock sense into her [...]" ("Sarah" 395) is indicative of the Church's influence and also interference in people's private lives. The priest's advice to take Sarah to a "Home" ("Sarah" 395) might be understood as a reference to the Magdalen laundries and thus as an attempt to place female sexuality under control. O'Byrne interprets the expression "Home" here as a place where women that gave birth to children out of wedlock can be taken to (13). As discussed in Chapter 1, women that were sexually disobedient, i.e. women that did not fit into the narrow mindset of the identity dichotomy mother/nun, were among those who were sent to the asylums. Shumaker argues that the priest makes Sarah appear in an unlawful light by suggesting that a Home is the right place for her. The brothers thus feel affirmed to get rid of her, considering her dehumanised (Shumaker). The priest's advice is not rejected by her brothers out of pity or love for their sister. On the contrary, they decide to keep her as their working force in the

household. Pat's worry concerning the priest finding out about Sarah's latest turpitude and coming to visit him once more in expectation of Pat having found a solution ("Sarah" 395) is symptomatic of the Church's power all the more. As pointed out by Shumaker, Sarah is in fact forced to leave because her brothers do not want to be called to account for her so-called misbehaviour by the priest any more.

That Sarah also has to justify her behaviour to the priest becomes evident in Pat's recalling of the priest's threat: "[...] if she didn't tell the name of the father, he'd make the new born infant speak and name him!" ("Sarah" 395). The reason why the priest has not carried out the threat is interesting to consider. Sarah is said to have hidden the baby from him up to the point he was busy with "[...] something else—the Confirmation—or the rewiring of the chapel" (395). From this the reader learns that the priest deems it necessary to interfere in a woman's sexual life as long as there are no other duties to be performed. Still, as Shumaker suggests, his threat is not insignificant at all: since Sarah used to keep secret the identities of her previous babies' fathers, he criticised her many times – a critique that eventually contributes to her demise. Sarah, as the critic further argues, could be seen as reacting to the priest's urging in that she decides to inform Mr Kedrigan that he is the father of the baby she is carrying. This reaction might be understood in terms of both compliance and defiance. Since the priest indirectly contributes to the killing of Sarah, he might be viewed as being representative of the Church as such: just as he urged Sarah's brothers to react harshly to their sister's so-called sexual indecency, the Church might be seen as urging the killing of sexually scandalous women like Sarah by their respective families in Ireland (Shumaker).

In her first writings, as A. A. Kelly points the reader's attention to, Lavin emphasises the authoritarian position that the Catholic Church holds (89). Strikingly, one of her opus's central topics is her descriptions of the costumes connected to the Catholic Church (85). In many of her writings she endows these descriptions with an ironic note (85). Humour in general appears to play a vital part in her work. Dunleavy points to Lavin's mocking use of metaphorical devices, for example (69). Similarly, Bowen testifies that many of Lavin's texts display humorous elements. With regard to the humorous types that can be found in her opus, Bowen differentiates between

lewdness, understatement, “black humor” (47), and lightness. According to A. A. Kelly, Lavin is aware “[...] that the transcendental is often given insufficient, or warped, human interpretation, embodied in formalistic ritual or denigrated to prescriptive rules” (85). The critic finds that Lavin’s discussions of customs related to religion are frequently ironic (85). A. A. Kelly further argues that Lavin views this prejudiced explanation and understanding also as a cause for the least educated becoming superstitious and afraid. “Sarah”, as identified by A. A. Kelly, can be said to address this central topic (89). As becomes evident from the extract quoted above, the obedience to rites and customs is considered crucial by Sarah’s religious community. What is to be regarded “a mortal sin” (A. A. Kelly 89) is redefined in “Sarah”, as A. A. Kelly’s observations illustrate. What the critic observes with regard to the first publication of the short story – the sentence “[a]nd Sarah found it easy to keep the commands of the servant of the Lord, even if she found it somewhat difficult to keep the commands of the Lord Himself” (“Sarah”, 1942, qtd. in A. A. Kelly 89) of the original edition seems to be particularly relevant for A. A. Kelly’s observations in this respect – can, as one could argue, be transferred to the altered version of 1943 used in this thesis: on the Church’s authority one commits “a mortal sin” (A. A. Kelly 89) if one is absent from Sunday service at church, for example. Consistent with the biblical commandments, however, one commits “a mortal sin” (89) if one has an extramarital affair. By this the critic hints at the fact that while Sarah has no problem in following the prescriptions of her Church, she does have problems in following the principles of the bible (89). This becomes – as the reader learns – evident when she is accused of having engaged in a sexual affair with a married man. As can be inferred from A. A. Kelly’s work, the distinction made between the tenets is ridiculed in Lavin’s story. The actual biblical commandments are apparently confused with the prescriptions of the Church in “Sarah” – a message that Lavin conveys through the use of irony.

3.2.1.2. Restriction of Female Characters to the Domestic Sphere

According to Donohue, Lavin made the “domestic tragedy” (280) one of the focal points of her writing. This, one might suggest, is also an important theme in “Sarah” which already becomes evident in situating Sarah’s life in the domestic sphere – a life

which ends tragically. Peterson points out that Sarah is not morally good in the traditional sense, which is strongly disapproved of by her environment. Still, she is vital and giving - features that make Sarah win her community's admiration (30). Similarly, Shumaker stresses that it is the fact that the cleaner Sarah – besides being pious – is working diligently that gains her other people's respect. What is more, O'Byrne observes that Sarah is domestically skilled - a competence, she argues, that underlies Mrs Kedrigan's willingness to ignore the trespasses with regard to sexuality Sarah is known for (7). There are numerous examples in the text that demonstrate Sarah's diligence in the domestic sphere. Right from the start the reader learns that "Sarah was a great worker, strong and tireless, and a lot of women in the village got her in to scrub for them" ("Sarah" 392). Sarah, in fact, excels in housekeeping. After having done the housekeeping for Mrs Kedrigan, "[...] her house was cleaner than it had ever been. The boards were scrubbed white as rope, the windows glinted and there was bread cooling on the sill" (394). That her brothers Pat and Joseph strongly associate womanhood with domesticity becomes more than evident in their relief once she returns from the Kedrigan's house: they are very happy that she will take care of them and their house again (394). According to O'Byrne, this short story reflects that Lavin is aware that women used to be economically constrained: for the work Sarah does in the house, Pat and Joseph do not pay her any money. What is more, as the critic draws our attention to, the handing over of the payment to her brothers she received from Mrs Kedrigan ("Sarah" 394) is also indicative of her restrictions in terms of money (O'Byrne 13). Financial dependence, as discussed in Chapter 1, contributed to keeping women from living their lives independently outside the domestic sphere. Shumaker argues that both Lavin's and O'Brien's "fallen women" do not come to the conclusion that it is their financial dependency rather than "[...] the evil they perceive as inherent to their female bodies" that hinders them to live the way they want.

Before Sarah's alleged scandalous behaviour is being addressed in a letter, as one could argue, the brothers exploit their sister economically. They do not want Sarah to leave for a Home in any case since they cannot imagine a life without having her as strong working force in their home: "[...] God Almighty what would we do without her? There must a [sic!] woman in the house! [...]" ("Sarah" 395). It is, however, not

only the male characters but also their female counterparts that determine women's place to be in the home: "[t]hree days is a long time to leave a house in the care of a man" (393) is how Mrs Kedrigan tries to justify her decision to assign diligent Sarah to do the housekeeping.

3.2.1.3. Motherhood and Female (In)Fertility

3.2.1.3.1. Sarah Murray

Sarah's place in the home is stressed by the fact that she is a mother, too. That her "brats" ("Sarah" 395) are in need of their mother is the argument brought forth by Joseph for not giving her to the Home. From this it becomes clear that motherhood and domesticity are strongly interrelated. Those areas are depicted as the only legitimate places for a woman in the short story. She is said to have given birth to her babies in an admirable way: "[a]nd not one of her children was born in the County Home. It was always the most upright matron in the village who slapped life into every one of them" (392). The question arises why this is the case given her bad reputation with regard to sexuality. The fact that Sarah is fit for being a mother by nature is proffered by Shumaker as a potential explanation. Shumaker also hypothesises that this "fitness" could have motivated the villagers' continual hiring of her. Sarah is indeed portrayed as a very fertile woman. As pointed out by Kleindl (160) she appears to become pregnant almost effortlessly – or even, as one could assume, without intention. Sarah does not emulate the Virgin in any case (Potts).

What is more, Potts contrasts Sarah's natural fertility with Mrs Kedrigan's consultation of experts that she expects to help her with becoming pregnant. Sarah does not have to be supported in this respect at all (Potts). Likewise, Shumaker argues that Sarah becomes a mother naturally. According to Peterson, Sarah does not complain about giving birth to children. She does not resent it at all. When it turns out that she is pregnant again the formerly exploitative people around her, however, strongly disapprove of her and let her down, displaying an inability to overcome their small-mindedness (30).

Right after Mrs Kedrigan has left for Dublin, there is a moment of intimacy, presumably a sexual one, between Mr Oliver Kedrigan and Sarah (“Sarah” 394):

[...] [W]hen he looked at her, he gave a laugh. ‘Did you rub sheep-raddle into your cheeks?’ he asked, and he laughed again—a loud happy laugh that could give no offence. And Sarah took none. But her cheeks went redder, and she angrily swiped a bare arm across her face as if to stem the flux of the healthy blood in her face. Oliver laughed for the third time. (“Sarah” 394)

This description of Sarah tells the reader that Mr Kedrigan is most likely to find Sarah attractive. Potts stresses that both of them are looking at each other. This detail can be deemed meaningful as it reveals power issues or more precisely the “[...] power over [Mr. Kedrigan] [...]” as identified by Potts: the critic observes that Mrs Kedrigan is powerful in terms of legitimacy (“Sarah” 393) as she is his wife. Sarah, however, “[...] has natural – sexual -- [sic!] power over him and other men” (Potts). Peterson describes Sarah – in sharp contrast to Mrs Kedrigan – as being naturally good (30). To Mr Kedrigan, as the passage indicates, Sarah is a woman he can laugh with. It is obvious that he enjoys her company. The colour of Sarah’s face is in striking contrast to his wife’s and suggests physical health. “[...] [T]he flux of [...] healthy blood [...]” is, as one could maintain, reminiscent of fertility.

3.2.1.3.2. Mrs Kathleen Kedrigan

In opposition to Sarah, Mrs Kedrigan has “pale eyes” (“Sarah” 400) and a “pale papery face” (393). The state of being pregnant is brought into connection with being ill by the maternity hospital she has to go to (Potts). The two women seem to represent opposites. Peterson, however, draws the reader’s attention to the way these two characters are related to each other. The critic considers Sarah and Mrs Kedrigan as Lavin’s creation of “psychological doubles” (30) achieved by thoroughly manipulating major images and important parts of the short story: Mrs Kedrigan as well as Sarah carries Mr Kedrigan’s baby respectively. “[...] [T]he emotional extremes of womanhood” (30) are symbolised by the two female characters. Mrs Kedrigan’s personality is, as Peterson continues to explain, marked by the highest level of conventionality and weakness in comparison with the other characters. What is more, she suffers from anxiety. Still, she is held in respect as a spouse in public. Sarah, on

the contrary, can be seen as “the natural lover” (30) regardless of her environment’s condemnation. While Mrs Kedrigan is self-righteous and becomes unnaturally empowered by what her environment thinks of her, Sarah strives for warmth and intimacy in anything she does (30).

The symbol of the red sheep-raddle links the lives of the two women all the more. Towards the end of the story Mrs Kedrigan is asked to give “[...] the tin of raddle” (“Sarah” 399) to her husband. When she tells him what has happened to Sarah and her baby, he gets very impatient with his wife and demands the sheep-raddle imperiously (400). Peterson argues that the sheep-raddle becomes a symbol of death. Formerly, it used to symbolise the love Sarah promised to Mr Kedrigan – she passed the identical tin of sheep-raddle to him. As a symbol of dying it is, according to the critic, reminiscent of his unwillingness and inability to act responsibly – a flight that appears in an ironic and very unpleasant light. At the same time the sheep raddle generates awareness of Mrs Kedrigan’s defeat against Sarah - the defeat of the alleged morally good against the morally bad. To Peterson “[...] the triumph of the unnatural over the natural, the perversely conventional over the independent-minded” (30) is symbolised by Sarah’s loss of life (30).

In addition to Peterson’s linking of the sheep raddle with death, one might also read it as a symbol of fertility. When Mr Kedrigan hears of Sarah’s death who has been carrying his baby and whom he probably remembered as having cheeks red as sheep-raddle in the sexually charged moment they shared – Shumaker speaks of his “[...] kindl[ing] [of] Sarah’s animal attraction to him by complimenting her red cheeks [...]” – it is possible that he keeps asking for the raddle to calm himself down, as he anticipates that it is not very likely that Mrs Kedrigan will bear him a healthy child herself ever. In fact, the way Mrs Kedrigan’s inability to bear children and her infertility are being socially constructed is vital to be discussed in this context. One of the older women who have tried to warn her of Sarah, views Mrs Kedrigan as a “bleached out bloodless thing” (“Sarah” 393), wondering how she even got married to a man like Oliver Kedrigan (393). Although the use of the word “bloodless” could be interpreted as a simple emphasis on her very pale state, Lavin could also hint at Mrs Kedrigan’s menopause and thus to her infertility. The reader, however, gets to know

that her baby is only “long-delayed” (396). Still, “bloodless” could be interpreted as an allusion to her inability to bear healthy children. The older woman deliberately uses this adjective to downgrade her. If Mrs Kedrigan did not attain motherhood, she would no longer live up to traditional concepts of Irish female identity construction and would thus be no longer socially accepted. The same woman continues to rumour that Mrs Kedrigan will never “[...] ever have a child, no matter how many doctors she might go to—in Dublin or elsewhere” (394).

When both Mrs Kedrigan and Sarah are pregnant, the latter is still able to attend Mass, whereas Mrs Kedrigan – “looking bad” (397) – is visited by the priest (396). The following description also makes clear that Mrs Kedrigan must be sexually less appealing to Oliver than Sarah:

By day she crept from chair to chair around the kitchen, and only went out at night for a bit of a walk up and down their own lane. She was self-conscious about her condition and her nerves were frayed. Oliver used to have to sit up half the night with her and hold her moist hands in his until she fell asleep, but all the same she woke often and was frightened and peevish and, in bursts of hysteria, she called him a cruel brute. (“Sarah” 397)

Her restlessness, sleeplessness, fear, irritability, hysteria, and paranoia as described in this paragraph indicate Mrs Kedrigan’s bad physical and mental condition in sharp contrast to Sarah’s. This condition, it could be argued, is representative of her low sex appeal and her infertility. The reader understands that motherhood is not likely to be attained by her. Shumaker also argues that the diseases Mrs Kedrigan suffers from while being pregnant are the reason for her reliance on Mr Kedrigan. Dependence on men, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, strongly hints at notions of traditional female identity construction in terms of supporting patriarchy. In contrast to Mrs Kedrigan, Sarah, as Shumaker further elaborates, continues her arduous work while being pregnant and conducts it independently.

3.2.1.4. Endurance/Support of Patriarchy

Up to the point that Sarah has to answer questions concerning a letter she is accused of having written, she endures her brothers’ repression. Till the very end of the story the male characters occupy a superior position though. Patriarchy is not at

stake yet. Sarah does not rebel against the rumours that circulate. She does not mind that her life is limited to attending Mass, working hard in the household and being a mother. She endures her harsh, unloving brothers and accepts that the fathers of her children do not take any responsibility for them. Apparently, the male characters of the short story contribute enormously to keeping the society a patriarchal one. In the end of the story the reader must learn that “[...] unnatural patriarchy triumphs over the natural mother” (Shumaker). By this the critic means that Sarah – despite her self-reliance – as well as her baby meets its death as soon as Sarah is no longer protected by her brothers and Mr Kedrigan.

The hierarchical status of the family is interesting to consider in this context. The elder brother Pat owns authority and holds the leadership role. He can be identified as the father figure. He is the dominant figure in the family who can decide over his sister’s destiny. Pat’s younger brother Joseph has to take his orders, but he is still superior to Sarah. Pat acts violently against his brother and his sister. When he notices that Sarah is pregnant “[h]e poke[s] Joseph [...] in the ribs with the handle of his knife” (“Sarah” 395) and orders him to become aware of this fact as well (395). The violence Sarah, however, faces is by far greater in extent, as will be discussed later on.

That Sarah lives in a misogynist society becomes also evident in her local community’s mistrust in women. Sarah’s denial of having written the letter is not only ignored but literally silenced – by her death. When trying to justify the letter’s content to his wife, all Oliver has to do is to maintain that “[...] it was an unjust accusation” (“Sarah” 397). The potential reasons underlying Mrs Kedrigan’s refusal to accept her husband’s guiltiness as well as the villagers’ conviction of Sarah’s guilt will be discussed in the following. According to Potts, Sarah does not comply with “[...] the patriarchal double standard for women’s sexuality” due to her lacking of shame – she is not regretful about becoming pregnant again and again out of wedlock – and also due to her resistance to change the way she behaves sexually subsequently. It is, as Potts explains to the reader, for these reasons that Sarah has to claim sole responsibility for her demise in the villagers’ view. Strikingly, males are seen as “[...] only helpless victims to her wiles” (Potts).

In opposition to Sarah, the internalisation of “[...] the patriarchal double standard for women [...]” (Potts) is obvious in Mrs Kedrigan’s character: according to the logic that governs Mrs Kedrigan’s mindset, as Potts maintains, her husband is not the one to be penalised. Mrs. Kedrigan rather advocates for Sarah’s punishment for the adulterous and sinful incident (Potts). Her view is apparently limited to Sarah’s part. As pointed out by Shumaker, Mrs Kedrigan is aware that the letter states the truth but does not call Mr Kedrigan to account. Shumaker wants the reader to bear in mind that if Mrs Kedrigan really trusted her husband claiming that he has not cheated on her, she would not have bothered to react to the letter. Due to the fact that Mrs Kedrigan is mentally and bodily dependent on her husband, however, she cannot confront him with this issue since a separation would not be possible anyway, as the critic continues to explain. Mrs Kedrigan is expecting their child and cannot survive if he did not provide money. To inform her husband about what happened to Sarah and her newborn baby happily and gleefully is the only way Mrs Kedrigan finds to take revenge on him. Shumaker describes Mrs Kedrigan’s character best by stating that she is “a victim of patriarchal restrictions”.

