

**NATIONAL FAMILY ALLEGORY:
IRISH MEN AND POST-INDEPENDENCE NOVELS AND FILM**

A Dissertation

by

SHANE NICOLE TRAYERS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2006

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

National Family Allegory: Irish Men and
Post-Independence Novels and Film. (December 2006)

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This dissertation explores the ideological functions of the National Family Allegory in post-Independence novels and film created by male authors and film directors. Ideology functions as a lingering force in service of the status quo, the current power structure, and these works recreate the same family structures as those established during colonization and through national myth. The roles of Mother Ireland, savior sons, and failing fathers repeat, sometimes through creative means. Although the texts attempt to subvert the allegory, many post-Independence works eventually show the traditional and conservative family structure of the National Family Allegory.

The first chapter, “Importantly Motherless: Spontaneous Child Creation and Male Maternity,” analyzes the connection between the missing Mother figure and male fantasies of pregnancy and child creation. Because of the lack of stable family structure, usually connected to early childhood abandonment or mistreatment, the novels discussed in this chapter show the absolute necessity of family in creating a personal and national identity.

In the second chapter, “‘You Can’t Protect Your Women’”: Male Irish Terrorists as Protector in Popular American and Irish Films, 1984-1998,” the young man/son

protagonist in his role as protector of the woman/Mother figure is analyzed in six different films.

In the third chapter, “Articulation and Stasis: The Son as Haunted Echo of the Father in McCann’s *Songdogs*,” discusses the father and son dynamic in relation to the missing mother in this diasporic novel to indicate that the Irish National Family Allegory holds true even during the dispersion of post-Famine Irish identity.

The last chapter, “Failing Fathers,” examines the father figure in Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry*, Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy*, and John McGahern’s *Amongst Women*. A father’s traditional role is to function in the public sphere and also to control the family, yet each of these father’s fail in their roles, which is typical of the National Family Allegory role established within the literature.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Article 41 of the *Constitution of Ireland* states:

1.1 The State recognizes 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.

1.2 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.

As is evident by its inclusion in the Irish Constitution, the “Family” is an integral part of both Irish culture and politics to the point where it is defined as “primary,” “fundamental,” and indispensable” to the nation as a whole.¹ The family is also understood as a model for the nation in Ireland; As David Lloyd writes, “As in the family, so in the nation, as nationalist ideologists have so often stressed” (16).² Although family is not defined within the Constitution itself, culturally it is understood to refer only to the heterosexual nuclear family. Other non-traditional family forms, homosexuality, and women’s rights are often viewed as a threat to this family unit (Conrad 4-5). Hence, there is an Irish cultural need to protect the idea of nuclear family from outside forces or

This dissertation follows the style and format of the *MLA Style Manual*.

¹ The term “Family” refers to heterosexual, nuclear, traditional family roles as created by the Irish mythos.

² Marilyn Cohen and Nancy J. Curtin make this same claim: “Feminists have long argued that the family or private domain is no less political than the public, and further...the private has been aggressively colonized by the public in Ireland. Familist ideology is, after all, as many of our contributors remind us, enshrined in Article 41 of the Constitution” (5).

threats; this struggle emerges, both are portrayed as nearly equivalent within the context of contemporary culture, and this is reflected through its repeated centrality in literature and film.

When I first began this dissertation project, I truly expected to find that post-Independence novels and film would demonstrate the development of new Irish masculine identities that functioned as a subversion of the gender norms, particularly those established during British colonization.³ It is typical of victims of Imperial policy to subvert cultural gender norms, so it would stand to reason that Irish post-Independence texts would follow this pattern.⁴ This was my initial assumption.

However, due to my interest in the effects of Irish National discourse on Irish masculinity, I limited my scope in this project solely to works by male authors and male directors, while maintaining a feminist perspective and method. What I found by examining this set of texts described in this dissertation – along with many others that follow the pattern but which are not included here -- surprised me. The works of male authors and film directors demonstrate a desire for subversive behaviors and new possibilities for identity in a newly independent nation. But this desire is consistently trumped by the magnetic pull of conservative Irish cultural ideological norms. The resulting texts present a constant negotiation between the desire for change and the seduction of familiar roles.

³ “Subversion” here refers to the action of utilizing concealed or disguised means to overthrow, disturb, break up, upset or undermine.

⁴ Homi Bhabha discusses this in “Signs Taken for Wonders.”

I came to understand this negotiation through the neo-Marxist concept of ideology. Literary texts symbolically demonstrate and recreate the ideological conflict. Rather than thinking of these texts as representations of the Irish condition, however, I began to recognize them as participants in a broad cultural discourse on gender in Ireland. As much as these works by men want to break out of the conventional depictions that prescribe the traditional gender roles, it is, at the same time, advantageous for men to perpetuate an ideology from which they gain a measure of power and through which they maintain the status quo. The traditional family roles, created during colonization and developed during rebellion and after Independence into the National Family Allegory, are constantly subverted and then finally supported symbolically within the same texts.

Ideology functions as a lingering force in service of the status quo, the current power structure. This is not to be seen as behaviorism. As Louis Althusser widely and repeatedly stated, "Ideology has no history." According to Althusser and others, ideology is not a form of determinism and does not function as a particular event but instead is a constant process of negotiation. It is a never ending process that limits subversion by a constant return to that which benefits the power structure.

Allegory functions as the means of production for the ideological force in relation to Irish culture. Allegory is a rhetorical tool, which functions to allow for the negotiation between subversive and static representations of personal and national identity. Allegory is also multi-functioning, especially in post-Independence Irish texts. For example, the same character type can represent several forces in power simultaneously through conflation. For example, the "son" role in contemporary Irish literature can be a religious

figure (Christ-like martyr) or a symbol of rebellion (in response to rhetoric by Pearse and others) at the same time. Ideology does not limit what the allegory represents. Instead, it can allow for negotiation of different power structures simultaneously through cultural conflation.

This “Irish National Family” mythos has been embedded in Irish culture through centuries of representations and cultural pressures and is greatly influenced by the allegories present in the language of colonization, and so it is not unexpected that many artistic works incorporate the family structure through allegory as a way to represent the nation. As Frederic Jameson contends:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel....Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society* (69)⁵

Much contemporary Irish literature and film, particularly those created by male authors and directors, follow this same pattern. Whenever the focus of the work is a private family world, it not only represents a personal conflict but a very public one

⁵ Several critics have chastised Jameson for his use of the term, “Third World,” which is certainly outdated and potentially offensive. In the context of his wider body of criticism, the term might be understood to be equivalent to the later, more broadly adopted concept of the postcolonial. Indeed, Jameson himself applied the concepts outlined in this essay to his study of Irish literature as postcolonial literature in the essay, “Modernism and Imperialism” found in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*.

simultaneously. As Kathryn Conrad states, “The difference between Ireland and the United States is that in Ireland the conflation of home, family, and nation is explicit; private and public are rhetorically intertwined in the Irish Constitution” (65). Not only are the works allegorical, but as I will argue, they follow a particular pattern that incorporates influences from colonial rhetoric, religious symbolism, and revolutionary movements to establish very specific roles for each different member of the family, and writers negotiate their representations within the context of these roles.

This dissertation argues that while some contemporary Irish literature subverts traditional family roles, most of them show a more conservative pattern within Irish literature.⁶ Most contemporary Irish novels and film demonstrate the same systems of representation that began even before *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, but which the play solidified into culture.⁷ The model of the Irish family prescribes roles within the Irish national myth that tells the story of a savior son protecting and sacrificing himself for the mother and the nation, the Mother Ireland (often conflated with the Virgin Mary) acting as catalyst for male martyrdom, and a controlling father as a patriarch. Ironically, the literature itself shows that for all the struggle to define Irishness, these same texts have created a stasis in representation. Even as the real world progresses forward, Ireland enjoys general political stability, economic improvement, and marked changes in family life, gender roles, and the place of religion in public and private culture. Nevertheless, post-Independence literature shows a need for traditional family and indicates how the

⁶ In particular, I will be examining works created by male authors and male directors, which seem to utilize the National Family Allegory on a regular basis.

⁷ The play by Yeats performed in 1902.

destruction of those very family expectations have affected personal and national identity.⁸ In other words, while there may be new identities forming in this rapidly changing nation, most national literature -- in spite of its aesthetic innovations and its attempts to produce subversive identity possibilities -- is nonetheless caught in a static position representing and reproducing the same Irish National Family. Although contemporary works often construct (on the surface at least) the most non-traditional family structures -- often with missing parents or families torn apart by illness, death, or war -- insidiously, these same works use substitution or fantasy to reconstitute the traditional family, reestablishing the National Family Allegory's psychic and social power in each successive repetition.

These object figures do not have to be biological, and most often, they are not related to the masculine protagonist. In fact, the substitute mother figures, for example, which are the most prevalent of substitutions, can be from a different nationality, race, or even gender, but the role itself is played out according to the same rules. Even if these substitutions do not hold up within the text or if the substitution is created only in fantasy, the fact that they are present to make up for a family absence shows a very obsessive concern with preserving the traditional roles.

Ireland, a colony of Britain from the reign of Elizabeth I, only gained Independence for the South in 1922; hence Ireland has only been an independent country for less than one hundred years, a relatively short time period in terms of the development of cultural

⁸ Although James Joyce's *Ulysses*, first published in 1922, the year of independence, was written before the original treaty that allowed for self-governance for the South of Ireland, the patterns in it reflect the same Family structures of the contemporary works. I have included it within the dissertation due to the fact that it is an important and central text for the development of Irish literature.

identity. Literature, as a reflection of and force upon culture, shows a struggle to deal with the labels and mythology of the colonized past, and it would be easy to understand that authors and filmmakers would likely attempt to reject the family roles placed on them through the colonization process. These contemporary Irish authors and filmmakers are often considered revolutionary in their depictions and their subject matter, and their works tackle such social and political topics as terrorism, sexuality and gender roles, transvestism, and family violence. However, as I will show, contemporary Irish novels and film's attempts at subversion fail under the weight of creative repetition of existing ideologies. These works rehearse but do not reject familial roles upon which national identity is based. The way in which these works repeatedly and subconsciously fit the characters of even the most dysfunctional or rebellious of families into this same allegory, these same family roles, shows a greater ideological investment, a repressed desire for cultural stability, that these roles are believed to fulfill. While many of the fictions of independent Ireland present themselves as subversive of colonial ideology, many narratives in fact conform to the patriarchal and hierarchical patterns of the imperial period. The republican values of the turn-of-the-century revolution somewhat collapsed before the greater ideological power of the Catholic Church and the patriarchal family.⁹

⁹ Kevin Whelan explains that revisionist theory believes that "neither human agency nor unjust social and political systems should be held accountable," specially for the Famine, but by extension as the only influences on Irish culture (205).

Slavoj Zizek outlines a similar dynamic in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, in which he argues that ideology functions not only as a misrepresentation of the real but also serves to construct that very misrepresentation as reality:

[Ideology] is a matter of a discordance between what people are effectively doing and what they think they are doing – ideology consists in the very fact that the people ‘do not know what they are really doing,’ that they have a false representation of social reality to which they belong (the distortion produced, of course, by the same reality) (31)

Yet, not only does ideology create a misrepresented reality, but that very construction masks the need it is created to fulfill:

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction, which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself: an ‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (Zizek 45)

Family roles fulfill an ideologically normative function. Many contemporary Irish texts unwittingly support the idea that the nuclear family structure, so “fundamental” in the Constitution, is necessary to the very function of Irish society. By implication, these writers suggest that ideologically, without the family, the cultural, social and political structure will collapse. The repeated inclusion of characters that fit the National Family Allegory demonstrates the desire for the stability, for political, social and gender stasis (impossible in reality) that is conservative rather than revolutionary.

Utilizing Jameson's critical theories on postcolonial allegory and Zizek's ideas about ideology, I will be reading the Irish National Family Allegory within selected post-Independence Irish texts and films. These representations were solidified during colonization and function ideologically. Simultaneously, this dissertation is concerned primarily with examining the masculine roles within the National Family Allegory, since much has been written on Mother Ireland and other female roles within Irish literature and film, but there is a paucity of analysis of Irish masculinity within these structures. The following chapters will apply the concept of male masochism to the savior son structure, particularly in reference to son roles.¹⁰

The dissertation will combine all of these major areas, the National Family Allegory, ideology, and major theories of masculinity, in order to create a new area of research and foundation for greater analysis of contemporary Irish texts. Within the plethora of contemporary Irish novels and film, my focus is on novels and film of this period primarily written by men. Another dissertation might be written to pose the question of whether the collaborative processes of dramatic performance produce an alternative Family Allegory or if novels and film with female protagonists and representations by women change these established roles.

Before discussing the origins of and influences on these roles throughout the Irish colonial period, it is important to note that although the focus of my analysis is on the constructions of masculinity within the family structure, I argue that this masculinity is relational to the prevalent figure of the Mother as nation; masculine roles emerge from

¹⁰ I will be utilizing several major critical theorists in the area of masculinity, including Tania Modleski, Carol Siegel, Sally Robinson and others.

this dominant, though powerless figure. A son's role, for example, is to free the mother through revolutionary action, while the father's role is traditionally to control and stabilize the Mother/Nation/Family. Because of this pattern, a mother's role is integral in understanding Irish masculinity in contemporary cultural work, and masculine roles are constituted in relation to her.¹¹

Even early national mythology depicted Ireland as female, even to the extent that the land itself was represented as a female body, but the depiction was always of the powerlessness of the feminine (Lewes 103). She was to be acted upon and never had agency until the mother role later evolved through the solidification that came from colonization and Christianity.

At least by the seventeenth century and possibly before, the British Empire reflected in its colonizing rhetoric ideas of what Darby Lewes calls "somatopia," which essentially is an extended metaphor comparing foreign lands with the bodies of women:

When seventeenth-century British explorers loaded their ships, they packed the somatopic metaphor along with the grog and sea biscuit. The genre enabled daring seamen and conservative landmen alike to regard the new lands and their indigenous populations as feminized territories whose destiny was to be conquered, cultivated and exploited by Europeans. Virgin lands were, after all, like virgin women – ripe and eager to be plucked and savored (103)

Although Lewes does not specifically discuss the repercussions of this type of colonial rationalization on the Irish people, this idea applies to all of the territories of Britain's

¹¹ Condren discusses this in *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland*, examined in greater detail later.

colonial empire.¹² This type of thinking led to the metaphorical idea of the “Rape” of Ireland by the masculinized British forces and the “indigenous population,” as well as the nation itself, whereby it took on a feminized (supposedly passive) subjugated position through Britain’s colonizing penetration of Ireland.

Although this colonial ideology paints Ireland as a “virgin” or wild, natural female waiting to be conquered, as all of the other foreign territories “needing” colonization, the Irish national female identity evolved over time from an enticing female to embody simultaneously a distinctly “motherly” figure. Although there is no clear and undeniable critical information as to how the mother figure as representative of nationhood evolved from the ideas of a feminized country, there are some possible catalysts to the popularity of the symbol. One such source is a popular 1869 British children’s geography book that Lewes exhibits that actually shows a map of Ireland where the picture of a mother carrying a child on her back is drawn over the Irish territories (144). This representation is, of course, British and although comic in nature, it does continue the colonial rationalizing propaganda through the visual depiction of Ireland as a feminine Mother figure needing Britain’s subjugation for her own protection.¹³

This dualistic symbol became internalized within Irish culture and then represented in nationalist Irish literary works beginning in the eighteenth century with the romantic

¹² The concept of “somatopia” is not limited to Ireland. Ecofeminist critics, such as the works contained in *Ecofeminism* edited by Karen J. Warren discuss the ways in which women’s bodies and the land are equated internationally.

¹³ Examining another possible catalyst, Margaret Kelleher’s *Feminization of the Famine* discusses this type of feminine figure as shaped by British colonial rhetoric during the time of the Famine.

poets and the aisling tradition.¹⁴ The most popular of these representations can be found later in William Butler Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, performed in 1902.¹⁵ In this play, an old, haggard woman figure convinces young men to fight and die for her, which, by the end, transforms her into a beautiful, young woman or perhaps a “Queen”. Attempting to convince one of the young men to fight, the Old Woman tells him: “If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all” (Yeats 8). From this early nationalist drama an ideological motif is perpetuated that suggests it is only the sacrifice of the men, the sons of Ireland, which enables the redemption of the country. Not only is this a blending of the “virgin,” young woman and the “old mother” symbols but also it includes the idea of the son who must sacrifice himself to save his mother or in greater nationalistic terms, his mother country¹⁶. As Condren states in *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland*, “For the sake of the mother or the ‘motherland’ one can feel justified for developing elaborate strategies of ‘defense’ or going to extreme heroic length for her sake, thereby mystifying the true social or economic issues at stake” (208).¹⁷ The fact that the mother(land) must be defended from outside forces places the woman in a position of power only through her helplessness.

¹⁴ Marian Eide discusses this in “The Woman of Ballyhoura Hills: James Joyce and the Politics of Creativity”.

¹⁵ The play may have been co-written by Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats.

¹⁶ An older and similar figure is that of “Roisin Dubh,” often translated as “Dark Rosaleen” or “Black Rose.” James Clarence Mangan created the most famous translation of a poem, immortalizing this figure. Within the poem, the speaker is willing to give up his life because Rosaleen can “give [him] life and soul anew/ A second life, a soul anew” (*Dubh Trust*). Often Rosaleen, like Cathleen, is considered representative of Ireland itself, and her reference in a literary work, including Mangan’s poem, can easily be interpreted as a nationalistic symbol. Rosaleen was most likely also influential in and conflated into the creation of the Mother Ireland representations.

¹⁷ Mary Condren’s *The Serpent and the Goddess* traces the figures of Eve, Brigit, and Mary and their evolution and impact to feminism during early Irish/Christian symbolism. In particular, Condren explains how Mary’s rise to a major figure within the church as a role model for women impacted their power status within society and constricted their sexuality

She can influence men to fight for her, but she cannot fight for herself. For three centuries, she acts more as a symbol than as an agent in nationalist literature.

This same sacrificial rhetoric acted as a catalyst for male masochism. It can be found in speeches and writings from the Easter 1916 Republican Uprising and slightly before, especially in the discourse created by Padraig Pearse, a leader of the independence movement. According to Susan Kingsley Kent's analysis of the uprising's driving philosophy, the purpose of the revolt was not to win freedom for Ireland, since those involved knew that this goal was an impossibility with so little manpower and such large enemy resources, but instead, to sacrifice themselves in order to "resurrect a manly Ireland" through martyrdom:

Pearse...had never expected to defeat the British army. Their goals had been more modest: to ignite, by means of a blood sacrifice on the part of Irish manhood, nationalistic feeling throughout the country; to redeem through an assertion of heroic manliness the old hag that was Ireland, in the imagery of William Butler Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and turn her back into a beautiful young queen by shedding their blood for her...Pearse's own writings had continued the themes of degradation and redemption through a blood sacrifice of its men on behalf of a feminized Ireland (265)¹⁸

¹⁸ An example of this type of rhetoric is Pearse's speech at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa on August 1, 1915: "Life springs from death; an' from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have pacified half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead – And while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace" (qtd. from Tempany-Pearse). His poetry also contained these same images of sacrifice and redemption. An example of this can be found in one of his more popular poems, "The Rebel": "...My

Pearse, who surrendered and was executed by the British along with other leaders at the end of the short-lived uprising, became one of the best known and most often remembered martyrs for the Irish cause, and his works were certainly influential.