Strikingly, it is not only men that foster notions of patriarchy but also women themselves. The other women talk badly behind Sarah’s back and construct her as inferior. Two older women even consider themselves responsible to warn Mrs Kedrigan who plans to entrust her housekeeping to Sarah in her absence (“Sarah” 392). According to O’Byrne, these two women – as the older female characters of “Sarah” as well as “A Scandalous Woman” in general - can be regarded as contributors to “[...] upholding the moral social order” (11).

3.2.2. Sarah’s Transgression

3.2.2.1. Patriarchy Undermined

When Pat notices that Sarah is pregnant he commands his brother to take notice of this fact, too. His utterance is not paid any attention to by Sarah (“Sarah” 395). However, one can note a minor difference in her reaction: she moves her head

suddenly upwards in order to demonstrate her annoyance. The greediness and hurry that she displays when having dinner and her leaving outside irritate her brothers (395). That this behaviour is not tolerated becomes clear in Pat's statement that "[...] something will have to be done about her this time" (395) – a statement that foreshadows Sarah's severe punishment.

After making Sarah sit down violently, Pat demands to know if she is the writer of the letter sent to Mr Kedrigan (397-98). Sarah breaks her silence for the first time. She pays resistance in answering him cheekily, "What business is it of yours?" (398). In another attempt to stand up she is being pushed down by her brother once more and asked the same question again. She demands from him to hand her the letter, grabs it, asks him rhetorically "[w]hat business [...] it [is] of [his] [...]" and even assaults her brother as a "thief" (398). Shumaker points her reader's attention to the fact that Sarah's following statement makes Pat very angry. When explicitly stating that "[...] [i]t's no business of [his]" (398) in the course of giving him a reply to his question if the letter states the truth, her brother loses his temper, threatening Sarah with the words, "I'll show you whose business it is!" (398). Indeed, he puts his words into action, as will be discussed later on in terms of Sarah's punishment.

It is, as Shumaker observes, not so much the fact that Sarah has had sex outside of wedlock that ultimately upsets Pat. It is rather Sarah's paying resistance to his authoritative position that he finds disturbing to a much greater extent (Shumaker). Although she does not succeed in having her business remain hers, one could suggest that her insubordination is yet a form of putting patriarchy into question. D'hoker argues that Lavin's short stories rarely attack patriarchy (420). This, however, can hardly be claimed with regard to the short story "Sarah": in fact, Potts is convinced that "Sarah" can be understood "[...] as a stinging indictment of Irish patriarchy [...]". Sarah, as could be maintained, can be seen as challenging the patriarchal structures that her life is embedded in. In a community marked by patriarchy, Sarah, as Potts continues to explain, becomes a symbol of "[...] female agency and empowerment [...]".

3.2.2.2. Incongruity: Extramarital Affairs and Motherhood

Sarah does not only defy patriarchal conventions with regard to female passivity but also with regard to the Virgin myth. As pointed out by Briggs, it is, in particular, the “strong moral line on sex outside of marriage” (12, qtd. in Fulmer 101), prevalent in Ireland during the middle of the twentieth century, that is challenged by Lavin in short stories such as “Sarah”. Sarah can clearly be seen to subvert traditional concepts of femininity as regards her promiscuity. Still, one could insist that she lives up to the ideal of motherhood. Extramarital affairs and motherhood, however, are depicted as constituting a highly subversive combination, as will be illustrated in the following.

Although motherhood is seen as a pivotal aim for any woman who is not a nun in the short story under consideration, Sarah cannot live up to traditional concepts of Irish female identities. She undermines the sanctity of motherhood through her illegitimate children: “[...] there was a certain fortuity about her choice of fathers for the three strapping sons she’d born — all three outside wedlock (“Sarah” 392). Marina Warner’s statement makes clear why a woman like Sarah would be excluded and avoided by the society she is living in. According to the critic, “[t]here is no place in the conceptual architecture of Christian society for a single woman who is neither a virgin nor a whore” (235). Since Sarah is equally considered a mother and a woman who is said to have sex with a lot of men, she does not fit the scope of identities Irish women could traditionally embody. Sarah’s piety, as Shumaker argues, is of no benefit to her from the priest’s standpoint since Sarah does not live up to “the repentant Magdalen role” but repeatedly conceives illegitimate babies. The priest views Sarah, as Shumaker aptly remarks, “[...] an embarrassment--a rebel against the notions of proper womanhood that the Madonna myth promotes”.

Earlier on, Sarah apparently used to have sex with men who were not in a relationship with any other woman (Shumaker). By comparison, her engagement in adulterous sex is viewed as being immoral and unacceptable to a far greater extent by her brother Pat (Shumaker). Likewise, O’Byrne argues that by revealing that Sarah has had sex with a married man she challenges the importance of the family. This can be viewed a particularly severe violation against Irish societal norms since

the family (as has also been discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis) is regarded society's fundamental component as stipulated in the Constitution of 1937 (3). Risking a man's marriage by engaging in an extramarital affair and carrying the fruit of sin in her womb, as one learns, means Sarah's death eventually. The conjunction of an extramarital affair and motherhood is depicted as the ultimate challenge to traditional notions of Irish femininity.

3.2.2.3. Sarah in the Role of the Alleged Seductress

Bowen reads the short story as "[...] a tale of a temptress [...]" (27). Kleindl, however, draws her reader's attention to the ambiguity inherent in this short story: the critic questions whether Sarah can really be regarded a "temptress" (152). Making Sarah appear in a suspicious light, as Bowen explains, is already enough to get her penalised by her society that aims to maintain its moral norms with regard to sexuality. In this way, Mrs Kedrigan is able to inflict punishment on her: it is not even necessary for Mrs Kedrigan to act against Sarah in an overtly vengeful way in order to make her suffer (27).

Sarah is already seen in the role of the seductress prior to the adulterous incident: "[s]he has a queer way of looking at a man. I wouldn't like to have her give my man one of those looks" ("Sarah" 393). This warning that Mrs Kedrigan gets from a woman is representative of how the female characters in the story conceive Sarah: she is a threat. As such there is no need for them to protect her. "Queer", as the reader learns, is equalled with being sexually provocative. Sarah's identity is seen as odd and strange because it does not fit the traditional scope in terms of sexuality. Sarah is even seen to be "queer" to an extent to which, as one of the women remarks, she "[...] wouldn't trust the greatest saint ever walked with Sarah Murray" (393). Sarah's "[...] queer way of looking at a man [...]" can be seen in the following: "Sarah stared after him [Mr. Kedrigan], keeping her eyes on him until the cart was like a toy cart in the distance, with a toy horse under it, and Oliver himself a toy farmer made out of painted wood" (394). This dreamlike-state Sarah seems to be in could be a metaphor for her sexual attraction to the farmer or at least an interest for him and his work. To Kleindl the staring after Mr Kedrigan also suggests that Sarah might be

attracted to him. Whether Sarah, however, is really the one to set in motion any sexual intercourse, as Kleindl further argues, remains unclear (155). What becomes perfectly clear, however, is that the reputation as sexual seductress makes her one: “[...] women with grown sons, and women not long married, took care not to hire her” (“Sarah” 392). The reader also learns that it is only women who can be in the role of seducing someone sexually. If moral boundaries concerning sexuality are being crossed, the woman is always seen to be guilty.

3.2.2.4. The Transgressiveness of Writing

As long as there are only rumours concerning Sarah’s transgression, it seems to be tolerable, as the reader learns right from the short story’s beginning: “Sarah had a bit of a bad name. That was the worst her neighbours would say of her [...]” (“Sarah” 392). Sarah’s brother Pat strongly associates gossip with womanhood: when Joseph asks him whether he knows who made Sarah pregnant, he answers him sharply that he does not have much clue and that he is not “[...] going to stay here all evening gossiping like a woman [...]” (396). Talk or stories about people’s private lives, as one could suggest, are depicted as harmful, but ultimately it is “[...] the written word [that] is demonstrably dangerous” (O’Byrne 11): as O’Byrne makes the reader aware, Sarah’s and her baby’s tragic destiny is sealed by the letter she has written (11). Kleindl, however, maintains that Sarah’s authorship of the letter merely rests upon the other characters’ speculation (159).

Unlike Kleindl, one could hold that Sarah has written the letter in order to effect change in her life. According to Shumaker, the text suggests that Sarah behaves differently than usual: during her current pregnancy she wants the father to know of his child. This time she does not want to be the only one in charge of the baby as it has always been the case. She also seems to be tired of making the pretence of virginal conception (Shumaker). Strikingly, as O’Byrne points out, Sarah, although giving birth to illegitimate children, is not seen as a threat to her society’s dominant system of rules as long as she keeps the silence surrounding paternity (3). This time, however, the reader learns that Sarah breaks this silence: ironically, Mr Kedrigan checks whether “[...] there [is] a letter from the Maternity Hospital in Dublin, where

she [his wife] ha[s] engaged a bed for the following month" ("Sarah" 397) but receives one claiming that he has made Sarah pregnant. After having informed his wife, he wants the letter to be destroyed (397). Apparently, as could be maintained, he is afraid of the consequences of the letter or - as O'Byrne puts it - "the written word" (11). Shumaker assumes that Mrs Kedrigan is jealous of Sarah. One could argue that she cannot accept that her husband had sex with another woman. She, as one could assume, is jealous because she is not able to give birth to her husband's child herself. This could have motivated her to outwit her husband, making him believe that she is burning the letter but in fact handing it to Pat later on. Peterson views Mrs Kedrigan as the trigger for Sarah's expulsion by her brothers (30). According to Shumaker, it is Sarah's natural destiny to become a mother which becomes evident from the comparison with Mrs Kedrigan: Mrs Kedrigan's sickness when being pregnant is represented as a striking contrast to pregnant Sarah's health (Shumaker). It could be argued that Mrs Kedrigan is much aware that the letter seals Sarah's fate eventually, seeking revenge for her own miserable health and inability to bear a child. It turns out that language expressed in writing is far more dangerous than talk. Not even Sarah's changing body is seen to be that treacherous.

Strikingly, "[...] her brothers kept silent tongues in their heads about the child she was carrying" ("Sarah" 396) before the arrival of the letter. Sarah's revealing of the father's name, as O'Byrne points out, poses a threat to the current state of affairs. The fact that Mr Kedrigan is another woman's husband appears to be a decisive factor for her expulsion from home (2). As summarised by O'Byrne, it is "[...] the *naming* [critic's emphasis] of a married man as the father" (3) rather than the illegitimate conception per se that really defines Sarah transgressiveness. Even though there remains doubt whether Sarah has had sex with Mr Kedrigan - in fact, her brothers do not even "[...] know the father of this [...] [child] any more than the others [...]" ("Sarah" 396) - and whether Sarah has really written the letter or not, the validity of "the written word" (O'Byrne 11), as one could argue, is not questioned.

What is more, O'Byrne assumes that "[...] writing about women's sexual lives [...]" is viewed "[...] a transgressive act in itself" (11) by women writers like Lavin and O'Brien regardless of the comparatively wide recognition and success they have gained. The

danger of language expressed in writing is present in both short stories (11). As summarised by O'Byrne, Sarah and her baby have to die due to the letter Sarah has written. In "A Scandalous Woman", as the critic draws the reader's attention to, it is Jack's note intended for Eily in order to arrange to go out with her for the first time ("A Scandalous Woman" 18) that could have meant their untimely disclosure since it could have also been found by others (O'Byrne 11).

3.2.2.5. Sarah's Punishment

3.2.2.5.1. Half-Acknowledgement of Sarah's Transgression

According to Fulmer, "Sarah" is one of Lavin's stories that sheds light on "[...] negative effects of sexual repression [...]" (100). As Shumaker aptly remarks, Pat and Joseph "[...] exceed her [Sarah's] sin of lust with one of violence". However, men's "sin of lust", as has already been insinuated, is not countered with violence. They are, as one can infer from Pott's observations, not seen as being guilty when engaging in sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Joseph considers men who made their sister pregnant "blackguards" ("Sarah" 395). As pointed out by O'Byrne, this makes Sarah appear in an innocent light (2). Still, he, not to mention Pat, does not even think about calling those men to account. Likewise, the two older women that visit Mrs Kedrigan to give her a warning of Sarah insist that "[i]t's not right to trust any man too far" ("Sarah" 393) but would never consider a man to be responsible eventually. As pointed out by Potts, the warning indicates that men are viewed as behaving in a very honest way with regard to sexuality. In case of a sexually transgressive incident women are – since the maintaining of goodness and morality is obligatory for them – portrayed as the ones to trick men, seducing them to commit sins and thus causing men's ruin (Potts). It is only Sarah that is being severely punished for her transgression. Shumaker argues that Mrs Kedrigan makes herself believe that it is Sarah who is "the sole culprit", although she is aware that her husband has cheated on her. This, as the critic assumes, helps the wife not to argue with Mr Kedrigan without whom she could not survive.

Unlike Donohue who holds that Sarah's punishment is due to her inability to love – as is, according to the critic, the case with all of this short story's other characters – rather than her transgressive behaviour in terms of sexuality (281), it is, as Auerbach maintains, “a woman's fall” (30) that is followed by her demise in the Victorian tradition. Speaking of Lavin's stories in general, Bowen remarks that “[t]he rules are [indeed depicted as being] Victorian, mean, and all-pervasive” (25). He also explains to the reader that the societies depicted by Lavin are merciless towards violators of the rules (25). Auerbach reveals the nature of “the fallen woman” in the Victorian tradition: she can be viewed “[...] a pitiable monster, created by the neurosis of a culture that feared female sexuality and aggression and so enshrined a respectably sadistic cautionary tale punishing them both” (31). One could suggest that the society Sarah is living in is afraid because Sarah is living her sexual desires. It is thus willing to make Sarah suffer with great pleasure. The following aims at depicting her environment's sadism when penalising Sarah for her fall: after she has called Pat's authority into question in the course of the siblings' argument over the letter, he punishes her insubordination by getting rid of some of Sarah's garments and other belongings. They end up in front of their home in the rain before Sarah's very eyes (398), foreshadowing her immediate future. Joseph, too, acts violently against his sister as he “[...] suddenly put[s] out a foot and trip[s] her” (“Sarah” 399). This, however, is by far not the end of the humiliation Sarah is experiencing:

When Sarah got to her feet Pat was standing at the door throwing her things out one by one, but he kept the green box till last and when he threw it out he fired it with all his strength as far as it would go as if trying to reach the dunghill at the other end of the yard. At first Sarah made as if to run out to get the things back. Then she stopped and started to pull on her coat, but her brother caught her by the hair, at the same time pulling the coat off her. Then, by the hair he dragged her across the kitchen and pushed her out into the rain, where she slipped and fell again on the wet slab stone of the doorway. Quickly then he shut out the sight of her from his eyes by banging the door closed. (“Sarah” 399)

Shortly before this happens the reader learns that the “[...] little green velvet box stuck all over with pearly shells” (“Sarah” 398) must be very precious to Sarah (398). Purposely, it could be claimed, her brother chooses this item to be hurled in the direction of the dunghill in order to demonstrate his power over her. Potts reads the box's throwing out as a symbol of the violation Pat makes Sarah suffer from: “[...] its [the box's] beauty, strong association with Sarah, with nature, and with female

sexuality [...]” is clearly evident to the critic. As will be also demonstrated with regard to O’Brien’s female protagonist Eily, Sarah is offered as a sacrifice in Lavin’s short story (Shumaker). Potts even argues that “[h]owever much readers may long to read the story as a challenge to the victim subject position, however much they may wish to grant Sarah agency, she is nonetheless ultimately a victim”.

To understand the sacrificing of Sarah solely in terms of erasing or penalising her, however, would be to misunderstand Lavin’s message, as could be concluded from Auerbach’s observations regarding the fallen woman in Victorian literary texts and art she investigated. Unlike Peterson who reads “Sarah’s death [...] [as] a triumph for the community [...]” (30), Auerbach hypothesises that the “fallen woman” (35) does not just meet her death eventually for the purpose of her obliteration or punishment but rather for her empowerment: “[...] death”, as the critic assumes, “rather than marriage is the one implacable human change, the only honourable symbol of her fall’s transforming power. [...] [I]ts ritual appearance alone does her justice“ (35). Still referring to the fallen woman in the Victorian tradition, Auerbach points out that it is her penalisation’s portrayals in which her victory’s visions are concealed (50). In “Sarah”, the protagonist’s challenging of sexual norms, as one could argue, can indeed be understood as resulting in her gaining of “transforming power” that is being “half-acknowledged” (Auerbach 52) by her very punishment: death.

3.2.2.5.2. Lavin’s Critique of Society

The description of Sarah’s brothers’ treatment of their sister is also representative of society’s harsh, brutal, and inhuman treatment of the individual as soon as boundaries regarding gender and sexuality are being crossed. This could be understood as Mary Lavin’s critique of society that punishes any transgressive sexual behaviour. Kleindl in fact reads “Sarah” as a “[...] biting social critique of female morality and conformity” (161). The critic correctly links Sarah’s so-called immorality to her unconventionality. Kleindl suggests that “[...] the effects of a rigid social system upon the lives of women, especially those like Kathleen who distort and pervert its rules as a means to exert control and gain esteem, and the effects on those like Sarah who are punished as a result” (161) are emphasised in “Sarah”.