However, through their use of the “Mother Ireland” symbol and the corresponding necessity for young men to become “sacrificial sons,” not only do nationalist patriots internalize an identity that was actually already *imposed* on them through the British colonial ideology but also they conceded their own power to make a change in the governmental structures that currently existed, since they identified themselves as willing victims in the colonized state. Yet, as David Savran postulates, the supposedly revolutionary masochistic self-conception of these Irish rebels “rather than destroy[ing] the hegemonic structures may have ended up ironically reinforcing hierarchical social configurations and the inequitable distributions of power and wealth that accompany them” (115).¹⁹ The only way to save Ireland, this symbolically inspired rhetoric contends, is through the death of Irish sons. The only way that the young men can prove their manhood is by asserting themselves against the British, and the only way to fulfill Irish idealized manhood is to die in the process. This death in turn implies that the “remasculinization” of Ireland is solely a suicidal endeavor that continually repeats itself

Mother bore me in bondage, in bondage my mother was born, I am of the blood of serfs;/...I say to my people that they are holy, that they are august, despite their chains, / That they are greater than those that hold them, and stronger and purer, / That they have but need of courage, and to call on the name of their God, / God the unforgetting, the dear God that loves the peoples / For whom He died naked, suffering shame. / And I say to my people’s masters: Beware, / Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people...” (Tempany-Pearse).

¹⁹ Savran’s arguments are made about the counter culture in the United States during the 1960’s, but his arguments seem applicable to Ireland.

with each new generation's additional martyrs, each of whom keeps the revolution alive without ever actually attaining its goals.

In another somewhat simultaneous development, the "Mother Ireland" symbol evolved further in its conflation with the religious figure of the Virgin Mary (Lyons 115). According to Laura Lyons, this occurred both in relation to and separate from political discourse. Both female symbols represent "virgins" or the untouched young woman and "mothers," both of whom lose their son in order to serve a greater cause. Early on in its history, the Irish Catholic Church "began to enlist the Virgin Mary as a role model for women," originally in the form of a "protectress of Ireland;" however, due to the famine of 1846, by the "mid-nineteenth century [the] Virgin is 'Our Lady of Sorrows,' the suffering mother of the adult Jesus...As nationalistic fervor increased from the time of the Famine through the first two decades of the twentieth century, this image of the sorrowful Virgin gained both in prominence and political significance" (Lyons 114-115). The image of Mary evolved over time to fit into each different political situation and in a relationship with the real lives of mothers losing their sons in famine, war, or other violent acts, and this continued into post-Independence. Since religion and politics have always been intertwined in Irish history, especially after 1846, the figures of "Mother Ireland" and "the sorrowful Virgin" are represented in much the same way. The two combined into a strong symbol of the pain and suffering of a passive, feminized figure waiting for her Christ-like sons to save her by their continuing martyrdom. This aforementioned process, Laura Lyons describes as cultural "articulation," or a combining of two like symbolic identities through social conflation (118). This constantly evolving

figure of Mother Ireland / Mary and by relationship, her martyred son, continues in contemporary Irish film and literature of post-Independence.²⁰ The mother and son familial/national relationship is the most central to the national allegory, and therefore, it is the depictions of these figures that prevails.

It is my contention that some contemporary male writers are not conscious of the ideologically pervasive repetition of this mythos or the fact that it undermines the revolutionary intent of their texts. In the works surveyed in this study, generally, women characters, particularly young women, seem to fit into this “mother” role, even if they have not had children of their own. Male figures are made self-sacrificing as sons or failing fathers. The family dynamic in post-Independence texts rehearses not only the Irish National Family of the Irish constitutions but also the patriarchal National Family of the colonial rhetoric. Independence did not bring about revolution of the family structure either in the political or in the aesthetic realms.

The Irish constitution conflates women and mothers in Article 41, “as can be seen from the rhetorical move from 2.1 to 2.2,” the former discusses the contributions of “woman” to the state and the latter indicates that “mothers” should not suffer economic hardship (Conrad 73). The two are conflated through a “therefore” in the latter. Literary discourse and live political discourse do not make a distinction in the way they are portrayed based on biological motherhood. In fact, in both fictional and legal texts, daughters can often be interchangeable with mothers. Responsible for child and domestic

²⁰ This conflation is particularly strong for Francie Brady in McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy*, since he replaces his own mother with the Virgin Mary directly. Leopold Bloom deals with representations of the two Marys, Madonna and whore, in relation to Molly and himself in *Ulysses*. These are the two most direct examined within this dissertation.

care, generally they are portrayed in the same helpless, victim position, waiting for young men to come and save them. In this same vein, mothers and daughters often play the role of hostage, especially in works concerning the I.R.A., terrorism in general, or war. Daughters are most often not included in the family model, being typically placed into the mother category within the National Family Allegory.

The son is forced into the predetermined national/literary role of the sacrificial son, which includes a necessary fight to protect the women around him. This role can be played by any younger man who is not biologically a father. Even if they adopt or marry into a pre-made family, the women and children act only as a substitution for the biological. Mothers can be missing for a variety of reasons, often but not always connected to some type of childhood trauma, yet the reaction of the son character tends to be the same. He is forced to substitute another woman or himself through fantasy in the place of the missing mother in order to have purpose. Without a woman/mother to protect, the young man has no role, no power, and the dynamic must be reinstated, even if it is artificial, in order for the young man to embody his typical role. The substitution itself points to ideology at work, since the patterns are not immediately apparent but function through substitution.

Fathers are generally older male figures, but the role can also be occupied by a priest, (because of the play on Father), or a younger man who is a biological father, particularly of a son. Because of the rhetoric of colonization and the availability of Catholic terminology, the father role traditionally would be to control the other members and to uphold the National Family ideology. Going back to the representations during

colonization, the father figure can double for Great Britain through the “rape of Ireland” mythology, and this contributes to the allegorical need of the father to “control.” As Kathryn Conrad contends, “Men were expected to control the family cell and moderate the relationship between the private and public spheres” (7).²¹ Unlike Conrad, however, I would apply this pattern only to the father figures within the context of the national allegory, since sons are used to fight the threats to the mother (nation) and masochistically attempt to liberate her, which, following Freud’s Oedipal language sometimes includes the father figure (most often representative of Britain).²²

However, literature and film often create the father figure as the opposite of the typical controlling force, often represented as the victim of circumstances surrounding the characters. Fathers are generally incapacitated in some way, whether by disease (from alcoholism to cancer), handicap or imprisonment, in other circumstances the figure is entirely missing, usually from death, emigration, or unknown causes. Fathers are expected to, and, if present, usually try to control the family, but they are often incompetent. Partially the inability of the father creates even more impetus for the son to

²¹ I would argue that the majority of father figures do represent the colonizing force that figuratively feminized and subjugated the Irish population; however, for some roles, like Father Bernard in *Breakfast on Pluto*, where the father is also a Catholic priest, the father figure can not be relegated to only the role of Britain, but is rather representative of a general normative culture pressure. Pussy’s revolt against her father, which includes burning down his church, is a fight against both the position in which Father Bernard put his mother by not allowing her to live in the typical mother role due to her rape and consequent abandonment of Pussy, but it is also a fight for her homosexuality/transvestitism that is against the norms supported by the doctrine of Catholicism, seen in Bernard’s inability to acknowledge his own child. In cases like these, it is impossible to pinpoint specifically whether the normative force that the father represents is an Irish one or an internalized result of colonization due to the fact that he represents political and religious controlling factions. It is most likely both simultaneously.

²² The son role demonstrates male masochism in his sacrifice of himself for the mother. This corresponds with Freud’s Oedipal complex in that the son is fighting the father, attempting to kill him when the father is representative of Britain, for possession of the mother, and the masochism is found in the pleasure that the son feels in sacrificing himself in this way.

have the ability to protect the mother/woman. Additionally, the literary depiction reenacts into the National Allegory by showing a colonizing force (when representative of Britain) that cannot control the nation/family.

These roles are repeatedly embedded in Irish texts with the same need to present, a stable, heterosexual, nuclear family by any means possible, including the creation of non-biological characters that fulfill conservative biological family roles. Yet even with the extensive substitutions or artificial structures, the new created family often fails to reinstate the family order. The resulting family structure, real or imagined, is unstable, and generally breaks down, revealing that these proscribed roles cannot function. This communicates the yearning of the culture for lasting structures of the stable and functioning type. On the surface, the repeated appearance of the roles seems to convey a culture stuck in the past, reenacting the conflated and evolved national mythos. However since few, if any, of these restructurings ever creates a functioning family unit that is culturally and politically subversive, even these roles turn out to be a dysfunctional attempt to fulfill cultural norms.

This project examines the ways in which the normative National Family Allegory constantly changes through substitution and other methods the dysfunctional or incomplete family in order to normalize it through these roles. These works, both literature and film, particularly those created by male authors and directors, shapes the literary concept of Irish masculinity and the two definitive male roles. Also of note here, I am focusing solely on Irish Catholic males within these texts and film for several reasons. For one, the Catholic religious influence was equally instrumental in forming the

National Family Allegory, and it was Catholic masculinity that Colonization affected due to the fact that these males were identified by British rhetoric as subjugated into a feminine position. Protestant men, even in post-Independence texts, tend to be conflated with the British/Colonizer, even if Anglo-Irish, so the National Family Allegory does not have the same kind of power over these representations. Second, Protestant males generally are shown as the victimizers and not the victimized. This occurs in a multitude of ways, four of which, I will explore here in this study.

The first chapter, “Importantly Motherless: Spontaneous Child Creation and Male Maternity,” analyzes the connection between the missing Mother figure and male fantasies of pregnancy and child creation. Each male protagonist in three different novels has these fantasies in response to the destruction of the traditional family structure. Because of the lack of stable family structure, usually connected to early childhood abandonment or mistreatment, the novels discussed in this chapter show the absolute necessity of family in creating a personal and national identity. Each protagonist in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street*, and Patrick McCabe’s *Breakfast on Pluto* responds to the need for a mother figure by becoming one themselves. The latter two novels utilize religious imagery in their depictions, sometimes conflating the Mother with the Virgin Mary. All of the protagonists create miraculously perfect children in their daydreams or hallucinations, ensuring their legacies and briefly reconstructing the family that has been torn apart or destroyed. Even though these fantasies are shown to be inadequate in the “realities” of the novels, the fact that the

protagonists attempt to recreate the conservative family structures shows a cultural need for the traditional family, but also a kind of stasis of identity roles.