Strikingly, Sarah's brutal treatment by her community is, as one could argue, very authentically portrayed. The question arises as to whether "Sarah" could be understood as a critique of society in autobiographical terms. Bowen's work on Lavin sheds light on how Lavin achieves such great authenticity and also demonstrates that her coping with "[f]reedom, or the lack of it [...]" (23) is by far not limited to the short story "Sarah":

Given Mary Lavin's lifelong concern with practicalities, money problems, responsibilities, and the effects of death, her vision of reality is harsh and closely circumscribed by an acute awareness of social class, and society's sanctions and rules. This is more than merely the theme of some of her stories; it is the *donnée* of her plots as well as the context of motive and constraint which condition the behavior of most of her characters. In the tightly controlled, sometimes fatalistic sphere in which her characters live, many of them succumb to a life of quiet frustration or desperation, while others try to escape, to rationalize, to hide, or to seek freedom through love, nature, insanity, or death. (23)

According to Bowen, Lavin's stories are strongly influenced by what she and people she knew have experienced which is often mirrored in what her figures experience in her fiction (44). Thus it could be assumed that Lavin seeks to utter her critique of the society she is living in through Sarah. As Bowen continues to explain, it is, in part, the manner she writes to her readers that makes her stories appear to be true and real: it is not only marked by clarity and lucidity but also by utility and unobtrusiveness in the majority of cases (44). Interestingly, A. A. Kelly argues that Lavin could be seen as rebelling silently and covertly on purpose (169). Lavin does take in a critical position but hides it behind ironic statements. This explains why the Censorship Board did not impose a ban on her oeuvre ever in sharp contrast to its banning of numerous texts written by other influential authors in Ireland at the time (181, footnote 4 of chapter 3). A. A. Kelly testifies that the author can "[...] be read for her social revelation of a particular milieu in Ireland [...]" (177).

Lavin also exposes the hypocrisy of the society her main female protagonist lives in that seeks to keep up appearances with regard to traditional Irish female identities. As Shumaker draws the reader's attention to, Sarah becomes a "murder victim" due to her "public shame". Strikingly, the critic views the short story as "[...] one of Lavin's

most hard-hitting pieces of social criticism". Although society seems to have an awareness of the circumstances Sarah is in, "[s]he's unfortunate, that's all,' this matron used to say. 'How could she know any better—living with two rough brothers? And don't forget she had no father herself!'" ("Sarah" 392), Sarah is confronted with "[...] an abashed congregation at Mass on Sundays [...]" (396). For the sake of keeping up appearances, Mrs Kedrigan also thinks that she has to "[...] let everyone see she could trust him [her husband]" (393). Likewise, Pat is much concerned about his good name (Shumaker; see also Kleindl 157): "[...] [c]arrying on with a married man! No one is going to say I put up with that kind of thing. I didn't mind the other times when it was probably old Molloy or his like that would have been prepared to pay for his mistakes if the need arose, but I wasn't going to stand for a thing like this" ("Sarah" 399).

According to Shumaker, both Sarah's and Eily's relatives – Eily being the female protagonist of O'Brien's story – act very cruelly in order to maintain the public impression of being decent and reputable. Donohue views Lavin "[...] a moralist speaking out against denial, conformity and hypocrisy, and against using the institutions of the church or marriage as a crutch" (281). In fact, the writing of Lavin at its initial stage can be said to be represented by "Sarah" to the largest extent according to the critic (281). By presenting characters that seek to keep up appearances – not even recoiling from sacrificing a woman's and her baby's life – for the sake of nurturing traditional notions of ideal femininity, Lavin demonstrates how brutal, yet hypocritical, the society is in which Sarah Murray was unluckily born into as a woman.

3.3. Edna O'Brien's "A Scandalous Woman"

3.3.1. The Disturbing Feminine

3.3.1.1. Punishing her Female Protagonists: O'Brien's Critique of Society

Just as Mary Lavin wrote about Sarah's punishment in her short story "Sarah" to express her critique of Irish society, Edna O'Brien articulates her resentment against societal norms in the penalising and disciplining of Eily in her short story "A Scandalous Woman". Interestingly, Pelan (2006b) observes that "[...] the repressed individual at the heart of the narrative is female" (35) in most books and stories written by O'Brien. As the critic continues to explain, centring on women and/or being narrated by a woman is characteristic of O'Brien's short stories and novels in general (35). One might suggest that "A Scandalous Woman" is typical of O'Brien's writing in this respect: through the eyes of a female first-person narrator, whose name is not mentioned, the reader learns that the short story's protagonist, Eily, gets punished for transgressing hegemonic Irish norms of behaviour: "[s]he had joined that small sodality of scandalous women who had conceived children without securing fathers and who were damned in body and soul" ("A Scandalous Woman" 32-33). Eily clearly challenges traditional Irish female identities with regard to sexuality.

At the same time she has skills considered desirable for women. She is endowed with talents: "[s]he [Eily] was wonderful at knitting and could copy any stitch just from seeing it in a magazine or in a knitting pattern" ("A Scandalous Woman" 13). This clearly hints at qualities considered valuable for work in the domestic sphere (O'Byrne 9). As observed by O'Byrne, Eily's domestic skills are reminiscent of Sarah's: giving their environment the impression of being devoted to Catholicism and working diligently in the domestic sphere is depicted as being vital for women in Ireland in the short story "Sarah" as well as in "A Scandalous Woman" (9). In fact, Eily is so occupied with her hobby that "a bunch of pins in her mouth" ("A Scandalous Woman" 12) for dress alterations has become her trademark in the days preceding the dress dance (12). What is more, Eily works hard: "[s]he would work like a horse to

get to the main road before dark to see the passers-by. She was swift as a colt. My father never stopped praising this quality in her [...]" (12).

Regardless of embodying qualities considered desirable for women, she gets punished severely for having dated secretly a boy called Jack, who is a Protestant bank clerk ("A Scandalous Woman" 17). She has crossed traditional boundaries, as she has had sex before marriage with him and has got pregnant out of wedlock. She is regarded as a fallen woman, a view that serves the people around her as a justification for penalising her heavily. Similarly, Shumaker draws a link between applying the label "scandalous" to both Eily and Sarah and their insubordinate behaviour as regards their families as well as their unchastity. The critic even takes this thought one step further and argues that O'Brien's – like Lavin's – message is difficult to misinterpret: scandalous women receive harsh punishment by their families in Ireland. O'Brien's punishment of Eily – like Lavin's punishment of Sarah - can thus, one might argue, be understood as a social critique the author seeks to convey, as will also be elaborated on in the following. As pointed out in "O'Brien, Edna", dealing with Irish women whose way in which they were taught how to behave while growing up was marked by repression and who were hindered in achieving their dreams and desires by society is characteristic of the major part of O'Brien's work in general (816). "A Scandalous Woman" can certainly be regarded as typical in this respect.

Since Eily does not live up to traditional concepts of femininity as regards sexuality, she loses freedom and personal happiness:

I knew we had no hope. Eily! Her most precious thing was gone, her jewel. The inside of one was like a little watch and once the jewel or jewels were gone the outside was nothing but a sham. I saw her die in the cold lime kiln and then again in a sick room, and then stretched out on an operating table the very way that I used to be.
("A Scandalous Woman" 32)

O'Brien's metaphorical use of language is interesting to consider. The missing "jewel" is used metaphorically for Eily's missing virginity (Lynch 47). "[T]he outside" refers to the body that is – without a soul – "nothing but a sham". Interestingly, Haule notes that it is Eily's pregnancy that leads to her reduction to the empty shell – a state very much reminiscent of the surgery game that took place when she was a child (219).

This is the first time that Eily's inner dying – a current theme that will be discussed at a later point – is addressed directly.

According to the logic that governs the society Eily is living in, Eily's body must be hidden, as she has destabilised the traditional image of the pure and chaste virgin.

[...] [s]o concealed was she, with a mantilla over her face that shewas [sic!] not even able to make a lip sign to me. Never did she look so beautiful as those subsequent Sundays in chapel, her hair and her face veiled, her eyes like smoking tragedies peering through.
("A Scandalous Woman" 33)

Her punishment entails being kept like a prisoner as "[...] she was kept under lock and key, and allowed out only to Mass [...]" ("A Scandalous Woman" 33). In fact, Shumaker observes that she is treated like a "criminal". It is vital to explore the reason for this denotation. "[...] [I]n her myth, Mary Magdalene sins", as Marina Warner clarifies, "because she is not chaste, and not for any other reason that might be considered more grave" (235). From this Shumaker concludes that Eily would have been more likely to receive her relatives' forgiveness had she, for example, been a thief. Sins connected to the transgression of sexual norms, however, are seen as women's true crime (Marina Warner 235 and Shumaker).

On the next day Eily is interrogated at the narrator's house. Like in a police questioning, she has to answer lots of questions in detail concerning her relationship with Jack ("A Scandalous Woman" 35). In the course of this cross-examination Eily's father threatens to take her to an insane asylum. Her mother strongly disapproves of the fact that she has not done the milking in two weeks (35). The narrator points the reader's attention to the injustices underlying their accusations. Their cruelty becomes evident in the description of Eily's imprisonment:

How could she have milked since she was locked in the room off the kitchen, where they stowed the oats and which was teeming with mice. I knew for a fact that her meals – a hunk of bread and a mug of weak tea – were handed into her, twice a day, and that she had nothing else to do only cry, and think, and sit herself upon the oats and run her fingers through it, and probably have to keep making noises to frighten off the mice. (35)

The idea of Eily's imprisonment is reinforced by her plea "[...] not to split on her" (36). It is important to note that Eily is not only in a prison-like state metaphorically speaking for subverting traditional concepts of Irish female identity. Her father's wish

"[...] to put a halter round her [...]" (36) very much stresses this notion on a literal level. Eily is seen in need of being led by someone else like a horse. Since she has crossed the boundaries of moral conduct, her father, if not restrained by his wife, would have treated her like an animal. Haule also shares this impression: he compares Eily's treatment to the one of "a wild and dangerous beast" (218) after the confirmation of her social collapse. Likewise, Pelan (2006b) compares Eily to "[...] a wilful animal which needs to be watched at all times [...]" (16) once she is considered scandalous. Although the critic makes the reader aware that O'Brien also uses images connected to animals in the part of the story preceding the scandalous incident – such as in the comparison of Eily to a fast horse in "[s]he would work like a horse to get to the main road before dark to see the passers-by. She was swift as a colt" ("A Scandalous Woman" 12) – she illustrates that it is only subsequent to the discovery of the scandalous incident that Eily is seen to feature those character traits of animals perceived as undesirable (16).

Nevertheless, Eily is strong enough to pay resistance to the adults. At the cross-examination she denies that she has done anything. She is even said to be "defiant" ("A Scandalous Woman" 35). This, one could argue, clearly shows her subversive attitude to patriarchy. When the narrator's mother asks her detailed questions, she claims that there has not been a single meeting with Jack. She gets beaten by her father for her "savagery", as she has replied to the narrator's mother, "What do you take me for, Mrs Brady, a hussy?" (35). Even the missionary pays a visit to Eily that day (36). This shows the widespread social attention that is paid to Eily's rejection of traditional patterns of moral behaviour. Her protest turns into a silent yet resistant one. Eily remains very calm. In fact, she is "[...] silence itself" (37). This suggests, according to O'Byrne, that Eily no longer stays defiant, but becomes dumb (3). In the course of the subsequent action, this statement proves to be particularly true: she no longer smiles ("A Scandalous Woman" 37). What is more, "Eily ate [...] listlessly, as if she weren't there at all" (43). In fact, O'Byrne identifies "silence" (3 and 6) as one of Eily's ways of coping with the situation. In this way, the repression the female character is exposed to is challenged (6).

According to Shumaker, Eily is offered as a sacrifice. This appears totally plausible in the light of Eily getting punished severely for her transgression. Her character can be situated in the realm of “female martyrdom” (Shumaker) since Eily suffers very much because of her beliefs. As encapsulated by Shumaker, this martyrdom has roots in the myth of the Madonna: to embody a wife, a mother, or a “fallen woman”, as it is the case with “A Scandalous Woman”, is to embody an identity that fits into the scope of female martyrdom. As discussed in Chapter 1 - referring to Marina Warner - living up to the virgin model is not possible: the ideal of the Virgin Mary can thus be seen as making those women that seek to adhere to its principles appear inferior. Shumaker also refers to Marina Warner and maintains that O’Brien’s as well as Lavin’s main female characters in their short stories hate themselves in this respect. Since they cannot emulate the Madonna and feel strongly ashamed, they make sacrifices. In twentieth-century Ireland, as Shumaker indicates, mothers that are considered “fallen” women have to dedicate themselves to their children in order to improve the opinion society has of them. While the sacrificial nature of the narrator in “A Scandalous Woman” is clearly evident, one could disagree with Shumaker as regards Eily whom she considers a “[...] modern Magdalen, sacrific[ing] herself for her parents’ reputation [...]”. Schmitz (92) also points to Eily’s subordination to her society. Unlike Shumaker, however, he leaves the question open whether Eily is willing or forced to do so (92). It is not, one might maintain, that she offers herself as a sacrifice, but rather, she is offered as a sacrifice. She transgresses moral boundaries and is unlikely to repent. Society forces her to make sacrifices in the process of her victimisation.

To view Eily solely as a victim would thus be a rather reductive approach to her character. She can be read as challenging traditional concepts of Irish female identity in that she protests and thus places herself partly outside of victimhood, although she gets sacrificed in the end. This denouement is heavily criticised by O’Brien as will be discussed in the following. After the attempts of the people around Eily to brainwash her, she does no longer want to talk to anyone (“A Scandalous Woman” 39). Eily even “[...] bared her teeth like one of the dogs” (39) in response to any questions directed at her (39). What is more, she tries to set a dog at her friend, the narrator (39). Right after the wedding reception Eily also attempts to flee to the car (44-45):

she “[...] tried it more than once, just like an animal trying to get back to its lair” (45). Eily, however, cannot escape. From this, it can be concluded that she and the narrator live in a community that is indifferent to the feelings of its outcasts (Schmitz 91). All that matters to this community is to appear in a moral and decent light on the surface level (91). Likewise, Pelan (2006b) describes the way Eily’s community responds to her so-called scandalous behaviour as “[...] an almost knee-jerk reaction to restore respectability no matter what the cost to the individuals involved” (15).

Eily becomes strange. She starts to speak to herself. She loses bunches of hair (“A Scandalous Woman” 47). Her “[...] letters were disconnected and she asked about dead people or people she’d hardly known” (47). When Eily, her husband, and her three children visit four years later, Eily seems to have gone crazy. She suffers from paranoia. She thinks that everyone is watching her. She is even seeking after “some male spy” (47), hiding outside or under the beds in the house (47). Many years later, the narrator and her own son meet Eily again (49). She asks her if she is still able to recall what life was like when they were girls. Eily, however, reacts indifferently (51). The narrator is shocked: “[m]y first thought was that they must have drugged the feelings out of her, they must have given her strange brews and along with quelling her madness they had taken her spark away” (51). As pointed out by Haule, “they” refers to the opponent (219). This sentence of the short story, of course, can be read as O’Brien’s critique of a society that seeks not only to preserve, but to nurture traditional values to an unhealthy extent. The Irish nation’s disastrous critique, as Meyer argues, is set in motion by the short story’s final sentence (344): “[...] I thought that ours indeed was a land of shame, a land of murder and a land of strange sacrificial women” (“A Scandalous Woman” 52). To Huber, this statement and the whole short story as such depict “the archetypal female experience” as being linked with “the national character” (235, footnote 7 to page 178). In other words, the embodiment of a sacrificial nature is constructed as natural for any Irish woman. Haule reads the short story’s final sentence as a result of the conspiratorial cooperation of Church and family that has successfully lessened Eily to sticking to their moral code (218).

To Shumaker, it is obvious that O'Brien uses the motif of the living dead that is reminiscent of Joyce applying it in *Dubliners*. In this way, problems rooted in Irish society can be depicted in a dramatic way (Shumaker). As Shumaker continues to explain, anything that Eily thinks, remembers, or dreams must be murdered, must be erased, in order to find happiness in her role of a wife that will never receive love. According to Shumaker, the narrator may suffer from the same destiny Eily does. Shumaker finds this, for example, suggested in the encounter of the pregnant narrator "under not very happy circumstances" ("A Scandalous Woman" 48), accompanied by her mother, with Eily. Since the reader does not get to know whether the narrator is also offered as a sacrifice to do justice to the virgin ideal in Ireland, Shumaker reads the title "A Scandalous Woman" as an allusion to the destiny of a large number of Irish women – of many generations – having to behave submissively to their husbands and parents forever, because they have been rebellious and thus been considered scandalous. Similarly, Schmitz argues that the potential intolerance and inhumanity of rural Ireland's society in response to any transgression of its rigid moral code becomes evident to the reader from O'Brien's depiction of Eily's destiny (89).

By using the alliteration "land" three times and the climax "shame", "murder" and "strange sacrificial women" in the short story's last sentence, O'Brien illustrates the cruelty in punishing women for challenging traditional Irish values on a figurative level. The author encapsulates the absurdity of trying to push Irish women into narrow roles. At the same time O'Brien – like Lavin – seeks, as stated by Shumaker, to call into question the set of beliefs of Irish society permitting the classification of women as "scandalous" or "fallen". Schmitz emphasises that Eily cannot be labelled scandalous herself. It is rather "[...] die intolerante, restriktive und unmenschliche Welt des ländlichen Irland [...]" (92) ("the intolerant, restrictive, and inhumane world of rural Ireland"), as depicted by O'Brien, that can easily be revealed as scandalous by the reader.

3.3.1.2. Eily Against the Backdrop of Traditional Notions of Womanhood

It is worth taking a closer look at some of the female characters in the short story under consideration, as an examination of these will disclose Eily's challenging of traditional attitudes even better. Although female characters such as the teacher or Mrs Brady may be of minor importance in advancing the plot, they are quite relevant as regards the focus of this thesis. It is pivotal to consider that those women who never dare to challenge traditional concepts of Irish womanhood are looked down upon by the narrator. What will also become evident in the following is that the idea of the "disturbing feminine" that needs to be kept under control is not only fostered, as one could assume, by the short stories' male characters, but also by its female ones: although a young woman's transgression is sanctioned more severely by men than women, to monitor what females that are younger do is portrayed as a fixed component of being a woman – in both "A Scandalous Woman" and "Sarah" (O'Byrne 12-13).

3.3.1.2.1. Mrs Bolan

Mrs Bolan is accused of acting like a moral vigilante in the most sinister places ("A Scandalous Woman" 22). She watches out for couples having a premarital romantic relationship, pretending to search for chicken that have gone astray. No one, of course, believes this to be true for she does not possess any (22). She "[...] was known to tell tales to be calumnious [...]" (22). A female school teacher even has had to move suddenly and secretly at night, apparently due to Mrs Bolan's gossipy nature. When Eily desires to wear her dance dress that has proven to be sexually provocative, the narrator is worried that her friend might fall victim to Mrs Bolan's gossip, too (22). The reader learns that rumours can have particularly devastating effects on a woman's/girl's whole life. As has also been demonstrated with regard to Lavin's "Sarah", determined efforts for the preservation of society's system of rules in terms of morality are made by older female characters such as Mrs Bolan in "A Scandalous Woman" (O'Byrne 11-12). To Schmitz, Mrs Bolan is representative of those people whose obsession is hindering lovers from living out emotions (89). She is portrayed in a very negative light, as she is monitoring and destroying people's private lives as soon as they challenge traditional norms.

3.3.1.2.2.

The Narrator's Teacher

Like Mrs Bolan's, the teacher's mindset is clearly a radically traditional one, which becomes obvious in her reaction to the recent scandalous event. She gives the narrator and the other pupils the order "[...] to go home in pairs, to speak Irish and not to walk with any sense of provocation" ("A Scandalous Woman" 45). Her advice not to speak anything but Irish is indicative of the impact of patriarchy on the one hand and the fear of the foreign, on the other. As discussed before, England was very much considered a masculine state, Ireland a feminine one. The teacher commands that the pupils speak Irish in order to stick to traditional identity norms of being restrained and ruled over by the masculine. What is more, the idea of the fear of the foreign also seems to be one plausible reason for making the pupils speak Irish only. The "foreign" - as also elaborated on in the previous chapter - in this case the English language as such is connected to Ireland's former coloniser's power. Moreover, her demand, "[...] not to walk with any sense of provocation" entails not to behave outside the realm of what is being sexually accepted for young women traditionally. This can be understood as an allusion to Eily's provocative behaviour that has clearly challenged traditional images of Irish womanhood.

It is intriguing to consider that the teacher expects her pupils to follow strict moral codes, but does not stick to them herself (O'Byrne 9). She turns out to be quite dishonest. Her deceitfulness can easily be revealed by her pupils. She loses her credibility, as "[...] she herself stood by the fire grate, [...] hitched up her dress [,] [and] petted herself" ("A Scandalous Woman" 45). What is more, she even turns violent when getting very angry. She pelts the pupils with chalk and makes use of "very bad language" (45). In other words, she is careless about behaving with sexual or moral propriety. As the presumed upholder of moral standards she embodies the impossibility of living up to traditional concepts of Irish womanhood.

3.3.1.2.3.

Mrs Hogan, Eily's Mother

The narrator describes Eily's mother as "[...] a backward woman and probably because of living in the fields she had no friends, and had never stepped inside

anyone else's door" ("A Scandalous Woman" 38). She really wants her daughter to live up to what Irish society expects young women to be, because she does not question critically traditional concepts of Irish female identities. Strikingly, the reader is not inclined to admire the mother figures in O'Brien's fiction (Pelan 2006a). This, as Pelan continues to explain, has its roots in the fact that mothers in O'Brien's writing "[...] are primarily responsible for programming daughters into a narrow-minded world of subjugation and imprisonment" (63). After Eily's secret has been revealed, the mother feels responsible for controlling her daughter so that she cannot misbehave again: "[a]lways I could sight Eily, hemmed in by her mother, and some other old woman, pale and impassive, and I was certain that she was about to die" ("A Scandalous Woman" 33-34). This, Lynch suggests, serves as an example that indicates that it is also women that suppress other women in "A Scandalous Woman" (47). Traditional concepts of Irish female identities are not only embodied by Eily's mother, hemming her own daughter and thus determining the ways in which she has to behave as a woman, but also by the old woman assisting the mother. The latter's impassivity is a typical traditional Irish female identity feature.

3.3.1.2.4. Mrs Brady, the Narrator's Mother

Mrs Hogan adheres to traditional regulations with regard to gender and sexuality just as Mrs Brady does. She raises her daughter in a very strict way. When the narrator, for example, gazes directly at Eily's face at mass after the scandalous incidents have become known, she digs her daughter in the ribs "[...] that [she] toppled over" ("A Scandalous Woman" 33). She feels relieved that her own daughter has not committed the same turpitude as Eily has (45). In the course of Eily's cross-examination, Mrs Brady appears to be "[...] the most reasonable but also the most exacting" (35) which indicates that she – like Eily's parents – is very fond of preserving traditional norms of behaviour as regards sexuality. On one occasion, the narrator confides to her mother her feeling that Eily might die soon. In response to her daughter's concern, she answers that Eily's death would be the most desirable option (34). The reader can assume that if Eily were her own daughter, she would have probably acted the same way as Eily's parents have done. This also hints at the idea that she is as backward as Eily's mother. What is also intriguing is her fear of the

foreign. She reveals that she paid a visit to a fortune teller at some time in the past. Mrs Brady deems her - and all other women telling people what will happen to them in the future - “uncanny” due to “their clairvoyant powers” (26). “[T]heir gypsy blood” (26) makes them appear strange and bizarre all the more to Mrs Brady. One could argue that the word “gypsy” is here used in an offensive, pejorative way and serves Mrs Brady as a distinguishing mark between the Irish and the Gipsies that represent foreignness and thus danger to her - prejudices which indicate her backwardness and ignorance all the more.

3.3.1.2.5. The Narrator

In contrast to the short story’s protagonist, the narrator does not challenge traditional concepts of Irish female identities to a comparable extent. Although she does not dare to address delicate issues of the public mindset, she questions their morality. She, for example, feels very sorry for Eily who is forced to get married to Jack: “[...] [she] almost blurted that out” (“A Scandalous Woman” 42). It is crucial to consider that she desires to do so, but does not dare to do it in the end, which differentiates her substantially from Eily. The narrator’s self-esteem seems to be much more dependent on her environment than Eily’s, which explains her inability to challenge traditional attitudes as regards Irish women overtly and consistently. In order to receive her teacher’s praise, the narrator provides her school books with new covers (45). From this, O’Byrne infers the narrator’s grasping of the need to be hypocritical (10). The sentence “[...] I would be sitting demurely by the fire, waiting to be offered a shop biscuit, which of course at first I made a great pretence of refusing” (“A Scandalous Woman“ 17) further stresses this assumption. After Eily’s marriage breakfast the narrator is being “[...] praised [...] for being such a good, such a pure little girl [...]” (45). Normally, this is what she would strive to hear for. She wants to fulfil society’s expectations. This time, however, the narrator suffers from a strong feeling of guiltiness, as she considers herself to have contributed significantly to her friend’s moral fall (45). In helping her friend to transgress sexual and gender roles, she is aware that she has transgressed them herself as well.

3.3.1.2.6. Eily Hogan

Eily is a character who stands in glaring contrast with the other women's. The Catholic girl has transgressed the boundaries of what has traditionally been considered moral. This transgression, as already discussed, is not left unpunished. It is almost all people surrounding Eily that are shocked by her behaviour.

Even when Eily gets punished terribly, she offers resistance – silent resistance and thus can still be seen in the role of challenging traditional concepts of Irish female identities. After her parents have sent her away to live with her husband, Eily is writing letters to her mother. Her messages, however, “[...] told next to nothing [...]” (“A Scandalous Woman” 46). She only keeps her mother informed about superficialities (46) and conceals her personal feelings.

However, she does not remain silent forever. When the pregnant narrator and her mother meet Eily, they hardly recognise her. Eily is described as being a “wild creature” (48):

Her hair was grey and frizzed, her costume was steelish, and she looked at us, and then peered, as if she were going to pounce on us, and then she started to laugh at us, or rather to sneer, and she stalked away and pounced on some other persons. (48)

No longer does she challenge traditional concepts of Irish female identities with regard to sexuality. Yet she has now turned violent and challenges images of the loving and caring mother all the more through her aggressiveness. When she starts to behave ultimately crazy, people feel very much intimidated by her transgressive behaviour: “[...] she was shouting something and brandishing her fist and struggling to get heard” (49). Her struggle for having a voice is vital to consider against the backdrop of women who do not have the opportunity of speaking out loudly as they are expected to live up to the traditional gender role.

3.3.1.3. Challenging Patriarchal Norms

As pointed out by Lynch, wives such as Mrs Brady or Mrs Hogan are portrayed as submissive to their husbands (45). Eily's mother is one of the female characters that does not speak out loudly. She supports traditional patriarchal structures: "[s]he [...] never called her husband anything but Mister. Unpacking the groceries she said that it was a pity to waste them on him [...]" ("A Scandalous Woman" 38). She is clearly depicted as a dishonest woman. Like Eily's mother, Mrs Brady also acknowledges male authority, as she usually "[...] ate only the pope's nose, and served the men the breasts of chicken" (42). It is important to note that Mrs Hogan's character fits perfectly into the traditional clichés of what constituted Irish womanhood. She does not subvert patriarchal norms – at least, not overtly. Addressing her husband with "Mister" clearly hints at her acceptance of his authority. However, she holds him in considerable respect only at the surface level. She talks badly behind his back. He has not earned her admiration because of his personality or affection for her but rather because of patriarchal traditions. What is more, characters such as Mrs Hogan and Mrs Brady do, in fact, foster patriarchal norms. As pointed out by Lynch, accompanying women are portrayed as having almost no solacing effect on the female individual in those of O'Brien's short stories set in the Irish countryside in the middle of the twentieth century (37). This, as one could argue, is the case with the female protagonists of "A Scandalous Woman" to which their mothers are not of much help.

There are, however, characters that subvert patriarchal norms in "A Scandalous Woman". Right from the beginning of the story Eily is defiant of male authority, thus challenging patriarchal norms. Lynch reports that Edna O'Brien's short fiction is primarily concerned with "[w]omen's responses to the hegemonic, male-dominated power structures pervading Irish society [...]" (37). This theme is also clearly evident in the short story under consideration. As Lynch continues to explain, the depiction of female characters "[...] as defensive, struggling, violated, trapped" (37) is characteristic of the fiction of O'Brien. While this evaluation seems to be perfectly valid, one should not neglect the moments of resistance in the short story. Although Eily does not confront patriarchy actively, she resists silently by acting "stubborn" and "withdrawn" ("A Scandalous Woman" 11) when her parents, for example, are around.

In order not to get beaten by her father she is said to have “lived under the table” (11).

Eily's father should be examined carefully in this context. He is described as “a very gruff”, “[...] old man with an atrocious temper [...]” (“A Scandalous Woman“ 25). Demanding meals and instructing the girls to keep studying are the only occasions when he communicates with the family (25). What is more, when asked by the narrator's mother to take his cap with him when entering the house, he is not even willing to do so. To the narrator this is indicative of his stubbornness in general (31). What is more, he behaves very rudely and even violently at the bank Jack is working where Mr Hogan has come to in order to hurt him (37). This impression is further backed up when he slaps Jack's face for refusing to stay with his daughter when the young man pays a visit to Eily's house at Mr Hogan's demand (41). It is intriguing that Mr Hogan is very much afraid to lose authority and power over his family. Once Eily's father returns to the house being drunk, he finds patriarchy at stake simply because of the rooms having been reassigned: “[a]m I in my own house at all mister?” (40). One has to bear in mind that he only makes this statement after Eily has started to challenge traditional identity norms. His utterance can thus be seen as a response to Eily's calling into question of patriarchal norms. Indeed, as Thompson (2006) points out, O'Brien illustrates in her texts that the constraining of female sexuality in Ireland is connected with patriarchy's anxiety. The power of men is preserved through the restriction of the feminine – at least on the surface level (31). What is more, by focussing her short fiction on women rather than on men (Lynch) who “[...] function[] instead as terrifying and abusive props to the central women's narratives [...]” (44), one could argue that O'Brien as a writer very much challenges patriarchal conventions.

3.3.1.4. Female Agency

Not only does O'Brien call into question the issue of patriarchal power, but also that of female passivity. The author turns against the Irish literary tradition in which women used to be objectified (Thompson 2006: 32). Eily, for example, actively seeks to fulfil her own needs, which could be seen as a subversion of traditional concepts of

Irish female identity. In other words, she does not want to be a passive figure dependent on her father's will. In contrast to Eily, the narrator has always been portrayed as being passive, as "[she] was enjoined to wash cups and saucers [...]" ("A Scandalous Woman" 36). Eily, in fact, incites the narrator to become active: "I said yes that I would be her accomplice, without knowing what I was letting myself in for" (18). As Pelan (2006a) draws our attention to, it is the female figures' activeness and extraordinariness that O'Brien is interested in. However, a depiction of the impact passivity can have on women is also not neglected in her fiction (76), which will be demonstrated in the following.

After Eily's secret has been revealed, agency is taken off her. Society tries to force her into becoming more passive. This, as one could suggest, is also expressed on a grammatical level, as "[...] she was taken upstairs by my [the narrator's] mother [...]" ("A Scandalous Woman" 36). The use of the passive form clearly hints at the undermining of Eily's agency. Passivity, as defined in this thesis, used to be an important component in the construction of traditional Irish femininities. Paradoxically, Eily is not even seen in the role of the culprit. She has not destroyed herself. Rather it was "[...] Jack, that was the culprit's name [...]"; "[...] the blackguard who had ruined [...]" (37) her according to her father. Consequently, Jack is made responsible for bringing honour to her again, as Eily's father commands him "[...] to do [his] duty by her and make an honest woman of her" (41). Jack is accused of having "[...] been pup enough [...]" (41). He must "[...] own up to it, and marry her" (41).

The objectification of women in the Irish literary tradition has already been addressed. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Irish women were not portrayed traditionally in the role of producing texts (Thompson 2006: 32). Was it Mary Lavin as a female writer as such and her protagonist Sarah that challenged traditional norms of Irish female identities through the very concept of agency, it is Edna O'Brien and with her Eily that subvert traditional attitudes as regards gender for the same reason. Coughlan also juxtaposes the author with her main female characters in terms of agency. However, she draws an interesting distinction: "[...] the *heroines* [...] lack, and struggle for, agency [...]. The *author* must be distinguished from them, by the very fact that she attains agency in the act of

imagining and writing them” (191). Similarly, O’Faolain argues that O’Brien as a female author of fictional texts has the privilege of immersing herself in the issue of female passivity through her female figures, but does not run the risk of being passive: the very act of writing endows her with activity at the same time. Moreover, the fact that O’Brien is a woman serves to further authenticate her portrayal of female passivity (O’Faolain).

3.3.2. Undermining Religious Norms – Undermining Female Identity Norms

3.3.2.1. Challenging the Identity Dichotomy Mother/Nun

It has been demonstrated that female agency is an undermining factor of traditional concepts of Irish femininity in O’Brien’s text. What is more, O’Brien also deconstructs classical gender images found in the constitution and the religious realm. According to Thompson (2006), O’Brien’s writing can be understood as a response to the Irish Constitution. In this “master narrative” (31) womanhood is equated with motherhood. In this respect Haule’s observation is highly relevant. He suggests that O’Brien features young female characters in her stories and novels that strongly associate the thought of becoming a mother with great aversion (217). These characters can be found in “A Scandalous Woman”, indeed. Strikingly, the intimidated narrator views babies as “terrible thing[s]” “ushering out” (“A Scandalous Woman” 37). The ideal of motherhood is very much objected to, as a baby is equalled with great calamity which ultimately challenges one of the most desirable identity ideals Irish women could possibly embody. As pointed out by Shumaker, giving birth to children is, in fact, portrayed as potentially “[...] doom[ing] a mother [...]” in the short story under consideration. According to the dichotomy, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, there is only one other traditional ideal the narrator can live up to otherwise: becoming a nun. It turns out, however, that there is no need to go to convent for Eily. Later on she becomes pregnant (“A Scandalous Woman” 48) and thus fulfils the traditional ideal of the mother figure.

As pointed out by Thompson (2003), the image of the highly important and worth-protecting heterosexual family is challenged by the author: O'Brien portrays how dysfunctional this image is and stresses that it eventually disintegrates. What is more, the repression and debilitation of women that emanate from it are also made tangible in her work. In this way, the author advocates liberating female sexuality – for female sexual identities beyond the restricted notion of the heterosexual family (197-8). Thus, O'Brien can be said to challenge or even to “[...] attack[] the foundations of Irish culture – state control of women’s reproduction, and the nationalist and religious mythologies, Virgin Mary and Mother Ireland – that have framed and, therefore, limited Irish women” (198). Likewise, Shumaker makes the reader aware that O'Brien, like Lavin, seeks to express her critique: she disapproves of her characters emulating the virgin that has to endure pain. In the beginning of the story it is made clear that Eily does not desire to become a nun. In fact, she clearly subverts the myth of the suffering Madonna:

Hers was the face of a madonna. She had brown hair, a great crop of it, fair skin and eyes that were as big and as soft and as transparent as ripe gooseberries. She was always a little out of breath and gasped when one approached, then embraced, and said ‘darling’. That was when we met in secret. (“A Scandalous Woman“ 11)

Here the image of the pure and chaste virgin is challenged by using explicit sexual imagery. Her thick hair clearly evokes images of fertility. Furthermore, using the adjectives “big”, “soft”, and “transparent” for describing Eily’s eyes underpin this impression. Comparing her eyes with “ripe gooseberries” further stresses this assumption. What is more, Eily’s breathlessness could be understood as an implicit allusion to sexual intercourse. Still, one must be cautious with this judgment, since the reader is told that she, indeed, suffers from breathlessness: “[u]sually Eily got the lighter tasks because of her breathlessness [...]” (“A Scandalous Woman“ 13).