In the second chapter, ““You Can’t Protect Your Women””: Male Irish Terrorists as Protector in Popular American and Irish Films, 1984-1998,” I examine the young man/son protagonist in his role as protector of the woman/Mother figure in six different films: the American films, *The Jackal*, *Blown Away*, *A Prayer for the Dying*, and the Irish films, *The Boxer*, *The Crying Game*, and *Cal*. In each of the son/mother relationships, the male protagonist must atone for a past harm related to a terrorist act; whether or not he is involved in the situation directly, he is removed from the horror of the actual event, and yet, must cope with the guilt until he has a chance to sacrifice himself in order to rectify the past. The conflict is always with a “bad terrorist” or mobster who places his loved woman in danger. Like Cathleen ni Houlihan, the young man must “give all” for the woman in order to fulfill this traditional role. All of these actions and motivation define the National Family Allegory’s son role as victim, martyr, and savior.

In the third chapter, “Articulation and Stasis: The Son as Haunted Echo of the Father in McCann’s *Songdogs*,” discusses the father and son dynamic in relation to the missing mother in this diasporic novel to indicate that the Irish National Family Allegory holds true even during the dispersion of post-Famine Irish identity. The structure of the narrative allows Conor’s life to follow that of his father, Michael, in a way that creates junctions in time and space between their two lives. While Michael documents his life through his international travels, Conor’s art is in the narrative he creates about his parents; both make the same circuitous journey, Conor following in his father’s footsteps.

The circular nature of the journeys suggests the stasis in their personal lives created by the lack of the mother figure, Juanita, who left her husband and son after the exposure of certain nude photographs published without her knowledge by her husband. The novel shows this stasis on both a personal and cultural level along with the inability of the characters to escape from their pasts and to develop an identity for themselves within the present time. The son attempts to reconstruct and save the mother from the past, while Michael is powerless to do anything except to regret that same past; these are traditional depictions of both father and son. The novel demonstrates the national fascination with the trauma of the past and the centrality of nostalgia in Irish culture. Even though the characters make a circuitous journey, the result is the same, and the National Family Allegory roles are reenacted without creating new national identities.

The last chapter, "Failing Fathers," examines the father figure in Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*, Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, and John McGahern's *Amongst Women*. A father's traditional role is to function in the public sphere and also to control the family, as a type of superego. Father figures have figuratively been attached to both British colonialism and also to the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the fact that priests are referred to as Father. Yet, repeatedly, father figures in Irish novels are shown as incapable, either by their absence, handicap, disease or alcoholism. Fathers are powerless, the old men in a culture where young men can sacrifice themselves in order to save the nation, but they cannot. All three novels have fathers who function only to create dysfunction within the family structure.

In none of these examples is the traditional National Family Allegory structure subverted. The novels and film recreate the traditional structure, even if only temporarily. Those that do not have a stable family do not have an identity, and their personal character dissolves. Through substitution, fantasy, repetition and absence, all the narratives support the integral part that family plays in identity production, both for the individual and the nation. Much of Irish literature is mired in the past, creating the same images and family roles as those produced before Independence, but utilizing creative substitution, sometimes of non-biological objects, in order to do so.

CHAPTER II

“IMPORTANTLY MOTHERLESS”:

SPONTANEOUS CHILD CREATION AND MALE MATERNITY

As discussed in the introduction, a dominant late 19th and 20th century version of the Irish National Family Allegory demands the political or military sacrifice of the young man or son for the nation or “Mother Ireland.” One of the recurring narrative patterns of colonial Irish fiction is that of the “aisling,” a story (often narrated in poetic form) in which a young and beautiful woman (Ireland) is held captive by a soldier (England). The young poet (the citizen) comes upon her and frees her, thus creating an independent nation. In retellings of this national myth, the colonization of Ireland is often figured as the rape of a young woman. The sacrifice of young men to save her secures the status of the independent nation. As explained by Nancy J. Curtin: “The feminized, maternal nation, Hibernia, Granu, Erin, the Shan van Vocht, by turns a graceful, dignified matron and an old woman summoning her sons to protect and defend her homestead, called up ‘the gen’rous sons of Erin, in manly virtue bol’ to avenge her wrongs” (39). This relationship between mother and son is central to the National myth and the traditional roles for different genders and for males, generations. In much Irish literature of the twentieth century, even when writers try to plot themselves out of this national family allegory, the structure of the story is repeated even as it is cast onto substitute figures for the nation and the citizen.

In an attempt to subvert this ubiquitous national story, some Irish novelists have tried to write the mother figure out of their texts (whether through death, betrayal, or

abandonment).²³ Yet “Mother Ireland” as a rhetorical and allegorical figure reasserts herself in these narratives, albeit in alternative guises. An absent mother could potentially create a subversive space within the traditional allegory, since the national family myth should not be able to function without a mother for the father to control and the son to martyr himself to save. However, this is not the case in some Irish literature, particular those by male authors. When the mother is missing or not functioning in the mother role, the young man/son figure substitutes either another woman/mother figure (which will be discussed in regard to films in Chapter III) or as will be discussed in the texts here, uses fantasy to create himself as mother, thereby fulfilling the family structure by himself. Within Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street*, Patrick McCabe’s *Breakfast on Pluto*, and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, all three protagonists lose a mother figure and subsequently have fantasies in which they spontaneously create children of their own, creating through one male figure an entire family to make up for what they had lost. Because these narratives of male pregnancy or of spontaneous child creation are represented and accepted as merely fantasy, they demonstrate that there is an ideological need, a desire by the male protagonists to attain this type of national heterosexual family. The authors may not have intended to recreate the allegory, but the narratives go to great lengths to reconstruct the National Family Allegory structures through imagination and creativity.

This chapter will examine the implications of these particular conservative family structures on national and personal identity. It is the loss of the mother suffered by the

²³ As shown in two of the three novels, McLiam Wilson and McCabe’s, discussed in the chapter and other works in the dissertation.

protagonists that engenders these fantasies and which leads the characters to perpetuate the ideological ideas of Irish culture and to return to the National Family Allegory. In short, the authors write the mother back in creatively and through the male characters. Sons need a mother in order to define themselves. Yet, they cannot play a dual role; it would overstep the traditional gender representations. This is where the ideological negotiation takes place. The fantasy demonstrates the need for a mother figure, but the break down of the fantasy in each of these texts shows that they may not create this mother from themselves without pulling apart the psyche. Split between playing the mother and the son, each character shows varying levels of insanity or mental instability. Characters who find a replacement mother figure in reality to fulfill the holes in the National Family Allegory, such as Jake in *Eureka Street* or Bloom in *Ulysses*, return to a stable life. The characters who do not, such as Pussy in *Breakfast on Pluto*, go insane. Not only do the novels have an interest in filling in the missing members of any family, but the pattern the texts demonstrate imply that these roles must be filled by the proper gender. Substitution of the mother with a real, female figure can work for a male character without damaging or splitting the self (as shown in Chapter III), but using the son character to recreate the mother does not. This demonstrates the National Family Allegory's investment in keeping gender roles status quo using fear of the destruction of the self as a controlling force. Ultimately, sons cannot be mothers, nor can they function without them.

Neither can sons be fathers without a real mother figure to have their children. All three fantasizing protagonists demonstrate one aspect of traditional father figures, a need

for legacy.²⁴ Yet, the ultimate and farcical “perfection” of the children shows the impossibility of the spontaneous child creation, which makes it less about having children and more about the need for males to recreate themselves. Since most of the protagonists who fantasize about having children on their own are victims of childhood loss of the mother and lack of stable family structure, this father-need to spring forth perfect children often represents a way of parenting themselves, creating a self that they can love and take care of in ways that they were lacking in their own lives.

On a national level, a missing mother figure would allegorically represent a missing sense of nation. Mother is nation. Young men without a nation to sacrifice themselves for have no national purpose to their roles. Hence, these young male characters are inevitably stuck in the mythos of the past, wishing for a revolutionary purpose, a way to save the nation that does not exist in contemporary culture. The need to “parent themselves,” fix their traumatic pasts that destroyed the nation, represents that national need to deal with a violent and traumatic national past and to great a new identity for young during the more peaceful present times.

History of Male Maternity

Masculine spontaneous child creation and male maternity occur in literary fiction across cultures and with relative frequency.²⁵ International mythology and religions

²⁴ The characteristic attributed to father figures is discussed at length in Chapter V.