What is clear right from the beginning of the story, however, is that Eily subverts the myth of the suffering Madonna. It is obvious that Eily does not want to suffer but seeks to develop her talents to the full: “[f]or one Advent she thought of being a nun but that fizzled out and her chief interest became clothes and needlework” (“A Scandalous Woman“ 11). Strikingly, as Shumaker observes, being fertile is of no

value in the life of a nun. This renouncement can be linked to Eily's getting pregnant who consequently gets imprisoned and goes mad (Shumaker).

It is also interesting to consider Nuala and the narrator's sisters that live up to traditional concepts of Irish female identities. They fit into the traditional dichotomy with regard to Irish female identity construction: "[a]t least Nuala was gone, back to Technical School where she was learning to be a domestic economy instructress, and my sisters had returned to the convent so that we were able to hatch it without the bother of them eavesdropping on us" ("A Scandalous Woman" 18). Their sisters obviously live up to the traditional identity dichotomy of becoming either a nun or a woman working in a home economics related low-budget profession, likely to depend on a man's financial support, likely to become pregnant at some point. Eily and the narrator are relieved that their sisters – representing potential distracting factors in their endeavour to subvert traditional concepts – are away.

3.3.2.2. Parodying the Tenets of the Catholic Church

By now, it has become clear that Eily subverts both images of the pure and chaste virgin, and the mother figure. What is more, she parodies other tenets of the Catholic Church, too. According to Lynch, the portrayal of the Church is quite negative. She also emphasises the significance of visiting fortune-tellers and performing practises detached from Catholic belief mentioned in the short story (47). This, as one could argue, strongly hints at the challenging of traditional moral values.

The parodying of tenets becomes, for example, evident in Eily who does not intend to keep her shoes clean for services primarily but for having fun – for being all set for dancing and probably meeting young men: "[i]t was well known that Eily and her family hid their shoes in a hedge near the road, so that they would have clean footwear when they went to mass, or to market, or later on, in Eily's case, to the dress dance" ("A Scandalous Woman" 12). The reader learns that this place is, indeed, used by Jack to convey a message to Eily (18). He asks her for a date (18). Although Eily is perfectly aware that she is not supposed to see him, she finds a way to meet him regularly. By using irony as a stylistic device, O'Brien draws the reader's

attention to the absurdity underlying the narrow identities Irish women could traditionally embody: “[w]e got wizard in our excuses – once it was to practise with the school choir, another time it was to teach the younger children how to receive Holy Communion [...]” (20).

To O’Byrne, Eily and her friend’s successful manipulation of the rites’ restrictions is indicated by their religion-associated alibis that ensure that Eily can meet up with Jack secretly. Since the girls know how to influence the restrictions they are exposed to, they use them for their own advantage (8). This obviously hints at the subverting of traditional Irish identity norms. Like Lavin’s Sarah, the girls can be seen to lead a double life (O’Byrne). By this, O’Byrne hints at the fictional women’s major plan for challenging restrictions. While the issue of “silence” (6) has proven to be important in this respect as well, particularly with regard to O’Brien’s Eily, it is the twofold nature of their lives that permits Sarah’s as well as Eily’s subversiveness (3 and 6).

O’Brien’s short story can also be read as ridiculing the inviolability of the Catholic Church’s authority by drawing comparisons that make the reader laugh. It is interesting to note that Lynch identifies - not only in “A Scandalous Woman”, but in quite a number of O’Brien’s short stories - “subversive laughter” as one of the fictional women’s “survival strategies” (37). Men and organisations such as the Church in its function of maintaining men’s power are the target of this laughter (38). Once the interior of the chapel is described as being “better than a theatre” (“A Scandalous Woman” 33). As the chapel is really crowded, the younger ones happen to attend mass from the altar steps and observe “[...] the priest’s adam’s apple as it bobbed up and down” (33). Examples such as the latter indicate, according to Lynch, the narrator’s repeated portrayal of those men who wield power over women such as priests – and husbands in other instances – in a “faintly ridiculous” (45) light. The focus on the priest’s body movements told from the perspective of a young girl questions his – and thus the Catholic Church’s - sublimity.

Similarly, the reader learns that the narrator is mesmerised by the missionary: “[...] if [she] were Eily [she] would prefer him to the bank clerk, and would do anything to get to be in his company” (“A Scandalous Woman” 36). Being sexually attracted to a

Church member can be regarded to weaken the traditional identity dichotomy mother/nun all the more. What is more, the girls “[...] say prayers and ejaculations [...]” (20). O’Byrne draws the reader’s attention to the twofold nature of “ejaculations” in terms of meaning. Its reference in this context is the uttering of short prayers, but the reader is also inclined to think of its sexual meaning. It “[...] is typical of O’Brien’s humour [...]” (9) to write in such an ambivalent way. Gillespie (1996) also asserts the author’s “[...] keen, satiric voice [...]” (109). In this respect, her humour is, according to the critic, similar to that voiced by Swift. In general, however, her texts are not as hostile to society in Ireland as his novel *Gulliver’s Travels*, for example, is. While “an either/or exclusivity” is evident in the majority of texts written by Irish men in terms of humour, O’Brien’s humorous writing is marked by “a both/and incorporating impulse” (109). She can thus be seen as enriching the Irish comic genre with a new facet – a genre in which male writers were traditionally predominant (109). Strikingly, she uses this very genre as a means of resistance to men, as will be discussed in the following. As suggested by Lynch, one way of interpreting O’Brien’s use of humour in “A Scandalous Woman” voiced by the narrator – and this is the one that is supported in the section of this thesis – is to read it as a means of resisting men’s influence on women: in the narrator’s story the incidents are formed. She is thus in a position of controlling what happens to some extent. This, in turn, can be understood as trying to endow women with the power to form and determine their own lives (45). Although “[...] the narrator’s mockery of powerful men [...]” is revealed to be limited in the scope of effects, “[...] it does [...]”, as Lynch continues to explain, “[...] at least offer a temporary respite [...]” (45).

What is more, Eily’s rather carefree, nonchalant character is juxtaposed with the narrator’s sorrowfulness and veneration for the tenets of the Church. Right from the beginning of Eily’s subversive behaviour, it is obvious to the narrator that Eily has to take the responsibility for it at some point (Schmitz 89):

One day all these sins would have to be reckoned with. I used to shudder at night when I went over the number of commandments we were both breaking, but I grieved more on her behalf, because she was breaking the worst one of all in those embraces and transactions with him. (“A Scandalous Woman“ 21)

This description makes a strict, exaggerated adherence to the teachings of the Catholic Church with regard to female sexuality appear in a ridiculous light. It is in the

following sentences that O'Brien particularly ridicules the notion that women have to repent after having transgressed what has traditionally been regarded as moral:

During those weeks my mother used to say I was pale and why wasn't I eating and why did I gargle so often with salt and water. These were forms of atonement to God. Even seeing her on Tuesdays was no longer the source of delight that it used to be. I was wracked. I used to say 'Is this a dagger which I see before me,' and recalled all the queer people around who had visions and suffered from delusions. The same would be our cruel cup. ("A Scandalous Woman" 21)

Eily – and the narrator in her role of helping her to meet up with Jack – does not only subvert the teachings of the Catholic Church by having premarital sex, but also by engaging in a lesbian act. That the one to adore can have the same sex, as Pelan (2006a) explains to the reader, is not uncommon in the writing of O'Brien (66). After the two girls in "A Scandalous Woman" have kissed each other passionately, the narrator even describes the kissing as a sacred moment – a description that ultimately undermines the tenets of the Catholic Church with regard to heterosexuality:

That moment had an air of mystery and sanctity about it, what with the surprise and our speechlessness, and a realisation somewhere in the back of my mind that we were engaged in rotten business indeed, and that our larking days were over.
("A Scandalous Woman" 24)

This clearly undermines what has traditionally been regarded as sacred – namely the Virgin Mary and her embodiment of virginity and asexuality. Still, the narrator suffers from a bad conscience which is indicative of the Catholic Church's influence the girl is just unable to escape. Although she enjoys the sexual experience quite a lot, she is afraid of the consequences that the engagement in this "rotten business" will eventually have.

3.3.3. Addressing the Female Body and Sexuality Explicitly

3.3.3.1. Overt Depiction of the Female Body

The narrator plays a lot with Eily and her sister Nuala ("A Scandalous Woman" 13) at a time long before the scandal. Nuala, in particular, loves to "play[] hospital" (14). It is intriguing how explicit the female body in the course of the girls' games is depicted by

O'Brien, which can be understood as a calling into question of traditional female identities: "[s]he [Nuala] had names for the female parts of one, Susies for the breasts, Florries for the stomach, and Matilda for lower down" (14). Drawing the reader's attention to a woman's sexual organs, the author very much makes her reader aware that women are, in fact, sexual beings with sexual needs. This is further elaborated on in the following: "I would feel the point of the knife like the point of a compass going around my scarcely formed breasts. My bodice would not be removed just lifted up" (16). According to Haule, however, the children's game – the pretended cutting out of (secondary) sex characteristics – can be understood as an allusion to the girls' future. Eily and also the narrator in a later step are reduced to being nothing but a shell as the plot progresses (218). To Shumaker, it also mirrors Irish society's teaching "[...] that woman as a sexual being is a monster needing maiming to correct her inborn flaws". Shumaker draws an interesting link between Eily's sexual experience with Jack, her subsequent punishment and the surgery game: the development of her sexual body features as such has caused her unhappiness. In other words, had they stayed undeveloped, she would have stayed happy (Shumaker).

Eily can again be seen in the role of refusing to embody desexualised identity versions of the mother or the virgin figure on the very day she attends the dress dance. As soon as parts of her body, however, are shown, she is not only criticised but even assaulted: "[...] the moment she slipped off the coat and the transparency of the georgette plus her naked shoulders were revealed, Peter the Master spat into the palm of his hand and said didn't she strip a fine woman" ("A Scandalous Woman" 12). Before she meets up with Jack, Eily underpins her sexual attractiveness. O'Brien uses quite sexual imagery in describing Eily:

She had an old black dirndl skirt which she slipped out of, and underneath was her cerise dress with the slits at the side. It was a most compromising garment. She wore a brooch at the bosom. Her mother's brooch, a plain flat gold pin with a little star in the centre, that shone feverishly. [...] Then she applied lipstick [...] [and] wet her kiss curl [...].
(18-9)

This description is worth of scrutiny. The word "cerise" alludes to a sexually-charged colour. A "dress with [...] slits at the side" further stresses the sexually explicit imagery. Wearing a brooch on her breast that is "feverishly" shining draws the

attention to a female body part that is very much associated with sex and sensuality. The phrase “a most compromising garment” is probably an insinuation on her desire to attract and seduce others sexually, which all the more is indicative of her questioning of traditional female identities. Doubtlessly, this dress is likely to tarnish her reputation.

O’Brien also destabilises traditional Irish female identities in that she constructs challenging and provocative images of pregnancy and child-birth: the narrator is really worried about Eily. She wonders whether the body of her friend is “swelling up” (46). The narrator does not only feel uncomfortable with regard to Eily’s body changing, but is also terrified of her friend giving birth to a baby: “[t]he one thing I could not endure was the thought of her stomach protuberant, and a baby coming out saying ‘ba ba’” (33). Describing that a baby is “coming out” directly of a woman is, indeed, quite explicit. O’Brien further elaborates on this issue:

[...] I was unable to move because of a dreadful pain that gripped the lower part of my back and stomach, and I was convinced that I too was having a baby and that if I were to move or part my legs some terrible thing would come ushering out. (36-7)

By repeating this imagery, the female body and its reproductive functions are directly foregrounded. Again O’Brien draws the reader’s attention to the female reproductive organ situated between the narrator’s “legs” and “some terrible thing” - a baby - “ushering out”. What is more, the reason Eily’s father gives to Jack for marrying his daughter is that “[...] she had a porker in her [...]” (41). The expression “porker” endows the language Eily’s father uses with vulgarity. By comparing Eily’s unborn child with a pig that is made fat and used as food, O’Brien clearly transgresses moral boundaries as a female author again. O’Brien also draws her reader’s attention to the movements of the unborn in its mother’s womb. The narrator “[...] shook, as indeed the child within [her] was induced to shake [...]” (49). This explicitness, one could argue, is in striking contrast with the covertness of traditional portrayals of Irish femininity.

Indeed, Thompson (2003) observes that it is richness and precision that characterise O’Brien’s style of writing (198). This can certainly also be claimed with regard to “A Scandalous Woman”. Minnis points to the short story’s coolness, crispness, and

directness in terms of language (15). One could argue that by using clear expressions O'Brien disambiguates her message to her readers: she seeks to challenge traditional concepts of Irish female identities.

3.3.3.2. Talking Directly about (Female) Sexuality

Edna O'Brien not only depicts the female body explicitly but also sexuality. Colletta draws our attention to the fact that the author was severely criticised by censors in Ireland for dealing openly with women's sexuality and betrayal by men in her oeuvre (475). In fact, the government of Ireland even imposed a ban on her writing at its initial stage (Thompson 2003: 197). In "A Scandalous Woman" female sensuousness, for example, is illustrated in the following: "[t]he locals were mesmerised. She [Eily] was not off the floor once, and the more she danced the more fetching she became, and was saying 'ooh' and 'aah' as her partners spun her round and round" ("A Scandalous Woman" 13). Eily's utterances "'ooh' and 'ah'" can be understood as allusions to the sounds produced during sexual intercourse. The dancing could be interpreted as a very sensuous, sexual activity. The phrase "[...] the more she danced the more fetching she became [...]" makes this comparison particularly explicit.

Not only is female sexuality implicitly alluded to but also made explicit. O'Brien describes one of Eily's and Jack's sexually charged encounters in detail:

I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw his hand go round her waist, and then her dress crumpled as it was being raised up from the back, and though the two of them stood perfectly still, they were both looking at each other intently and making signs with their lips. Her dress was above the back of her knees. Eily began to get very flushed and he studied her face most carefully, asking if it was nice, nice. (19)

Eily challenges images of a traditional pure and chaste life that Irish women were supposed to lead. This becomes more than evident in a comparison with the narrator who mirrors, in a way, moral standards as regards gender and sexuality: the narrator is clearly surprised, perhaps even shocked, by Eily's behaviour. Eily and Jack clearly engage in some sort of sexual prelude, which becomes particularly obvious in Jack's question "[...] if it was nice, nice", "it" most likely referring to the prelude.

Eily lives out her sexuality openly and actively, which can be viewed as her ultimate transgression (Lynch 46). Ingman (2002) draws an interesting link between Eily's "loose" sexuality and nationalism; a link which, as one might suggest, makes the challenging of traditional concepts of Irish female identities evident all the more: Irish society used to perceive women like Eily "[...] as anti-Irish or 'foreign'" (254) since the leading of a pure and chaste lifestyle, which was at the core of particular conceptions on how Irish women should behave, was linked with images of a pure Ireland and a country different from other nations (254). The fear of the foreign, as already indicated in Chapter 1, was vital in shaping Irish identities. At the backdrop of being attached the stigma of being "'foreign'", Ingman (2002) continues to explain, women could, in fact, be relieved not to be forced to leave Ireland. However, expulsion from their families, for example, was a consequence that was sure to follow, as O'Brien exemplifies in her short story (254). O'Brien illustrates that Ireland's nationalism - that strictly makes gender-based distinctions - inflicted harm upon the lives of many women, and certainly upon those of some men as well. In this way, O'Brien seeks to criticise Irish nationalism in her oeuvre (263), which, as one could maintain, becomes particularly evident in "A Scandalous Woman".

The punishment for the breaking of sexual moral codes has already been discussed. The explicitness of describing female sexuality, however, will now be drawn attention to: "[...] Eily confided to me [i.e. the narrator] that something out of this world had taken place" ("A Scandalous Woman" 13). The wording "out of this world" indicates the transgression of boundaries. Afterwards, Eily's sister Nuala takes her home (13). Eily is no longer able to participate in the dancing festivities. The breaking of the moral code is apparently followed by her exclusion. What is more, when Mr Hogan pays a visit to the narrator's family, he tells them that "[...] he had found his daughter in the lime kiln, with the bank clerk, in the most satanic position, with her belly showing" (31). Obviously, "the most satanic position" is here used to describe sex positions. Schmitz rightly points out that Eily and the narrator grow up in a world which is prudish. What is more, any form of sensuality is negated in this world (89). At the backdrop of this, premarital sex, or even sexual foreplay, is regarded satanic, as it takes place out of wedlock and thus transgresses the tenets of the Catholic

Church. This breaking of the moral code is sanctified. Eily's father goes on to explain that he started to chase after Eily and Jack, "[...] not know[ing] which of them to kill first" ("A Scandalous Woman" 31).

3.3.3.3. Sexual Bond Between the Girls

Obviously, Eily has broken moral codes by engaging in sexual intercourse with Jack. No one, however, is aware of that she has additionally called into question traditional Irish female identities in a much broader sense and has thus transgressed her society's boundaries of good moral conduct all the more. Eily and the narrator become friends quite soon. In the course of an interview with O'Brien, Thompson (2003) addresses the importance of women's friendships to the author's work (202). O'Brien's comment on this statement is interesting to take into account when investigating the short story under consideration: to O'Brien "[...] friendship is one of the vitals of life" (203). Strikingly, Lynch identifies "female bonding" (37) as another strategy women apply in order to cope with difficult situations in some of O'Brien's short fiction. The critic views the function of female bonding "[...] as a powerful [...] perpetrator of patriarchist values" rather than "[...] as a route to autonomy and power [...]" (38) for women. Still, the bonding between the two girls in "A Scandalous Woman", as one could argue, also entails transgressive aspects. The short story's very first line already foreshadows the narrator's special relationship with Eily: "[e]veryone in our village was unique and one or two of the girls were beautiful. There were others before and after but it was with Eily I was connected" ("A Scandalous Woman" 11). Schmitz also notes that there is an inseparable connection between the girls. What is more, they are totally loyal (88). The girls forge a bond: Eily "[...] applied lipstick, wet her kiss curl and made me [the narrator] kneel down in the field and promise never ever to split" ("A Scandalous Woman" 19). Ironically, Eily is preparing for her date with Jack. Nevertheless, these lines imply the growing of the bond between the two girls - particularly on a sexual level.

Shumaker, however, is convinced that unlike O'Brien's "Sister Imelda", "A Scandalous Woman" features "a consummated heterosexual affair" rather than a "sublimated lesbian romance". Still, one could argue that lesbian desire does play a

vital role in “A Scandalous Woman” if one takes a closer look. Though the sentence “[s]he was wearing nothing under her dress since it was such a scorching day” (“A Scandalous Woman“ 22) can be interpreted as a simple observation of a matter of fact, O’Brien’s intention should be carefully considered here. By explicitly drawing the reader’s attention to it, one could argue that O’Brien insinuates on the issue of lesbian desire. This assumption proves to be particularly true at the backdrop of the girls getting closer at a cock of hay:

She said to close my eyes, open my hand and see what God would give me. There are moments in life when the pleasure is more than one can bear, and one descends willy nilly into a wild tunnel of flounder and vertigo. It happens on swing boats and chairplanes, it happens maybe at waterfalls, it is said to happen to some when they fall in love, but it happened to me that day, propped against the cock of hay, the sun shining, a breeze commencing, the clouds like cruisers in the heavens on their way to some distant port. (23)

“[T]he pleasure” the narrator feels is described as “[...] more than one can bear [...]”. This can already be read as an insinuation on the disputing of sexual norms. That the girls feel attracted to each other sexually is foreshadowed in images usually used to describe the tension and love between heterosexual couples such as nature and “chairplanes”. O’Brien can thus be said to play with literary conventions to advocate homosexual’s equality and thus to challenge traditional Irish sexual identity norms on a stylistic level. In the following, the lesbian bond is made explicit. Eily has given a perfume to the narrator, a scent that is reminiscent of desire to the two girls:

I unscrewed the cap, lifted off the little rubber top and a drop of the precious stuff was assigned to the flat of my finger and then conveyed to a particular spot in the hollow behind the left ear. She did exactly the same and we kissed each other and breathed in the rapturous smell. The smell of hay intervened so we ran to where there was no hay and kissed again. (24)

Shumaker assumes the perfume to have a symbolic character. Eily is obsessed with attracting men and wants the narrator to be obsessed with this desire, too. She thus gives the perfume to her friend (Shumaker). This bond, however, turns out to be more important to the narrator than it is to Eily. When Eily confides to her friend, the narrator of the story, that she has had an argument with Jack, the narrator tries to draw her attention to the perfume bottle: “[...] [she] held it up to the light to show how sparing [she] had been with it [...]” (“A Scandalous Woman“ 25). This can easily be understood as an excuse for showing Eily the bottle. In fact, the narrator seeks to remind her of their bonding in order to help her friend to overcome her lovesickness.

Eily, however, does not show any interest at all in what the narrator is telling her. All that matters is the young man (25). This, as one could suggest, indicates the one-sidedness of affection between the girls. It is obvious that while Eily appreciates the narrator's company, she prioritises her sexual relationship with the boy.

Despite the passage of years (49), the narrator is still convinced of the existence of the bond when she meets Eily again: “[i]t was the very same as if we’d parted only a little while ago” (50). The reader never gets to know whether Eily feels the same. Yet she welcomes the narrator with the words “[t]alk of an angel!” (50) which indicates that she is at least pleased to see her. At the moment of saying goodbye, a kiss is given to the narrator by Eily (52). Lynch draws a link between this event with the girls’ earlier kiss “[...] in a headily sensuous and subversive moment [...]” (44) when they smelled the scent of the perfume bottle back then. This time, one might argue, the kiss takes place in a desexualised context. Against the backdrop of the holy water that is sprinkled on the narrator by Eily (“A Scandalous Woman” 52), the moment they are kissing is one of innocence and sacredness. To Haule, the sprinkling of the holy water is, in fact, “[...] a telling reminder of the curse that they both must bear for a lifetime” (219). Similarly, O’Byrne points out that O’Brien’s Eily – and also Lavin’s Sarah – strive to live their sexuality in a more liberal way. They try to hide their subversion from the society they are living in (18). The two girls question traditional narratives of Irish female sexuality only temporarily. Their tentative exploration of a sexually liberated space can only exist if kept secret. Lavin and O’Brien make their readers aware that at that time a full transgression of traditional Irish female identities was not possible.

4. Promiscuity, Bisexuality, and Homosexuality No Longer a Taboo: Liz Gill's *Goldfish Memory*

4.1. Dublin, the Irish Film, and the Comedy Genre

4.1.1. Challenging the Irish Film Tradition: The Depiction of Dublin as an Innovative, Sexually Liberating Space

The previous chapter has demonstrated that the rural areas both Sarah and Eily grow up in do not allow them much freedom for challenging traditional concepts of female (sexual) identity. Elizabeth Gill, however, situates the characters of *Goldfish Memory* into an urban space that is portrayed as more liberating. Dublin's depiction as a (sexually) liberating space is strongly interrelated with the challenging of the Irish film tradition as will be illustrated in the following.

As has already been mentioned in Chapter 1, the Emerald Isle underwent a process of transformation in the 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century in the face of the Republic of Ireland's rapidly growing economy and the Northern Ireland peace process (McLoone 2006). Issues of national identity, as McLoone (2006) continues to explain, became subject to re-imagination. As a result of these series of changes, the arts on the Emerald Isle in their entirety were transformed and revived. Strikingly, Ireland's emerging national institution of filmmaking, financed by the government, can be linked to the innovative process of active development as regards culture at the time (147).

What is more, McLoone (2006) claims that Ireland's novel "[c]inema" can be understood "[...] as a [m]ediator of [c]hange" (161) in that it has started to function as a major place used for the mediation of broader processes connected with society, politics, and culture that have triggered the Irish country's transformation. Society and culture have become radically different, bringing along re-imaginings that have been arranged by Irish motion pictures in a careful way (161).

As pointed out by McLoone (2006), what is left of the moral beliefs associated with conventional Ireland was depicted to be embodied by the Irish countryside: Catholicism, Nationalism, and the Gaelic language were frequent components of its portrayal. According to the critic, the postulate that the pure Irish countryside is antithetic to the alienated, decadent, tainted Irish city – represented by Dublin in particular – and in a larger sense by places marked by urbanity outside of Ireland’s borders – as may be the case with Britain in particular – has survived to the present time. It is “[t]his debilitating contrast [...]”, as the critic further observes, that “[...] lies at the heart of the traditional cinematic image of romantic Ireland” (148). The portrayal of the Irish nation as a happy and peaceful place in the countryside was one of the recurrent features of the filmic convention (149). Depicting what life is like in Ireland’s cities used to be uncommon in this tradition (152). This is, as McLoone (2006) further explains to the reader, not really a surprise, considering the predominance of conceptions of the countryside in Irish culture (152). Hill also asserts Éire’s portrayal as a peaceful countryside in many films of the past. In addition, he discerns a second trend in the way Ireland’s landscapes used to be cinematically represented: he points to the presentation of Irish urban space in terms of a “dark and strife-torn maelstrom” (147, qtd. in Harrower 217). To Harrower, referring to Hill’s observations, “[...] *Goldfish Memory* suggests that providing new, queer images of Irish identity requires a flushing out of the existing lexicon of landscape imagery” (217). Similarly, McLoone (2007) argues that

[t]he spaces being looked at—being discovered and indulged—are both ‘queer’ spaces and feminine spaces or they are the formerly hetero-masculine spaces of discursive Dublin that are now being opened up to the previously disguised and dispossessed. This image of Dublin is a remarkable revision of the accepted viewpoint [...]”. (213)

As McLoone (2006) continues to explain, the novel films in their emergence have repeatedly portrayed city life in Ireland when more and more national motion pictures have been produced (152). Celebrating the urban space rather than being afraid of it was characteristic of the approach taken by the majority of the motion picture producers that became recognised during the 1990s (154). The following can be understood as a reflection and as a potential explanation of this reality: motion pictures located in the city that revolve around the notion of “hip hedonism” (154) such as *About Adam* (2001, directed by Gerry Stembridge), *Goldfish Memory* or

Intermission (2003, directed by John Crowley) have become preponderant “in recent years”³ (154). The glorification of a particular way of living in the city is displayed in these motion pictures. What signifies the culture of the young worldwide at the present day is much enjoyed by this way of living. The Celtic Tiger’s attractive Irish men and women are shown to inhabit this particular city space, living this specific way of life. Regardless of their Irishness, their embodiment of a “transglobal ‘cool[ness]” (154) is evident. Flats full of luxury and “offices” (154) having comfortable and appealing furniture are depicted as constituting Ireland’s capital in these motion pictures. In addition, these locations are portrayed as offering breathtaking views of the city. The strong focus on representing “[...] contemporary art galleries, trendy restaurants, stylish coffee and wine bars, and modernist pubs” (154) as the centre of the urbanites’ lives, gives the impression of Ireland’s capital as an urban area in which people consume a lot. What is more, Dublin’s portrayal “[...] as a city of promiscuous sexual abandon [...]” (154) is striking.

It is vital to note that Dublin is only constructed as an entirely hip and liberating space in this motion picture. As indicated in Chapter 1, homosexuals were not only still facing marginalisation, but also ostracism and discrimination in Ireland in the beginning of the twenty-first century (T. P. Kelly 575). Thus, Ging⁴ suggests a reading of the film in terms of “[...] a utopian vision of a more sexually tolerant future [...]” (5). Westwell is also convinced that the Dublin of 2003 has not turned yet into the liberated space in which people can live their homo- and bisexuality free from worry as depicted in this motion picture:

Apart from one cursory ‘coming out’ scene early on, little attempt is made to show how sexual preferences generate friction if they go against the grain of socially determined norms; but then the film’s soft Dublin is predictably free of homophobia. (52, qtd. in Blandford 51)

This utopianism is not only evident with regard to sexuality, but also with regard to social class. Strikingly, as Gillespie (2007) points out, it is only the middle class that is

³ McLoone’s article “Moving Images” was published in 2006. His observations of what he refers to as “‘hip hedonism’” thus refer to the early years of the 21st century.

⁴ Ging refers to Lynch’s and Lodge’s *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation* (2002) and Norman’s and Galvin’s *A Survey of Teachers on Homophobic Bullying in Irish Second-Level Schools* (2005) that illustrate that Irish society has not overcome its homophobic issues yet. What is more, she points to the (legal) inequality that homosexuals face in relationships in this context.

portrayed in *Goldfish Memory* (63). McLoone (2006) draws the reader's attention to the fact that *Goldfish Memory* and other motion pictures of a similar kind only reflect what the Celtic Tiger period was partly like with regard to the prevailing consumerist values (155). The critic explains to the reader that the boom the Irish country experienced in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century and its increased prosperity then were the underlying causes for the unrestrained belief that it is good to buy and use many goods and services. At the same time this motion picture does not portray the negative issues Irish society had to struggle with that were reinforced by the consumerist mindset affecting the whole world (155-6). What is, however, important in the context of this thesis is Elizabeth Gill's successful construction of Dublin as a (sexually) liberated and liberating space.

4.1.2. Images and Shots: A Re-definition of the City and Sexuality

An exploration of love in terms of alternativeness can be found in *Goldfish Memory* (McLoone 2006: 155). In addition, as McLoone (2006) elaborates, a re-imagination of the Irish capital in terms of alternativeness is achieved by stylising it – through this particular process of making the film “[...] an almost impossibly attractive contemporary milieu for the film's daring sexual politics” (155) is created. In the first place, shots of Dublin were made on “digital video” (155). Afterwards, a significant extent of sweetness, metaphorically speaking, was added by post-processing the images. The creation of a sight characterised by a feeling of happiness endows Dublin with an untypical brightness and attractiveness in the film. This has its roots in the enhancement of hues of orange, mild blue and friendly green in the post-processing stage, spread all over the eventual version of the motion picture. Dublin is shot from higher vantage points a couple of times. The filming of such scenes was conducted from several different angles and during several different times. This results in the interruption of *Goldfish Memory* at intervals. By this means, the Irish capital and the experiences typical of living in the city are celebrated: “[...] urban life[‘s] [...] secret and exciting spaces of sexual freedom and exploration” (155) are glorified. The large city as well as sexuality is portrayed as being endowed with safety, openness, and invitingness through the “mise-en-scène” (Harrower 223) of *Goldfish Memory*.

Remarkably, Harrower points to the brevity of the parts of *Goldfish Memory* set in the countryside (218). These parts, as aptly phrased by the critic,

[...] do not provide a distinct contrast with the urban scenes, and they are not central to defining the characters or their Irishness. In fact, Irishness does not seem to be a concern at all in the narrative, which, ironically, is indicative of new understandings of identity in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. (218)

Similarly, Gillespie (2008), in referring to *Goldfish Memory* and films like *About Adam* amongst others, argues that “a distinctly Irish nature” (69) in their portrayal of a changed Ireland and its changed people is hardly discernible. This is indicative of a general Irish cinematic trend that became evident in the early twenty-first century (69).

4.1.3. Subverting Romantic Comedy Genre through Adoption and Alteration

Not only is the Irish film tradition challenged in *Goldfish Memory*, but also romantic comedy. According to Harrower,

[...] the ways in which the film punctuates a utopian sexual universe with images of Dublin as a bright metropolis significantly transform both cinematic expectations about Ireland as a geographical entity, and generic codes that guide audience expectations of romantic comedy. (217)

Compared to films set in the city but centring on issues connected to politics, *Goldfish Memory* and other Irish motion pictures of a similar kind, McLoone (2006) argues, feature a far greater extent of lightness with regard to their general character. What is more, infectiousness and intentional irreverence are characteristic of their humorous elements. Strikingly, it is the humorous elements that constitute the driving force behind this kind of motion picture (154).

McBride observes that *Goldfish Memory* adopts the typical conventions of romantic comedy in terms of structure. However, this motion picture, as she continues to explain, subverts the very hegemonic system in which opposite-sex relationships are favoured that constitutes romantic comedy’s drive in general. This system is inverted

in *Goldfish Memory* by the representation of the impregnated lesbian character Angie. The raising of her child, as insinuated in this motion picture, will be in striking contrast to conventional depictions in this kind of discourse (8). Likewise, Harrower hints at the subversion of what she defines as the major characteristic of the romantic comedy tradition: in the film it is, contrary to the tradition, not only heterosexuals that are shown to have sex. By partially adopting the traditional styles of romantic comedy, the normalisation of homosexuality is attained (221-22). Clark and Holquist (280-81) define the “typical narrative formula” (281) of what they refer to as “*erotika pathemata*” (281) – ancient Greek love stories depicting the ways in which young people in love suffer – in the following way:

[...] [A] young boy and girl of marriageable age, beautiful and chaste, meet and fall in love suddenly and unexpectedly. But their marriage cannot take place because they are parted. There are shipwrecks, pirates, slavery, prison, miraculous rescues, recognition scenes, court trials, and sleeping potions. The story ends happily, with the marriage of the two lovers. This plot is, in other words, the original of the boy meets girl, loses girl, gets girl stereotype. (281)

Referring to Clark and Holquist’s work, Díóg O’Connell argues that *Goldfish Memory* transgresses this classical “[...] boy meets girl [...]” model. Instead, the story achieves progression “[...] along a multi-character plot akin to 1990s’ independent American film, whereby the classical device of protagonist and antagonist relating narratively in cause-effect is supplanted with a multi-character set up” (Díóg O’Connell 121). The story is frequently advanced by coincidental incidents (121).

What is more, Harrower points out that the conventional characteristics are also subtly altered and consequently queered by applying the “gay best-friend/confidant” (223) tradition as well as the “wrong person’ scenario” (222). As the critic continues to explain, the first tradition is slightly subverted by Angie and Red, who both are homosexual. They have sex once. As a result, Angie gets pregnant and decides to raise the child together with Kate, her new partner. Red and David – who have engaged in a relationship with each other – want to support the two lesbians in their endeavour. In terms of the “wrong person’ scenario”, there are instances in the film that indicate an expansion from this traditional style to a “wrong-sex’ variation” (223). In many of the romantic comedies produced in Hollywood the figures are portrayed to

be in a relationship/having a love affair with a man/woman who turns out to be inadequate for them. The epiphany derives from their realisation that they feel greater affection and/or attraction for someone else. In *Goldfish Memory* this tradition is partly challenged in that some of the figures come to the realisation that they are in a relationship/having an affair with someone of the inadequate sex rather than merely with the inadequate individual. Clara, for example, is portrayed as having a romance with Tom initially. Afterwards, she falls in love with Isolde. However, the relationships/romances figures such as Rosie engage in does not subvert but preserve the “wrong person” tradition of romantic comedy. She is first portrayed as being in a permanent relationship with David. After they break up, she plans to get married to Larry. After having come to the realisation that he is not her true love either, she has an affair with another male character (222-3).

Díóg O’Connell also illustrates that *Goldfish Memory* sticks to conventional characteristics of the love story genre in that two characters that have fallen in love with each other are shown to engage in permanent relationships towards the end of the story. They have overcome a series of problems and can now live a happy life together. At the same time *Goldfish Memory* challenges Irish romantic stories of the present day in this respect. The Irish romantic story is preoccupied with love’s inherent destructiveness or centres on the separation of lovers in many cases, coping with specifically Irish cultural and societal issues (121-2). *Goldfish Memory*, however, can be seen to constitute an exploration of “[...] the universal nature of love and romance [...]” (121).