²⁵ For one of the more known examples, Athena sprang fully formed and often fully armored from Zeus’s head in Greek mythology (Morford & Lenardon 133). As one interpretation of the myth’s purpose, Greek patriarchs could use this myth to prove that women were not the only ones able to give birth and therefore, could strip women of their importance in propagating the human race. Ra, in Egyptian myth, is sole creator for the people of his land through masturbation. “Ignoring the clamor all around him, Ra withdrew and gave himself over to the pleasures of his own hands. All alone he gave birth to a multitude of children, men and women whom he named the “Remit,” like-wise called humanity” (Houston 30). Meanwhile, due

provide a large number of literary examples of male child creation, but science fiction and popular culture have instances of male maternity as well.²⁶ In current times, fan fiction, mostly Internet based, offers similar types of depictions.²⁷

Speculations on the motivation for such depictions vary. “Womb envy” or the male desire to experience the power of creation has been suggested.²⁸ Certainly, men wanting

to a prophecy that one of his sons would kill him, Nut (sometimes referred to as Nu or Nun), Ra’s wife is not allowed to give birth to Ra’s children. Cultures other than the Greeks and Egyptians had myths or stories that include male maternity or a sole male propagating the species. The following are a few examples. In Hindu belief, Brahma, the “creator god,” gave birth to sons who were “‘manas-putra,’ or mind-sons.” They are born “from Brahma’s mind and not his body” (“Brahma”). Creation through the mind is not a new idea. Writers are often spoken about metaphorically as “giving birth to” an idea or a work, and Brahma’s story falls into that category. In African mythology, Faro is the “sky and water god of the Bambara people. He became pregnant by the rocking of the universe, and he gave birth to various twins, the ancestors of the human race” (“Faro”). In Norse mythology, a giant named Ymir (sometimes spelled Ymer) created a man and a woman from the sweat of his armpits and was an ancestor of Odin, god of war, wisdom, and magic (“The Creation;” Utenriksdepartementet). Both the African and Norse, like the Greek and Egyptian, allow men to be the creators of the entire race of man and therefore, usurp woman’s power. In Japanese mythology, “Izanagi, in deep sorrow at the passing of his goddess, journeyed after her to the land of death. Upon his return to the upper world he bathed himself at Ahagiwara in Tachibana Bay...while thus cleansing himself, he gave birth to the Heaven-Shining Goddess who by the explicit command of her father-God, came to rule the Heavenly Plain for all time to come” (Debary 16). Izanagi, being able to have a daughter without his “goddess,” can make up for his tragic loss by creating a new loved one.

²⁶ Director Ivan Reitman’s 1994 film *Junior* uses fictional advances in biological science to explain how Arnold Schwarzenegger’s character is impregnated in an experiment to see whether male pregnancy and birth is a viable option. The film utilizes humor foremost, which is achieved by coupling a visually masculine, large, muscular main character and his feminine behavior. The film represents the hopes and fears of pregnancy and birth, depicting morning sickness and labor, as well as the emotional responses to the growing bond between “mother” and child. It represents as well the collected societal fears of science interfering with the human body and reproduction.

²⁷ In art and writing, what is called in slang as “Mpreg,” is featured on quite a few sites and in different forms. The most complete definition of “Mpreg” available is as follows:

The term is short for Male Pregnancy and is most often used in fan fiction to describe the surprising occurrence of pregnant males. It is most typically seen in male/male pairing, but has occasionally sprung up in other situations. Is most commonly used as an adjective (“Mpreg”)

Harry Potter characters and anime are the most utilized for Mpreg works on the Internet at the present time. For example, one website offered a story where Snape had an affair with Fred and George, the twins from *Harry Potter*, and became pregnant from the interlude. As the definition describes, the stories more often than not are homosexual in nature and the level of sexual description or depiction varies. It seems that the creators are generally more interested in the idea of the pregnancy or depicting the pregnant male, rather than birth or child rearing. From the number of websites dedicated to Mpreg works, it seems that there does exist a modern interest in male maternity.

²⁸ Perreault considers this concept of “joy or power” in imagined maternity within “Male Maternity in Ulysses.”

to understand an experience that they are not capable of having would explain a fictional curiosity or desire. According to Freud, “Sexual or life instincts” oppose “the ego or death instincts” in their opposite aims (52), and even fictional or fantastical creation may serve the purpose of seeking balance in the psyche between the two. Any and all of these mental processes may be at work, possibly simultaneously, within the fictional or real psyche of the male creator/protagonist. However, these psychological needs are not the center of the Irish novel’s interests in the National Family Allegory structure; they are merely catalysts that serve the greater need to recreate a stable, traditional family structure.

Other speculation with implications for the Irish uses of this myth interprets these depictions as a misogynistic need to eliminate the woman from the creation process. Jeanne Perreault makes a case for this type of misogyny in regards to re-birth or the process of being “born again” in Christianity: “Apparently the facts of biology are a profound humiliation to the fathers of Christianity, and in the mystical-rebirth process they are able to transcend nature and eliminate the dependency on the female” (305). This could easily also be applied to the Greek and Egyptian mythological instances, among others, due to the fact that these myths also spring from religious practices, and certainly, misogyny does seem an appropriate motivation in these international examples. However, Irish novels by male authors are not misogynistic, even though they utilize some of the same qualities.

There is a certain element of this within the Irish texts, particularly in the ways in which in attempting to rectify a childhood trauma or one caused by a mother figure, the

protagonists are giving birth to themselves or re-writing their lives through the fantasy of childbirth; this creates a “re-birth” for themselves. They *do* eliminate the mother from the process; however, she is always the one who let them down or abandoned them first. It is love for the mother figure, a need for her in their lives that drives the protagonists. Even though this type of removal of the mother from the process of childbirth is represented, because the mother is treated as a central, often sacred figure in all of the literary texts, the elimination is not portrayed as malicious or misogynistic. Rather, it is a type of mother worship.

Another possible explanation is that the Irish novelists are attempting to reject the feminization of the nation in the British colonial rhetoric. Since the “Mother Ireland” myth and the family roles that come from it solidified during colonization, the lack of a mother figure may be an attempt to rewrite the cultural mythos without the victim figure. Their repeated reenactment does allow a space for the reader to question the Allegory roles. Yet, in relation to male pregnancy, it tends to be the opposite. Rather than questioning the allegory, it demonstrates a need for these very gender and generational roles to remain in tact.

These Irish texts grapple with a colonized past, where first the nation was forcefully colonized and then demanded self-sacrifice of its citizens in the independence movement. It is the essential trauma of the violence of both colonization and independence that authors attempt to combat by rewriting these national myths in new forms. Irish literary versions of this prolific myth/fiction are different from those of other national representations due to its mother centrality. The Irish myth has all the political and

national ramifications of the other international creation myths, but with the added demand for the victimization of Mother Ireland's sons.

It is in relationship to this absence or loss of the mother figure that all three works represent fantasies of giving birth; therefore, the explanation for the motivation of each character may include displacing female power or craving the impossible experience or even fighting the death drive, but as an Irish allegory, the national identity is the most important motivation. In three representative cases examined in this chapter, the abandonment or loss of the mother figure takes place chronologically before the novel begins, but the protagonist brings the reader into his crisis by repeating it in various incarnations, some of which are disguised. Male characters in Irish post-independence literature do not work through their trauma related to mother abandonment or seem to understand how to make the "feedback loop" stop on their childhood lost, so the cycles continue and past and present collide mentally. In fact, each novel suggests the repetitions are continuous and unending; the characters have not faced their history of loss or on the national level, the traumatic past of colonization and revolution. Instead of mourning or grieving and letting the traumatic event or events be some recognizable part of the past, those past events, personal and national, become internalized and displaced. They are constantly reminded of the breakdown of their family structure.

Since the child or self-as-mother objects are an external representation of an internal struggle and the objects can never actually *be* the protagonist or change past experience, nothing actually changes. Substitution works only to allow a type of expression for the

protagonist's trauma, creating a false sense of power over a past where he was not in control. It is only a momentary fulfillment of the National Family Allegory, but never a working through and moving on to create a new personal or national identity. If the protagonists were working through their mother loss, there would be a clear difference between past and present and not a conflation of the two. Instead the Irish narrative repeats in new forms a compulsory ideological script of national identity, allowing the protagonists to try on each of the National Family Allegory roles, which demonstrates the need for these roles in the formation of a stable identity. It is the need to have control over those who abandoned him that allows him to create the traditional family that he could never have and ensures a fictitious future legacy, a copy of himself that has a stable family.

“Five Years Old and Reading Pushkin”: Jake’s Response to Foster Care

In McLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street*, Jake was removed from his biological parents at the age of fifteen to be placed into foster care. He describes this by saying, “When all the bad stuff happened with my real folks, the cops and the social workers’ nabbed me” (103). Jake never reveals what events are represented by the “bad stuff,” which indicates his repression of the incidents of his early life and the severity of his early home situation, a representation of anything but a stable family structure. The choice of the word “nabbed” implies that he was taken by force and without consent. Jake’s foster parents, Matt and Mamie, later describe his state when he first came to live with them as being like a “wolf-boy,” and his most poignant moment on his first night there was the fact that his foster parents had put a blanket on his bed (103). By this, the author implies

that his biological parents' home was not equipped with even the basic amenities, and that Jake was neglected, most likely physically and emotionally. There are hardly any details of his childhood in the text, indicating by omission the character's severe repression. Without a stable family structure, Jake's character lacks a way to define himself as a son figure and this emptiness, need to replace the mother, continues into his adulthood.

The author can be imagined as subverting the traditional story of a Mother Ireland who demands the sacrifice of her sons by removing the child from the abusive home and in doing so, removing the biological mother figure. Without a mother figure, the National Family Allegory should collapse. However, the reconfiguration of Mother Ireland occurs when Jake fantasizes ways to fix the trauma of the past by casting himself as a loving mother. The only stable parental structure offered by the novel is that of the traditional family in which the abuse (either fictional or political) occurred in the first place or the foster family to which Jake never really belongs. The abusive home may even represent the Ireland under colonial rule, since we can read nation as home.

The ideological negotiation of the lack of Mother Ireland figure resurfaces in images of creating his own spontaneous children, spurred on by the news that his friend Chuckie is about to become a father. Chuckie's status as a father-to-be is simply the catalyst for Jake's reliving of his trauma, which is double because Jake has also never recovered from his girlfriend, Sarah, who not only left him but also went to England to have an abortion without his knowledge. This is a second loss of a Mother Ireland figure for Jake. Yet,

Jake does not deal with his double trauma directly, but instead through a much more implicit repetition of loss and abandonment:

It was my big secret. I was hilariously broody. I desperately wanted to procreate. It was a need in me that made me sweat in the middle of the night. For months I had been assailed by dreams of ready-made sons and daughters arriving on my doorstep (importantly motherless), five years old and already reading Pushkin. Roche would never constitute an adequate substitute for the beribboned marvels of my fantasies. It was one of the reasons that I was pissed at Sarah. I couldn't live with the thought of her killing the kid (309)

In order to attempt to rectify his own childhood experiences, Jake repeatedly creates and chooses objects, both in fantasy and reality, to replace what has been lost, both in his own childhood and in the loss of his child, which seem to be conflated. His idea of instant parental status, "ready-made" children, is a way for Jake vicariously to create an imagined childhood that he can control, since as the only parent, he can assume that the child's early life would be better than his own had been. Since Jake did not know that Sarah was pregnant when she went to England to have the abortion, he had no control over the termination of the pregnancy and, possibly influenced by Catholicism, this serves as a secondary trauma that dredges up the first and negates his fledgling sense of self-control. It also functions to show that Jake could have had the traditional Family structure, but without it, his life spins out of control. He must continually suffer the loss of a child, the hallmark of his traumatic repetition, because no object substitution will allow him to mourn his losses or to create a whole traditional family unit. There is an

attempt to subvert the ideology of the traditional Family here by the narrative's negation of the two mother figures, Jake's biological mother and Sarah as mother, but the novel cannot seem to save itself from presenting any biological and realistic alternative as disastrous. He cannot move on due to the fact that he is conflating his past and the current situations.

The children are also perfect, as we will see in all three of the novels discussed in this chapter. Jake's are exceptionally intelligent and cultured, "five years old and already reading Pushkin" (309). They represent a legacy for Jake, and therefore, they must be extraordinary in some way, a representation of himself perfected, which may be the author's reminder, possibly created subconsciously, of just how impossible Jake's fantasy is and how important the mother figure is to the family structure.

When Jake meets twelve-year old Roche, Jake sees him as a son, as well as a version of himself, another conflation of past and present. He, like Jake, is missing the traditional structure of the National Family Allegory roles, so he chooses him as a substitute for himself and his own aborted child. Jake tells himself, "Mathematically, I could have been this kid's father" (203), and Roche acknowledges this same attempt on Jake's part when he asks him, "What are you like my dad now or something?" (303). Jake, however, is not Roche's father, who beats him, or his mother, who is never mentioned within the text ("importantly motherless"). Jake unofficially adopts Roche, even allowing him to stay at his apartment and buying him clothes (301 – 304). Jake points out the similarities between the way he grew up and Roche's broken family structure: "I came from a place just like this" (205). Roche's life mirrors Jake's, even in his eventual placement in foster

care. In sheltering Roche, Jake is moving toward a family that he never had, although it cannot be complete because there is no mother figure. This family does not sustain itself for long within the novel, perhaps because it does not fit the National Family Allegory structure in that neither Jake nor Roche has a mother figure to base their identity around.

Jake's fear of abandonment and feelings of loss of the Mother figure include Sarah, his ex-girlfriend. The narrative begins six months after Sarah's departure, and at several points, he reminisces about how he felt with her:

I loved her more than I thought was legal. The sight of her handwriting made my eyes fill with reasonless tears. When I heard sirens I convinced myself that they were ambulances going to the site where her shattered body lay. Sometimes at night, when she slept and I couldn't, I lay with my arms around her, just loving her. I felt that if I had a zipper running down the front of me from throat to belly I would unzip myself and cram her inside and zip her up in there. I could never hold her close enough (73)

Without a woman to have as a mother figure to sacrifice himself for, Jake cannot be whole. Yet even while he was with her, he imagined the possibility of her abandonment of him, most likely because of his abandonment by his mother in his early childhood, and through her pregnancy she does double as a second mother figure.

His description in this passage resembles a reverse pregnancy since he wants to place her inside himself above his belly, although without the images of eventual birth. If his fantasy were possible, then Sarah would be unable to leave him, which would counteract his fears and the abandonment that he feels from childhood, when he lost his parents and

the traditional family structure. Also, Jake can only think of love in the terms of a parent loving a child, not as two lovers as partners, an obsession about having roles that fit the National Family Allegory that overshadows any other type of relationship. In another similar passage, Jake says, "Since then, I'd been sitting alone late at night, smoking, wondering what it was like to be her" (74). He repeatedly wonders not only what she is doing, but also fantasizes about "being" her, a mother figure and therefore, what he is lacking. However, these fantasies, being impossible, serve only to remind him that he cannot hold on to her because she is already gone, so Jake brings her back in fantasy, only to lose her repeatedly. Substitute objects and situations are cathartic to a certain degree, since they do allow for the repressed trauma to come forth in a subconsciously twisted form. However, these objects, including Jake's imaginary children, can never replace those absent. The novel implies that he needs an actual traditional family in reality in order to be whole, which the text moves toward but only much later in the narrative.

The novel, particularly placing Chuckie's happiness in his girlfriend's pregnancy in juxtaposition to Jake's unfulfilled life, implies that happiness is found in the traditional National Family Allegory structure. Try as he might, Jake never succeeds in creating one for himself, but the fact that by the end he has found a new girlfriend, who has the potential of being a mother and creating a family with him, allows there to be a type of possible family. Jake is headed in that direction as the novel ends, giving the hope that the National Family Allegory will be reconstructed for Jake and therefore, he will have a Mother Ireland to sacrifice himself for or he will become a father figure, fulfilling his

legacy. If it is possible for him to have a family of his own, the novel implies, then Jake will be healed and all will be well. The fantasy is only temporary, and one character can not fulfill all the traditional family roles himself. The absence of Jake's family in the novel shows the consequences for not having the conservative family structure, a miserable existence, which is rectified by the potential at least, for him to have the conservative family structure in reality through his new woman object. The National Family Allegory roles can not be fulfilled by those who do not fit its gender and generational categorizations, nor can it be created in fantasy. Stability of identity occurs only when these roles are fulfilled by proper characters, even if those characters are not biologically related to the protagonist.

On a national level, Jake's character represents a generation of young men with no nation for which to fight and therefore, a difficulty in self-definition because of this. It also demonstrates that the gender and generational roles of the National Family Allegory do not allow for cross-gendering or for one person to fulfill a multitude of roles. There is a cultural investment for young men to find a national cause in order to fulfill their traditional savior son roles and for the nation to deal with its own traumatic past, the equivalent of Jake's biological parent home. In this case, the potential for traditional family structure develops a sense of identity for the protagonist, but this is not always true for post-Independence novels.

“He's Ours”: Pussy's Dreams of Motherhood

In Patrick McCabe's novel, *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), just such a rape narrative forms the central trauma of a text that compulsively repeats the tragedy of colonization.

No matter how its figures seek to subvert the compulsory narrative, the novel returns to the need for the National Family Allegory. The protagonist, Pussy's, mental instability is directly linked to his lack of traditional family structure as his obsession for his mother and anger toward his father (who represents the Catholic Church as well because he is a priest) consume Pussy and lead to his eventual institutionalization. As a national allegory, Mother Ireland and the Catholic Church (as father) have both abandoned the son, who still wants to save the nation but has no productive outlet to do so.

In a fashion similar to McLiam Wilson's main character, Patrick McCabe's biologically male protagonist deals his loss of traditional family through fantasies of impossibly born children.²⁹ Like Jake, Pussy's early childhood trauma was being placed in foster care, and his maternal fantasies are directly tied to the loss of his mother, who in his mind represents a sense of belonging, acceptance, and home (allegorically as nation). Pussy's sexual identity as a transvestite prostitute combined with his early childhood abandonment creates difficulties for him in finding acceptance, especially in a small, Irish town. As a National Allegory, the text implies that Mother Ireland is unable to take care of her sons and the colonial state serves as an inadequate substitute.

Pussy rejects two different mother figures as replacement objects for his mother, and then his search for a new object turns narcissistic as his mental capacity to separate fantasy from reality crumbles. He cannot find a traditional family structure, and the foster care system does not provide him with a substitute, as Pussy will not accept anyone as his

²⁹ I chose to use the masculine pronoun in my discussion of McCabe's male homosexual transvestite due to his biological gender. The fact that Pussy is biologically male but considers herself to be female throughout most of the novel makes the pronoun choice problematic. Yet, I prefer to use one pronoun in my discussion to facilitate easier reading.

mother but the biological one. Because of this, he wants to become the mother that he never had. In order to do this, Pussy both reconstructs and relives aspects of his mother's life, repeating the mother's traumatic rape, and eventually acting in revenge against his father for that rape. The narrative reenacts the national myth, the rape of Mother Ireland by the father, although it replaces Britain as controlling force with the Catholic Church.³⁰ This replacement implies that the Catholic Church has a defining control over Irish identity. It is also ironic, as Britain was portrayed as feminizing the Irish during colonial rhetoric, and for Pussy, it is his femininity (cross dressing) that Father Bernard most rejects. He also never claims him as his son since having a sexual encounter (and much more perpetrating a rape) would be inappropriate for a priest, making Pussy a bastard child.

The hatred for his father stems from the feeling of childhood loss as well. Pussy feels that his father raping his mother precluded him from having a normal life and a real home, so the rape becomes his focus. For Pussy, accepting rage for the mother is a mental defense against accepting his own feelings of loss. Also, without a traditional Family structure, the character loses his sanity. He, like Jake, never acknowledges the real reason (although the narrative itself does point to his lack of family) for his psychic trauma and therefore, cannot move on from ever escalating cycle of repetition. In this case the repetition is both of his own trauma and of his mother's, and, unlike Jake's,

³⁰ Chapter V discusses in detail the ways in which the different types of father figures are portrayed. Father figures are utilized as symbolic of forces of control over Irish moral and cultural standards and as a representation of "the law". Although Britain and the Church use different means of control and are different entities, they are represented similarly due and the ideological negotiation of the protagonists with their controlling power.

Pussy's repetitions lead to madness and the obvious unreliability of the protagonist as narrator.