4.2. Sexual Liberation

4.2.1. Fulfilling Desires without Social Sanctions and Restrictions

The depiction of sexuality “[...] as a matter of choice [...]” (Ging 5) is clearly evident in *Goldfish Memory*. Being socially included or excluded is represented as being hardly linked to a figure’s decision to be hetero-, homo-, or bisexual. The same applies to a figure’s rights in the film (Ging 5). The entry “*Goldfish Memory* (2004)” in Flynn’s and Brereton’s *Historical Dictionary of Irish Cinema* directs the reader’s attention to the

very name of the film: the Dubliners of the present time, as suggested by the heading, engage in ephemeral love affairs only (140). Harrower, however, takes a closer look and points out that the figures do, in fact, have not only shorter romances but also longer lasting relationships (220). Whatever it is the characters are striving for, they are portrayed to be able to live their desires and fulfil their needs.

Strikingly, *Goldfish Memory* is reminiscent of *Der Reigen* (1900), a play written by Arthur Schnitzler, in terms of structure (McLoone 2006). The story of *Goldfish Memory* consists of many narrative threads that unfold through circularity. The numerous figures pursue deep affection and sexual intercourse. In the course of trying to fulfil their desires, their “[...] play[ing] [of] games with [...]” (154) each other is evident. Characters of different kinds of orientation with regard to sexuality – be it straightness, gayness, lesbianism, or bisexuality – are shown to couple, combined as sexual partners in pairs in any imaginable way (154).

The following statement hints at the notion of sexually liberated female identities and their fulfilling of needs and desires without constraint. Helen, Rosie’s friend, is convinced that “[...] the only cure for heartache is a good ride”⁵ (ch 10, 49.12), giving Rosie a promising smile. Her statement is an explicit reference to sex and sexuality. Helen wants her friend to have sex soon to overcome the separation from her boyfriend David who has recently turned homosexual. She thus orders a drink for a male stranger standing at the bar (ch 10, 49.06). Indeed, her plan works: the women are joined by him because he apparently finds Rosie attractive (ch 10, 49.49). Helen is subverting notions of female chastity on a language level. She grants sexual desire as well as lust to women. Women are no longer portrayed as beings deprived of any sexual fantasies and desires but as active agents in the pursuit of sexual satisfaction. Contrary to traditional portrayals, characters such as Rosie are not punished for transgressing norms of sexual behaviour but rather encouraged to do so. Most importantly, Helen and later on Rosie as well are no exceptions in their subversion of traditional concepts of female sexual identities. The majority of the female characters in *Goldfish Memory* challenges these notions, regardless whether they embody fixed

⁵ I have transcribed all quotations taken from *Goldfish Memory* by myself.

or rather “fluid sexual identities” (Blandford 51), as will be demonstrated in the following.

4.2.2. Unconventional Female (Sexual) Identities

According to Barton, it was “[o]nly with *Goldfish Memory* [...] [that] gay and lesbian sexuality enter[ed] Irish cinematic discourse in a positive and celebratory fashion” (126). Likewise, Díóg O’Connell points out that this motion picture portrays the relationships among heterosexuals as well as those among homosexuals positively and progressively (121). What is more, Blandford draws the reader’s attention to *Goldfish Memory*’s “[...] light-hearted representation of shifting, fluid sexual identities [...]” (51). The critic reminds the reader of the sheer unimaginability of depictions like this in Éire only 30 years earlier (51). Unlike *Goldfish Memory*’s presentation of gender in terms of relative unchangeability, its depiction of sexuality can indeed be understood in terms of fluidity (Harrower 221). In fact, the film depicts both “[...] characters who inhabit relatively fixed identities along the gay–straight continuum [...] [and] characters who do not identify with any fixed position. In short, anything goes in terms of sexuality [...]” (220-1).

4.2.2.1. Angie

Angie is an attractive, apparently successful television reporter. She thus challenges the very notion of the man as the sole breadwinner and questions the concept of female passivity. She does not only subvert visions of domesticity, but also notions of female sexuality. In the beginning of the story, her sexual identity can be defined in terms of fixedness: she is sexually interested in women only. When she meets Clara, a beautiful, young student, she falls in love with her immediately. Angie is traditional in that she is looking for a permanent, monogamous relationship – but untraditional in that the partner she is longing for is supposed to be a woman. As will become evident from the following dialogue, Angie challenges concepts of heteronormativity⁶:

⁶ Berlant and Michael Warner define heteronormativity in the following way: “By heteronormativity we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only

Angie: Do you have a boyfriend?
 Clara: ...Not really.
 Angie: A girlfriend?
 Clara: No!
 Angie: Sorry, I just...you know, I didn't want to presume...that you're straight. I mean, if you're not, it doesn't matter. Are you?
 Clara: I don't know...well, my best friend and I used to practice kissing on each other when we were thirteen, but that doesn't really count, does it?
 Angie: Well, it depends. Did you enjoy it?
 Clara: I suppose...Jesus! I hadn't thought about this until now, but...I suppose we did it more than once, so...
 (ch 4, 12.59-13.43)

Angie deconstructs straightness as the prevailing norm. As Harrower correctly points out, homosexuality is depicted “[...] as another element of identity [...]” (221). Yet, this “element” (221) is not portrayed as serving as a marker of otherness in the story. Angie triggers awareness in Clara: homosexuality does not have to be equalled with otherness which also becomes evident in Clara’s conversation with her later lover Isolde. Clara reconsiders her own sexuality that she has appeared to define only in heteronormative terms up to this point. That the two women are engaging in sexual intercourse (ch 4, 13.50-15.00) ultimately challenges traditional concepts of Irish female identities.

Angie appears to be so pre-occupied with her (sexual) feelings for Clara that she mixes up the personal pronouns in an interview with a woman called Mrs Devine on the next day:

Angie: Mrs Devine, how could you not know that she was deceiving you?
 Mrs Devine: Who?
 Angie: Sorry?
 Mrs Devine: Who? Who was deceiving me?
 Angie: Your husband.
 Mrs Devine: Oh, no, no. No, I had no idea, no idea.
 Angie: Did you never suspect that she was lying to you?
 Mrs Devine: Sorry, who?
 Angie: Your husband.
 Mrs Devine: It sounded like you said “she”.

coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment” (548).

Angie: She?
Mrs Devine: Yes. "She was lying to you."
Angie: Who?
Mrs Devine: That's what I mean.
(ch 5, 17.58-18.20)

The replacement of "he" instead of "she" hints at the blurring of boundaries of gender and sexual identities. The message is simple: whether it is a man or a woman one is in love with/has engaged in a sexual relationship with, it can be an equally and comparably nice – or in this case painful – experience. What is more, Elizabeth Gill also exemplifies that sexuality is fluid⁷: Angie and her homosexual best friend Red have a one-night stand (ch 8, 36.16-36.26) after Angie and Clara have broken up. Angie's sexual identity can thus not be exclusively grasped in terms of homosexuality. Next, she falls in love with Kate. It turns out that she is pregnant from Red, though.

4.2.2.2. Clara

Clara, a student, is initially in love with her college professor Tom Lawless. Apparently, Elizabeth Gill has chosen a telling name for this disloyal male character. After discovering that he is having an affair with Isolde, another student, Angie breaks up with him. Next, she is dating Angie. At this stage Clara challenges traditional concepts of Irish female identities on various levels. When Angie wants to know whether Clara wishes to become pregnant one day, Clara is outraged, "Jesus Christ! I'm twenty-two, give us a chance!" (ch 5, 19.26). Clara turns away in disgust from the children Angie is pointing to enthusiastically. She thus calls into question the ideal of motherhood Irish women were expected to epitomise.

Most strikingly, however, is her embodiment of the notion of fluid sexual orientation.⁸ First, she is Tom's lover. Then, she and Angie engage in a love affair. At this point, however, she cannot really be seen as being "purely" lesbian: when Angie wants to know whether Clara dates her and a young man called Conzo at the same time, she

⁷ My observations are based on Blandford's and Harrower's notion concerning *Goldfish Memory's* depiction of sexuality in terms of fluidity, as discussed earlier on.

⁸ See footnote 5.

eventually answers her that “[she’s] only expressing [her] bisexuality” (ch 7, 30.26). Clara’s question “[d]o you really want to lock me into a monogamous relationship?” (ch 7, 30.31) directed at Angie very much points to her subversion of traditional concepts of Irish female identities. She does not want to live monogamously but promiscuously in the first place. To Clara, “[n]othing is forbidden [...]” (ch 7, 31.02) which summarises her entire attitude to life and sexuality. Angie applies this mindset that seems to govern her thinking to any situation: Clara thinks that she is allowed to have a male and a female lover at the same time. Although one may not be in a monogamous relationship, one can – according to Clara – still explicitly state that one is in love (ch 7, 30.57).

4.2.2.3. Isolde

When Tom addresses the highest compliments to his student Isolde and tells her about the love he feels for her, Isolde answers him that she is only interested in “[...] hav[ing] some fun” and that she wants to “[...] keep it light [...]” since “[...] [she] just got out of a heavy relationship” (ch 5, 17.08-17.24). These notions are indicative of her subversion of female sexual norms. As has been demonstrated with regard to Angie and Clara, Isolde is also expressing her sexuality in very liberal ways which also becomes apparent in the following dialogue:

Clara: So do you have a boyfriend?
Isolde: Not at the moment.
Clara: Girlfriend?
Isolde: No.
Clara: Sorry, I just didn’t want to assume you were straight or anything...ever been with a woman?
Isolde: No! Well, I’ve nothing against the idea. It’s just, you know, I can’t see how you can really...I don’t know. I’m into, you know...sex.
Clara: Me too.
(ch 10, 51.21-51.49)

That Clara has learnt the lesson Angie taught her becomes evident from her statement “[...] I just didn’t want to assume you were straight [...]”. Similar to Clara who has gained awareness that homosexuality is not a marker of otherness, Isolde appears to think over her sexual orientation in the course of the conversation she is

having with Clara. Isolde explicitly states that she is in pursuit of sex, and she puts her statement into action: after their conversation, the two young women are having sex (ch 10, 51.57-52.12). She loves living her sexual desires. The sex of her partner turns out to be of secondary relevance which threatens traditional understandings of Irish female sexual identities.

4.2.2.4. Rosie

Rosie belongs to the few female characters in the film whose sexual identity can be grasped in entirely fixed terms. She is heterosexual and shows no apparent sexual interest in any woman. Still, she turns conventional Irish female role models upside down. Rosie, after having been in a relationship with David who – as has already been mentioned – fell in love with a homosexual, plans to marry Larry. Before the wedding she wants to introduce him to her mother. She warns her fiancé about her mother's traditional expectations before they enter her house (ch 10, 56.55-57.31). Although the viewer does not meet the mother, Rosie's short description of her already reveals some of her character traits before the couple actually enters the house. Rosie's mother wants to have many grandchildren. That she must be a very conservative woman is also reflected in the fact that Rosie urges Larry to pretend that he is Catholic. Her mother's backwardness is further stressed on a cinematographic level: her house is situated in a rural part of Ireland - in a small village called Termonfeckin (ch 10, 56.52). Rosie, however, is antithetic to her mother. She is an urbanite who does not want to have lots of children. In fact, she is a bit shocked by Larry's reaction to her warning concerning her mother. He turns out to be conventional. He desires to be the father of many children. All of a sudden she comes under pressure to admit that it is already enough for her to take care of the children of the nursery she is working in (ch 10, 56.55-57.31). Larry barely succeeds in concealing his disappointment when she tells him that "[...] one would be as much as [she]'d want to handle at home" (ch 10, 57.11).

Rosie's revulsion against serving as a baby producer is also stressed on a more covert level when she and her fiancé go shopping in a cosmetics shop. One particular tin of crème is said to not only feature "pulverised primrose petal", but also

“placenta” (ch 12, 01.05.30-01.05.35). Rosie wrinkles her nose against the latter part of the description. This scene could thus be interpreted as mirroring her disgust for pregnancy and motherhood. She apparently does not want to get pregnant right after she is married. Her emotional rejection is underscored by her rejection of the crème’s ingredients.

That Rosie is not even sure about marriage and particularly about leading a monogamous lifestyle becomes evident in her cheating on her fiancé in the club she is celebrating her hen’s party (ch 13, 01.14.05-01.14.55). Rosie foregrounds her own (sexual) desires. She does not want to live up to her fiancé’s child-bearing fantasies. Her kiss with a stranger accompanied by affirmative whoops as well as her consequent insinuated sexual intercourse on the club’s toilet followed by her friends (from the other side of the door) are indicative of her subversion in a broader sense: by portraying the unrestrained living of sexual desires in public in a celebratory manner, Elizabeth Gill deprives unconventional Irish female sexual identities of their stigma of abnormality.

4.2.3. Normalising the Living of Unconventionality in Public

The film normalises the living of one’s sexual desires publicly. The cinematic techniques applied reinforce this impression. As pointed out by Harrower, it is striking that *Goldfish Memory* lacks “point-of-view shots” (224). By this the critic points to the fact that the feelings and perspectives of the subject appearing on the screen while witnessing intimate moments shared by lovers in the public are not revealed. After having slept with each other during the night, Clara and Angie are kissing in the morning before Angie leaves for work. The embracing and kissing women are framed in the side-mirror of the car in which Eddie, Angie’s colleague, is waiting for her (ch 5, 16.09-16.12). In this shot he is foregrounded. Right after that the mirror is more closely framed (ch 5, 16.13). The viewer gets the impression that it is from Eddie’s angle from which this event is shot. Rather than gaining insight into what Eddie thinks or feels about what he has just learnt, distance is achieved through the use of the mirror. Harrower also directs the reader’s attention to the scene in which Tom unexpectedly finds Clara and Isolde kissing in a coffee shop (ch 12, 1.11.53). Tom

only sees the kissing from outside of the big window of the shop. That Clara and Isolde have actually been chatting with each other intimately before they start kissing is, however, exclusively witnessed by the viewers of the film (224).

The prejudice against lesbian couples Tom and Eddie might feel are not given voice at all. Thus, the message is conveyed that living one's unconventional sexual orientation in public – a vision that challenges traditional understandings of Irish female identities and a practice that would have been most likely sanctioned in any form in earlier times – is an integral part of everyday life in twenty-first century Dublin.

4.3. Ridiculing and Dismissing Traditional Values

Dublin's representation “[...] as a city of promiscuous sexual abandon [...]” (McLoone 2006: 154) has already been insinuated. The critic views this fact to be most striking in terms of the ultimate attack on traditional moral beliefs characteristic of “the old Ireland” (154) made by films such as *Goldfish Memory* - an attack indicative of the broader novel trend in the Irish film industry. The implication that images of the Irish nation associated with Catholicism and Nationalism belong to a history that has died rather than to the present of a new generation of Irish people is carried by these motion pictures (154).

In particular, Díóg O’Connell points to the change evident in newer Irish motion pictures in the way they depict sex. *Goldfish Memory*, for example, reflects a broader trend in which sex no longer needs to be inevitably portrayed as being linked to “guilt, religion and moral ethics” as used to be the case in the “meta-narratives” (74) of earlier Irish motion pictures such as Margo Harkin’s *Hush-a-bye Baby* (1990). Similarly, Harrower affirms the presentation of sexuality “as guilt-free” (221). This is indicative of *Goldfish Memory*'s radical detachment from the way in which sexuality used to be portrayed in older Irish motion pictures (221). The following dialogue is representative in this respect:

Helen: You know, Rosie...you don't get a medal for the amount of time you're sticking with a fella.

Rosie: I know, I know!
Helen: I mean, every second you're unhappy is a waste of time. And that's a sin.
(ch 6, 25.00-25.09)

Sin is redefined in *Goldfish Memory*. Violating the tenets of the Catholic Church is encouraged rather than looked down upon. In fact, Catholic values are being subverted. To the female characters of *Goldfish Memory*, there is no necessity to emulate the Virgin myth. They do not have to fit the traditional identity dichotomy of becoming either mothers or nuns in order to be socially accepted. They do not feel remorse about committing sins against the Church over and over again. They can have many sexual partners if they desire to do so – a notion which very much undermines traditional notions of female purity and chastity. Unhappiness, however, is defined as a besetting sin. Although monogamy is presented as desirable in the end of the motion picture (Gillespie 2008: 74), it is also called into question during the film:

Clara: I'm seeing someone else, you know.
Conzo: Oh yeah?
Clara: Yeah, a woman.
Conzo: ...Cool!
Clara: You don't have a problem with that?
Conzo: Why should I have a problem if you're bisexual?
Clara: Who said anything about bisexual? Maybe I've turned lesbian.
Conzo: ...Have you?
Clara: Would you have a problem with that?
Conzo: No way, babe! I believe in freedom in every possible way. You're beautiful. Of course, everyone's going to want you. I can appreciate that.
Clara: So you'd be cool about me seeing her and you at the same time?
Conzo: Yeah, sure, babe. Why should we be limited to some antiquated bourgeois concept of monogamy? If you're attracted to someone, there's a reason for it and you owe it to yourself to find out what that reason is. Everyone in our lives is sent to us to teach us something as part of our karma from our past lives. So if the gods see fit to send you someone, who are you to question their judgment? You just have to say yes to life, yes to love, yes to pleasure. You just have to say, yes, yes, yes! Let me smell it, let me taste it, let me feel it! I might die tomorrow; give it all to me now. Do you know what I mean?
Clara: Yes.
(ch 6, 22.34-23.41)

Conzo depicts a monogamous lifestyle for both men and women as defective. What is more, he calls into question Catholic – and in a broader sense Christian – principles through his belief in reincarnation and polytheism. Conzo's point is to live in a sexually liberated way, released from any societal prescriptions. He advises Clara to escape any form of sexual repression and to break any monogamous compulsions. By encouraging Clara “[...] to say [...] yes to pleasure”, he acknowledges that she is an active subject as well as a sexual being with needs and desires – an image that very much subverts traditional concepts of Irish female identities.