According to Pussy, his foster mother, whom he refers to as "Whiskers" and "Hairy Ma" repeatedly, fails to fulfill his need for a mother figure. When Whiskers finds Pussy dressing in female clothing, she slaps him and cries, which reinforces Pussy's feelings of alienation (13). When reminiscing about his discussion with his psychiatrist, Terrence, in the mental institution, Pussy says, "One of his favourite pieces of all and he used to keep asking me to show it to him was the bit about Whiskers although he knew that strictly speaking he should have been encouraging me not to call her that – (after all, to him she *was* my mother)" (4). The psychiatrist, in a somewhat humorous cliché, attempts to treat Pussy by discussing his mother, but Terrence does not understand Pussy's reaction to his early abandonment and his viewpoint on Whiskers' authenticity as mother. The fact that Terrence repeatedly comes back to the subject of Pussy's mother may indicate for the reader that the psychiatrist feels that the foster home environment and Whiskers' mothering were important to both the psychological problems and the development of the present Pussy figure and supports the idea that without a traditional family structure, a person's identity will crumble. Yet, the use of italics on the word "was" (included in the original text) demonstrates Pussy's rejection of Whiskers as a mother object. Not only is it past tense, but also it is only *to Terrence* that Whiskers ever could "be" or "have been" Pussy's actual mother. Terrence does not see that the biological mother is the *only* one

that Pussy considers to be genuine.³¹ For Pussy, Motherhood is not a “role” to be played, but something that must be real and biological in order to be authentic.³² He is on a continual quest to find his “real” mother, and Pussy rejects Whiskers for not living up to his biological mother, which Whiskers can not possibly ever hope to achieve due to the fact that Pussy idealizes her. Ironically, the mother that he never knew and therefore can never replace is the most authentic for him. Thus even in a narrative written from the perspective of a potentially subversive Irish Catholic transvestite prostitute, the lack of an intact, biological family haunts the narrative.

In another brief diversion from himself as mother object, Pussy engages in an Oedipal fantasy with Louise, his boyfriend’s landlady, which places Pussy in the role of a male son. These are the only scenes in which Pussy takes on a male persona and accepts briefly a substitute mother object voluntarily. Louise, who has lost her son, Shaunie, uses Pussy in a similar fashion as a replacement for her dead son; both were trying to replace the missing family structure. “With [Louise] it was her son, with me a mother – it was the same thing all in all” (91). Through the double role playing, Pussy and Louise create

³¹ This is unusual for an Irish text of this nature. Often, motherless Irish protagonists will choose mother figures not biologically related and sometimes even of different nationalities, races, and other variables. In general, biology does not seem to matter to the male figure, but for Pussy this is different. Perhaps since he is the only one of the three protagonists discussed in the chapter that is actually insane, the implication is that if another figure, a substitute mother in this case, is not accepted by a male figure, then he will become mentally unstable. The National Family has to be reconstituted in some way or identity is lost entirely causing insanity.

³² Pussy focuses on becoming a biological woman and often ties this to motherhood. Yet, he does not discuss undergoing surgery himself, but instead seems to wish for some natural way to just become biologically female. He wants to have “stomach labors,” or in other words, natural childbirth. A second reference occurs when Charlie, Pussy’s female friend, points out that Pussy’s wish is to become biologically female: “[Charlie] just laughed and said: ‘No! Why should I! When all you want is the impossible – a vagina all of your own!’ And to that – what could I possibly say when it was true?” (36). In Pussy’s mind, biology is directly connected to both femininity and motherhood, and this contributes to Pussy’s inability to find an adequate substitute mother figure and his need to actually “become” his mother later in the novel.

a mother/son relationship. While not traditional in the strictest sense, it is a recreation of a type of family structure, briefly reconstructing what both had lost. Even after Pussy's boyfriend discovers him in boy's clothes, sucking Louise's nipple and calling her "mammy," which causes him to leave the relationship, Pussy continues with the fantasy rather than returning to the female sexual persona. The incident does, however, allow Pussy to begin to doubt the choice of mother object:

The only thing about it being that somewhere at the back of my mind, I kept thinking: 'You shouldn't be doing this, as you well know. She's not your mammy. If she wants you to be her son, that's fine. But she's not your mammy.

Your mammy was special...no one- no one! – could ever take her place (93)

Yet, Pussy only becomes dissatisfied with the fantasy enough to leave the relationship when he discloses to Louise the idealized description of his imagined biological mother, and Louise attempts to become her in dress and manner (115). Pussy's fantasy of having *a* mother comes to a halt when Louise wants to be *his* mother. This hits too close to home, and he severs all ties with Louise and all mother objects that are not his biological mother or herself. Pussy seems to realize subconsciously that "no one" could ever take his mother's place, except for himself.

Pussy's imaginings focus on reconstructing his mother's life, avenging her trauma, and becoming his mother himself. Terrence, Pussy's therapist, directly traces this need to repeat and imagine his mother's life to the trauma of abandonment in his early life.

Pussy recounts the conversation: "I think the truth, Patrick? I can hear [Terrence] saying, 'is that maybe you always secretly wanted to *become* her, Eily. After all – she

could hardly walk away then” (95). (This is quite similar to Jake’s need to place Sarah inside of him). If the male protagonist could become the woman/mother figure, whether in part or as a whole, then he cannot be abandoned, and his role as son is secure. This fear of abandonment and need for family drives Pussy constantly to create larger and more fantastic fantasies and reconstructions, as well as pushing him into situations in his own life that resemble the mother’s.

In a narrative, presumably written for his therapist, Pussy devotes seven pages to the detailed description of Father Bernard’s rape of Eily Bergen, his mother.³³ As far as the reader knows, Pussy should have no information about these details, since he only found out that Father Bernard was his father from Whiskers, who would not be privy to that detailed information. Since Pussy is born as a result of the rape, he would have no first hand knowledge. Hence, the reader can infer that the description is entirely a fantasy of his own making.

The author’s craft in this narrative is in the details. Pussy imagines his mother dressed conservatively in a housecoat, since she is working as a housekeeper for the priest, and that the rape takes place during breakfast, while Eily serves sausages to the Father. Pussy internalizes these details and makes them fact, although the reader knows that the description is pure fantasy. The idea of “breakfast” is tied to the title, *Breakfast on Pluto*, an allusion to a 1969 pop song about escapism, metaphorically shown as floating through space, which might imply an escape of the spirit from the body, as well

³³ Placing the rape of the Mother figure on the Catholic Church rather than British colonization is a political move, whether or not McCabe was conscious of the conflation that the novel creates. Yet, as I explain in Chapter V, often both the Church and Britain function as controlling forces for the nation, and it is not unusual for some contemporary Irish novels to conflate them due to this.

as simply leaving his current environment. Pussy's depiction of his mother's reaction to the rape is a similar type of escapism, feeling as if she leaves her body and watches the rape from outside of herself. The internalized connection for Pussy between "breakfast" and rape repeats later in the novel in scenes with Louise and the therapist (115). The choice of sausages as the meal appears phallic, placing the idea of consumption in the forefront of the scene, as both Eily and, later, Pussy's life are "consumed" by the actions of the father that day.

The story grows in each successive repetition. A later recounting of the incident includes the pregnancy and birth, as well as the details of the rape, and represents a greater wish fulfillment for Pussy. In her account, Eily exclaims, "I want to keep him! I want to keep my baby! ...But she couldn't do that!" (129). In this case, it is Pussy's voice, not Eily's, which focuses on the impossibility of Eily raising the child as her own. In fact, Pussy speaking in his own voice demonstrates the inability of him to keep up the fantasy and his need for his mother not to have abandoned him. Pussy creates a mother who was forced by outside influence to relinquish her child, which allows Pussy to believe that his mother did want him, which negates his greatest fear.

Another repetition negates the earlier "breakfast" and escapism ideas and functions to allow Pussy to feel accepted for his transvestitism. This repetition of the same theme goes back in time and allows Eily, at an unspecified time, to go claim her son from Whiskers. When asked about her son wearing dresses, Eily states, "You simply wear them because that's just how you are!" (150). Then the two of them leave, "Together out across the stars, all the time in the universe ours, making up for what we'd lost. And

going where we'd want to!" (150). Although this fantasy does not repeat the rape sequences, it is related to it through the song-like quality of the language and its similarity to the lyrics of the song, "Breakfast on Pluto," as quoted at the beginning of the novel. Here, the same "visiting the stars" concept of escapism found in the breakfast reference and included in the text of the first created rape sequence transforms it into a pleasurable and wish-fulfilling experience. This repetition comes closest to fulfilling his traditional son role, but succeeds only in conquering Pussy's fear of non-acceptance in his own mind and only briefly. The fantasy creates a perfect and accepting Mother object for the moment and allows him to play the good son role, but it cannot last as a replacement for his loss. None of the repetitions can. Still, a fetish-like quality exists in Pussy's belief that the description that he created *is* the way it occurred, even though the story changes in small ways each time, which influences both his actions and his choice of revenge.³⁴

Almost all of Pussy's more narcissistic fantasies of himself as mother are sexual in nature, possibly a response to the fact that the Oedipal stages were not played out during his childhood.³⁵ In this way, he replaces himself for the mother that he would have had as a sexual object with himself and attempts to kill his father. Another example of Pussy as sexual mother occurs in a scene with Pussy's first boyfriend, who he calls Dummy Teats.

³⁴ The early definitions of a "fetish" refer to objects that were thought to have supernatural powers and worshipped by primitive people. It later became something "irrationally revered." However, Freud later defined it as an inanimate object or body part that was used in order to bring about sexual desire ("Fetish"). Pussy's engaging in sexualized fantasies with Louise in combination with his creation of his mother in fantasy, including her rape in detail, allow for her to function as the object of Pussy's fetish. He imbues his fantasy with power of his own making and then worships it as if it is true.

³⁵ When Pussy creates himself as mother, he moves himself into the center of his own fantasy. Up until this point, Pussy has allow his fantasy mother to be the center of his attention and worship, but by moving himself into this position, he begins to make himself larger-than-life. His life is consumed with himself as Eily.

He introduces the idea of Pussy as mother: “‘Oh, Mammy!’ he’d say when he got in one of his moods and I came up with this idea of inserting my thumb into his mouth” (34). Yet, Pussy immediately accepts the sexual role-playing. It is possible that this role-playing is a catalyst for future imaginings.