What is also striking in terms of Elizabeth Gill's ridiculing and dismissing of traditional values is her treatment of marriage. Rosie's running away from her life as a wife is vital to discuss in this context. When Rosie is having her hen's party, she and her friends meet a group of young men who are celebrating a future bridegroom's stag party (ch 13, 01.14.05-01.14.55). The future bride and the future bridegroom meet for the first time. Rosie and the stranger ask each other whether they are excited about their forthcoming marriage. Both answer entirely unenthusiastically. The future groom tries to illustrate the cause for his insecurity towards wedlock by rhetorically asking her, “[...] [C]an you imagine never making love with anybody else in your life...ever...again?” (ch 13, 01.14.35). Rosie's answer is unambiguous: they start kissing, and it is insinuated that they are having sex with each other in the toilet. They are clearly unable or at least unwilling to “[...] imagine never making love with anybody else in [their] li[ves] ever again[.]” Consequently, she writes a letter to her fiancé Larry, cancelling the wedding, and runs away with her new lover (ch 13, 01.15.23-01.15.51).

In fact, Barton points to the presentation of matrimony “[...] as a worst case scenario [...]” (127) in *Goldfish Memory*.⁹ This is in striking contrast to the friendly, enthusiastic view on the fact that the lesbians Angie and Kate, who are in a relationship with each other, want to have children together (127).

⁹ While Barton's observation is perfectly valid in most instances, Tom's and Renée's wedding is portrayed in a very positive light. Tom has finally found the woman he wants to spend his life with.

4.4. Motherhood and the Family Unit Re-envisioned

McLoone (2006) points out that *Goldfish Memory* also tries to communicate conservative notions that are marked by irony. A re-imagination not only with regard to the concept of love is evident, but also with regard to the concept of family. Homosexual female and male characters are depicted as eventually longing for sex within a permanent relationship. The family is returned to its previous, yet different status: the lesbians Angie and Kate, who are lovers, are impregnated – or to be more precise planning to get impregnated in the end of the film as is the case with Kate – by the gays Red and David respectively who are dating each other as well. As McLoone continues to explain, this reinstatement of the family can be understood in terms of both radicalism and extendedness (155).

It is vital to take a closer look at Angie's and Kate's becoming mothers. Kate is a horticulturist and meets Angie after her separation from Clara. When Angie comes to visit Kate in the nursery she is working in, their own fertility seems to be reflected in the growing plants. A little girl accompanied by her mother who is turning around and smiling at Kate (ch 9, 45.30) foreshadows the baby girl Angie will soon give birth to. This scene is in striking contrast to Clara's expression of disgust when Angie calls her attention to the nearby children in a restaurant (ch 5, 19.19-19.25). The scene in the nursery also marks the first time that Angie and Kate actually discuss their desire to become mothers at one point (ch 9, 45.25-45.40). Ironically, a sign saying "Clitoria Ternatea" catches Angie's eye and is given prominence through a close up (ch 9, 45.43). The name is obviously reminiscent of the female clitoris, becoming larger in size at sexual excitement. They both laugh at Kate's assertion that this is the authentic name of the plant (ch 9, 45.49). Strikingly, this sign reappears later on: after Angie confesses to Kate that she is pregnant from Red, Kate is unsure how to handle the situation and leaves abruptly (ch 12, 01.03.53). When Kate waters the "Clitoria Ternatea" plant, however, she seems to be reminded of the love, fun, and, presumably, sex she shared with Angie and decides to return to her. There follows a close-up on the sign again (ch 12, 01.04.53).

Before Angie becomes aware that she is pregnant, Angie and Kate take a stroll along the coast. They are talking about how they would split the initial stages in the giving birth to/upbringing of the child: while Angie humorously suggests that Kate could “[...] enjoy the labour pains” (ch 9, 46.57), Kate assigns Angie “the night feeds” (ch 9, 47.00) in turn. After both know about Angie’s pregnancy, Angie and Kate further elaborate on the equal division of tasks in the interview they give to a reporter in a show:

Reporter: But surely you can understand people’s shock at the idea of a lesbian couple raising a child?
Angie: I’m well aware of their prejudices, but let me share with you an article from last week’s paper. I quote, “Lesbians make better parents...because they are better at dividing up household tasks...spending more time with their children...and organising alternative methods of work whereby each can spend more time at home.”
Reporter: Yes, but every child needs a father!
Angie: My child has a father.
Kate: Did you think it was the Virgin birth?
(ch 12, 01.10.19-01.10.48)

Their sharing of tasks challenges notions of domesticity and thus subverts traditional gender structures. The domestic tasks such as the bringing-up of the child will be equally split and not left to one of the partners of the relationship only. Each of the partners can work outside of the domestic sphere. Moreover, by bringing up the notion of the Immaculate Conception Kate ridicules the myth of the Holy Virgin. Gill may not have chosen the reporter to be male coincidentally. By urging the two women that “[...] every child needs a father!”, his anxiety of a subverted male identity becomes evident. This assumption is further stressed by Kate’s as well as the audience’s subversive laughter triggered by her response to the reporter’s statement. His body language reveals that he does not feel at ease at this moment. The father figure in the role of the breadwinner is absent in Angie’s and Helen’s family model. While fathers used to be a fixed component in the Irish family unit, they are depicted as optional.

In the end of the film David, in addressing Angie and her girlfriend Kate, remarks that “[...] motherhood really suits [them] both” (ch 13, 01.19.38). That a baby has two

mothers and got fathered by a “homosexual” man out of wedlock clearly exceeds traditional understandings of the Irish family unit. While the concept of motherhood is depicted approvingly, it is clearly subverted at the same time. That this fact, however, does not have to be understood as an antithesis can be concluded from Nash who argues that “[t]o confuse simple, traditional, binary understandings of cultural, gender and sexual identity is to change what Irishness can mean” (Nash 124).

5. Conclusion¹⁰

“[...] Every Second You're Unhappy is a Waste of Time. And That's a Sin” (*Goldfish Memory*, ch 6, 25.05-25.09): this quote is a vital part of the title of this thesis as it reveals a shift in Irish women's realities in terms of gender and sexuality. As Shumaker rightly points out as regards “A Scandalous Woman”, “[t]o be happy as an unloved wife, Eily must have her thoughts, memories, and dreams killed”. The acknowledgment of female (sexual) desire was absent in both O'Brien's and Lavin's text. Committing sins against the tenets of the Catholic Church was considered a grave violation. Gill's text demonstrates an enormous shift towards a re-definition of Irish female identities: being unhappy and (sexually) unfulfilled is defined a sin. Still, it is important to note that each text has proven to be an invaluable source of information regarding Irish female identity construction: the selected texts represent a cross-section of the various ways in which Irish female authors challenge Irish female identity constructs at different points of time.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of major landmarks in Irish female identity construction. The notion that Irish women and the Irish country are intrinsically linked to fertility and reproduction was shown to date back to pre-Christian times. Both the nationalists and the colonisers created a feminised version of Ireland that attached the image of female dependence upon men to Irish female identities. In the years following the Famine alterations regarding the possessions of land and customs of heritage became evident. These phenomena co-occurred with altered views on nuptials and sexuality. These economic and social alterations that were reinforced by the Catholic Church have been identified as Ireland's roots of chastity and sexual repression. The Catholic Church emphasised the importance of a chaste lifestyle for women and motherhood. One was only expected to engage in sexual intercourse after marriage in the post-Famine years. Sexuality was linked to being heterosexual and to be willing to have children within the framework of the family.

¹⁰ For better readability and for the sake of avoiding redundancy the major points of this thesis are summarised without citing the specific authors of the borrowed material. For precise references to the sources used see the previous chapters.

The idealisation of the Virgin Mary reinforced the creation of female identity. Asexuality, maternity, and domesticity were stipulated for Irish women. Traditionally, women could only embody one of the following identity models: remaining a virgin or becoming a mother. The fixed role of the woman as the mother figure bound to the domestic sphere has been constituted by Eamon de Valera in 1937. The Irish Catholic Church functioned as a reinforcement of the laws enacted by the Constitution in terms of gender structures. Irish women's bodies used to be under the state's control as the state banned divorce, contraception, and abortion which was much supported by the tenets of the Church.

In the 1960s and 1970s Ireland increasingly changed: it became easier for Irish people in general to improve their educational status. Moreover, Irish women were more likely to find employment. Ways of living sexuality unconventionally and rights concerning reproduction, for example, were publicly debated on the basis of a set of scandalous incidents in the 1980s and 1990s. Drops in the natality and marriage rates, Mary Robinson's becoming president in Ireland in 1990, and the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 are just a few of many factors indicative of a changing Ireland in terms of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, a short insight into what the situation was like in the beginning of the twenty-first century illustrated that the Republic of Ireland could not be considered a sexually tolerant and liberated society at this stage.

Chapter 3 centred on the analysis of Mary Lavin's "Sarah" and Edna O'Brien's "A Scandalous Woman". First, the notion of the short story as being a medium of challenging repressive discourses was briefly illustrated. In both Lavin's and O'Brien's short story, it is mainly the protagonists that ultimately challenge traditional notions of Irish womanhood. Strikingly, both Lavin and O'Brien highlight their female protagonists' subversion of traditional concepts of Irish female identities at the backdrop of traditional notions of femininity.

Lavin and O'Brien use irony as a stylistic device in order to draw their reader's attention to the absurdity underlying the narrow identities Irish women could traditionally embody. The texts display the authors' critical attitude towards the tenets

of the Catholic Church. What is more, they call into question the fear of the foreign that used to be vital in shaping Irish identities traditionally. Sarah's and Eily's undermining of traditional concepts becomes most obvious in their challenging of the identity dichotomy mother/nun. The two characters do not only subvert the Virgin myth but also the ideal of motherhood. The combination of extramarital affairs and motherhood is depicted as highly subversive in Lavin's "Sarah". Since she risks a man's marriage by having an affair with him and is pregnant with his baby she has to die eventually. In "A Scandalous Woman", Eily also dismisses both images of the pure and chaste virgin and the mother figure. Eily undermines the teachings of the Catholic Church by having premarital sex and by engaging in a sexual bond with the female narrator. O'Brien makes her reader aware that women are sexual beings with sexual needs. What is more, her explicitness when describing the female body is in striking contrast with the covertness of traditional portrayals of Irish femininity. Intriguingly, Sarah and Eily are initially able to break conventions because they lead a double life. In addition to their objecting to traditional norms of female behaviour in terms of sexuality, the two characters dispute power structures in terms of gender. At their respective cross-examinations, Sarah and Eily pay resistance to men's authoritative position and thus undermine patriarchal conventions.

What is more, it has been argued that Lavin and O'Brien wrote about their protagonists' punishment to express their resentment against the norms of society. Sarah's death does not have to be necessarily understood as the villagers' and her family's triumphing over her but rather as a partial acknowledgment of her transgression. Similarly, Eily, also being sacrificed eventually, defies traditional concepts of Irish womanhood: she rebels against societal norms and thus places herself partly outside of victimhood. Lavin and O'Brien also expose the hypocrisy of the society their main female protagonists live in that seeks to keep up appearances with regard to traditional Irish female identities. The two girls question traditional narratives of Irish female sexuality only temporarily. While Lavin and O'Brien demonstrate that at that time a full transgression of traditional Irish female identities was impossible, Gill illustrates in her film *Goldfish Memory* that an ultimate subversion of these concepts is possible in the beginning of twenty-first century Ireland.

Goldfish Memory is set in an urban space that is marked by (sexual) liberation. It has been demonstrated that the creation of this space strongly challenges the Irish film tradition. The portrayal of Éire as a peaceful place in the countryside was typical of the filmic convention. The glorification of a particular way of living in the city is evident in films such as *Goldfish Memory*. The images and shots used as well as the city's stylisation contribute to making the Irish city and sexuality appear in an innovative light. This film does not only subvert filmic but also genre conventions. The romantic comedy tradition has been undermined through the film's adoption and alteration of its characteristics.

Fulfilling needs and desires without social sanctions and restrictions is what differentiates this film substantially from the other texts discussed in this thesis. While Sarah's and Eily's exploration of a sexually liberated space can only exist if kept secret, the unrestricted living of sexual desires in public is advocated in *Goldfish Memory*. What is more, the very notions of lesbianism, bisexuality, and promiscuity dismiss traditional concepts of Irish female identities. Whatever it is the characters are striving for, they are portrayed to be able to live their desires. In "Sarah" and "A Scandalous Woman" it is mainly the female protagonists that break conventions. By contrast, most of the female characters in *Goldfish Memory* call into question traditional values, regardless whether they embody fixed or rather fluid sexual identities.

What is more, Catholic values are being ridiculed and violated against. The female characters do not have to fit the traditional identity dichotomy of becoming either mothers or nuns. Monogamy is presented as desirable for any character. Still, this concept is also challenged during the film. That Conzo acknowledges that Clara is an active subject as well as a sexual being with desires is in striking contrast to how the male characters in both "Sarah" and "A Scandalous Woman" perceive women. Women are no longer portrayed as beings deprived of sexual fantasies but as active agents in the pursuit of satisfaction of their desires. Furthermore, Gill generally portrays wedlock in a very negative light. She also undermines traditional values by re-envisioning the concept of the family. The father figure who traditionally functioned

as the breadwinner is obviously absent in the lesbian family model. The fathers are no longer a fixed component of the Irish family unit. The lesbian couple's sharing of tasks undermines notions of domesticity and thus subverts traditional gender structures all the more.

It is vital to point out that not only the texts have challenged traditional concepts of Irish female identity but also Edna O'Brien, Mary Lavin, and Elizabeth Gill as such. What Ingman (2002) demonstrates in the following as regards O'Brien, can easily be transferred to Lavin and Gill as well: "[...] by the very act of taking up [their] pen[s], [they] [are/were] subverting the political and ecclesiastical definition of Irish womanhood as confined to domesticity" (255).

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Abstract in German

Jungfrau bleiben oder Mutter werden – anhand dieser Dichotomie lässt sich, wenn auch vereinfacht formuliert, der enge für irische Frauen geltende traditionelle Identitätsbegriff erfassen. Der Staat sowie die katholische Kirche Irlands haben dieses Frauenbild geprägt und gefestigt. In der irischen Konstitution legte Eamon de Valera 1937 den Platz der Frau in der häuslichen Sphäre fest. Die Familie wurde als zentraler Bestandteil der irischen Gesellschaft definiert. Die Kirche in Irland hat die Gesetze des Staates durch ihre Dogmen unterstützt. Der Mythos der Jungfrau Maria hat dabei maßgeblich zur Identitätsbildung irischer Frauen beigetragen. Asexualität, Mutterschaft und Häuslichkeit wurden der irischen Frau vorgeschrieben. Die Abschaffung der Scheidung, der Verhütung und der Abtreibung – staatliche Maßnahmen, die in der Folge die weibliche Persönlichkeits- und Sexualitätseinfaltung einschränkten – wurde durch die Glaubenssätze der katholischen Kirche unterstützt. Darüber hinaus wurde Femininität mit Passivität und Abhängigkeit vom Mann gleichgesetzt.

Einem Abriss des sozialhistorischen Hintergrunds der Republik Irland – ausgehend von einem Diskurs in die Vorchristenzeit, in der die Trope Irlands als Frau und auch das irische Frauenbild als eng mit Fruchtbarkeit und Fortpflanzung in Verbindung stehend wurzelt, bis hin zu einem kurzen Einblick in die Situation am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts – folgt die Analyse dreier Texte. Die ausgewählten Texte, die jeweils 1943, 1974 und 2003 veröffentlicht worden sind, bilden einen Querschnitt der literarischen bzw. kinematographischen Subversion traditioneller irischer Weiblichkeitskonzepte. Mary Lavins „Sarah“ und Edna O’Briens „A Scandalous Woman“ verdeutlichen, dass die Autorinnen die Kurzgeschichte in ihrer Funktion als Infragestellung repressiver Diskurse verwenden. Ihre kritische Einstellung gegenüber der katholischen Kirche kommt unter anderem durch den gekonnten Einsatz von Humor zum Ausdruck. Ihre Protagonistinnen Eily und Sarah untergraben sowohl das Jungfrauen- als auch das Mutterideal. Darüber hinaus rebellieren sie – obgleich es sich streckenweise um eine stille Rebellion handelt – gegen patriarchale Strukturen

innerhalb ihrer Gesellschaft. Ihr Untergraben traditioneller Werte wird ihnen vor allem durch das Führen eines Doppellebens ermöglicht. Dass Sarahs subversives Verhalten mit ihrem Tode endet, muss nicht zwangsläufig als Triumph über die Rebellin interpretiert, sondern kann auch als Anerkennung ihrer Transgressivität verstanden werden. Die Bestrafung Sarahs und Eilys kann des Weiteren als Gesellschaftskritik der Autorinnen gelesen werden. Während die beiden Charaktere Femininitätskonstrukte nur temporär umstürzen können, porträtiert Elizabeth Gill das Dublin des 21. Jahrhunderts als liberal, als von jeglicher weiblichen (sexuellen) Unterdrückung befreit.

Im Gegensatz zu Lavin und O'Brien wählt Gill die Stadt als Schauplatz für ihren Film *Goldfish Memory* und ebnet ihren weiblichen Charakteren dadurch den Weg für die ultimative Subversion weiblicher Identitätskonzepte. Gill stellt eine Filmtradition in Frage, die das Ländliche in der Darstellung Irlands fokussierte. Ebenso werden die Konventionen der romantischen Komödie zerrüttet, in dem ihre Charakteristika teilweise zur Gänze adoptiert, teilweise in veränderter Form übernommen werden. Die Tatsache, dass das Ausleben jeglicher sexueller Orientierung in der Öffentlichkeit als gesellschaftlich legitim dargestellt wird, ist als grundsätzliches Unterscheidungsmerkmal von den beiden anderen Texten zu nennen. Katholische Werte werden in Hinblick auf weibliche Sexualität als dysfunktional porträtiert. Die Familie wird zudem völlig neu konzeptualisiert. Ein Kind kann zwei Mütter haben, während Väter nicht zwangsläufig als Bestandteil der Familie gelten müssen.

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