Soon after the aforementioned scene, he begins to have repeated fantasies of being biologically female and naturally giving birth to a family all his own:

-thinking to myself how if I did manage to get a vagina, one thing I was certain of, and I didn’t care even who it was with, was that I wanted at least ten of a family...each one of them from my hard stomach labors so lovingly sprung...And who would ever to deny it dare? To say: ‘They are not hers. For she has no vagina!’ (40-41).

Again, the progression of imaginings becomes more complicated and moves toward creating himself as the more authentic or realistic mother figure, his own Mother Ireland. For Pussy, this fantasy moves beyond role-playing because he acts for his mother; it becomes real. Although here the vagina is a means to an end, allowing Pussy to become the biological embodiment of his mother and to build the family that he never had, it is also symbolically tied to being a “real” woman. It is interesting that Pussy believes that gender is not performative but instead biological. Of course, this is the one thing that Pussy cannot be. Even if he did have surgery and receive female anatomy, he would not be able to have “stomach labors” or be a natural mother. In fantasy, though, as the mother, Pussy can be certain that “everyone would my children love for they themselves knew love and shared it” (41). He also imagines all ten children around his deathbed

reveling in all the love they had during their lives, a metaphorical representation of his legacy. What Pussy seems to want most here is to become that perfect, idealized mother that he continually imagines his own mother to be. He wants to give love to a child. In this way, he is countering his own childhood trauma, using the children as a substitute object in order to become a mother to himself, the real desire underlying the fantasies.

A mirrored fantasy occurs in the last scene, as Pussy imagines not his death surrounded by loving family, but the birth of a child:

Maybe one day taking the time to write it down for Terrence, what my fondest wish would be (he asked me to – even though he’ll never see it now) – to wake up in the hospital with my family all around me, exhausted after my ordeal maybe, but with a bloom like roses on my cheeks, as I stroke his soft and tender head, my little baby, watching them as they beam with pride, in their eye perhaps a tear or two – who cares! – hardly able to speak as they wipe it away and say! ‘He’s ours.’ (199).

His statement presents a balance between abandonment and belonging. Terrence, his therapist, left the hospital before his treatment ended, causing him to feel as if the therapist left him specifically. Yet, he still feels the compulsion to give birth to his fantasy in writing, which is what the narrative does, even if Terrence would never see it. These images, like those above, create him as a loving mother of a biologically impossible child. Also, Pussy’s choice of gender for the child combined with his earlier expression of a wish to belong may make this image an attempt to place himself, since he is biologically male, as his own child. The male child that is “ours” is given the

acceptance that Pussy never felt he had. This child has a stable and loving family structure, which is Pussy's greatest wish; it is also a picture perfect example of the National Family Allegory at work.

Pussy's obsession influences his analysis of his "real" life as well. While working as a prostitute, a customer, who Pussy nicknames "Silky String," attempts to rape and strangle Pussy (65-66). During the attack, Pussy "seemed to see the inhabitants of Tyreelin," which is Pussy's hometown in Ireland (66). Certainly there is a cliché that when dying, one sees one's life flash before one's eyes, but seeing only the hometown seems unusual. Pussy sees Tyreelin because in his mind he connects his own attack to his mother's rape. Evidence of this occurs later in a fantasy of the perfect family with a child named Patrick, in which his mother's rape and the Silky String episode are conflated:

And now, at last, small Patrick sleeps. The soundest sleep of any toddler since this world of ours began. In the corner – the shadowy figure of a parish priest with his soutane raised and his great big angry tootle glaring out? Of course not, sillies!

The silhouette of a silky man with a silk garrotte who smiles to the strains of a summer song as your last ebb of life chokes out? For heaven's sake! (110-111).

The previous pages show, at length and with a great deal of creative detail, an idealized, perfect family that would fulfill the National Family Allegory. The reality of Pussy's trauma, both his own and the internalization of his mother's, interrupts his dreams in the form of the two lurking figures. More importantly, the fantasy changes the victim in the

priest's attack. Here the intended victim of the priest (previously Pussy's mother) is "small Patrick," and even though the following exclamation negates the possibility of the scenario, it is still an expression of a subconscious fear that Pussy will be the one attacked, and that he will be helpless. This is also a reflection of the helplessness that he felt as a child when he felt abandoned by his mother. Pussy fundamentally believes that this absence is all Father Bernard's fault. When Silky String attempts to kill him, it solidifies in his mind the possibility that his mother's life and his own are similar in their victimization. This passage is representative of Pussy's state of mind. He feels that the Priest and the Strangler are constantly lurking, and he has to protect "small Patrick," himself, from constant danger.

Eventually Pussy's obsessive adoption of his mother's persona turns to revenge against Father Bernard.³⁶ Utilizing the fetishized details of previous fantasies, Pussy becomes the "dark, dreaming Avenger" (176). He dresses in an "old housecoat and head scarf...sporting check yellow blouses and Mitzi Gaynor³⁷ Capri pants" (176-177), the clothing he imagined his mother would wear, in order to confront the priest. In one scene, when the Father would recognize him as his son by exclaiming, "It's him," he fantasizes that he would "open her coat at that precise moment!" and the priest would be shocked (176). This passage seems to indicate that opening the coat would be shocking

³⁶Due to the protagonist's institutionalization and inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, it is difficult for the reader to be certain about whether events in the novel take place within the novel's reality or within Pussy's unstable mind. However, I would argue that whether or not the revenge was actually committed or a figment of Pussy's mind is irrelevant in terms of his way of dealing with the trauma. If he believes that he did confront his father and burn down the church, then in terms of mental state, he did. However, most likely these scenes of confrontation are purely false memories.

³⁷ Pussy conflates Mitzi Gaynor with his mother at several places in the novel. He was told as a child that her mother resembled her.

to Father Bernard, because he would realize that his son was no longer male. The “dark, dreaming Avenger” would not be Pussy in persona, but a reincarnation of Eily, his mother.³⁸ The Avenging Pussy scratches Bernard’s face and then causes his gruesome death:

Not one scrap was to be found, as out in the night a bad bitch burned and burnt it, his poor church to the ground, with petrol splashing about its door and into its heart a bluelit taper thrown across the valley all her madness...as the flames they licked the sky and in her wild and daring eyes, flesh melted on an old man’s bones. ‘You fucking bastard!’ she squealed, bad gremlin on a fern-furzed hill.

‘You fucking fucking bastard! Never will I forgive you! Never never never! (177)

The “bitch,” Pussy, enacts his Oedipal fantasy of patricide and burns down the church with him inside. During this scene he functions as the savior son avenging his mother in her guise. The scene also functions as a further embellishment of the mother persona and shows that without a stable parent structure, Pussy is falling into insanity. If his mother were still around, then it would be possible for her to avenge her rape, but since she is not, Pussy as mother does it for her. Enacting vengeance on his father is a repeated obsession, and six pages previously Pussy says that he is “going to burn your church with you inside it!” (170), making the enacting of this revenge another repetition of the same idea. He blames him for the destruction of any possible traditional and stable family structure.

³⁸ More support for this can be found in the fact that Pussy states that the priest would have seen him “in the mid-fifties and then suddenly...again in 1974” (176-177). March 1955 is Pussy’s birthday (ix). Although Pussy has spent some years in London, the priest would have seen Pussy since 1955, in fact throughout Pussy’s childhood. Hence, the most logical explanation for this would be Pussy assuming his mother’s identity and not the son identity that would have seen his father in the intervening time period.

Pussy's need to become a "real" mother, to act for revenge in the way his mother never could or did, and the need for maternity, to create for himself a family that would love him and children that would be loved, all comes from the same childhood trauma, the destruction of the nuclear family, which he blames entirely on his father, whom he considers to be the sole cause of his mother leaving him after birth. Being abandoned as a child is the focus of Pussy's existence.

Pussy cannot ever fulfill that wish for biological children or to replace his mother, so the trauma will continue to produce hallucinations and other fantastic images. Unlike Jake, he became unable to function sanely in the real world. Through the insanity of the protagonist, the novel also seems to advocate the idea that without a structured and traditional family with mother and father, a son cannot exist; he has no identity of his own. By its absence, the narrative supports that the family is central to mental health and personal growth.

As allegory, the novel shows a nation, controlled and manipulated by the Church, and a young male generation searching for the missing national identity that would solidify his role. Although certainly *Breakfast on Pluto's* protagonist is the most subversive of the typical son role on the surface, as he is a transvestite prostitute, his taking on his mother's persona is a conservative return to both the typical son (as avenger) and mother (as victim) roles.

Madonna and Whore: Leopold Bloom's Loss of Legacy

Published in the same year as independence was gained for Ireland, James Joyce's *Ulysses* offers one of the most experimental revisions of the National Family Allegory

through a traumatic loss culminating in visions of fantasy children. For Leopold Bloom, the loss of his 11-day-old son is unexpectedly conflated with ideas about his own sexuality and an obsession with his wife's impending affair, both of which undermine the functioning family unit. Leopold Bloom had the structure that fits the National Family Allegory, but he loses his position as father with the death of his son, and then loses the wife/mother figure through her infidelity and her refusal to produce another child.³⁹ He is displaced from his Family role, and this displaces his identity as well, creating a need for him to recreate his own family structure, replacing Molly with himself in fantasy and engendering his own children, his own male legacy. It is a rebirth of his identity, a way for him to give birth to perfect male copies, and fulfill the traditional family roles by himself. Bloom's enactment of motherhood reveals a psyche that is saturated with religious imagery, conflates him with Mary, and reveals that he worries about sin and sexuality as connected to his mother role. As discussed in the introduction, it is not unusual for Mother Ireland to be conflated with the Virgin Mary, but Joyce's narrative goes one step further and includes images of prostitutes as well, possibly an allusion to Mary Magdalene. The double representation of Mary-like figures most likely appears due to the fact that Bloom is concerned about his own Mother/Mary figure, Molly, whose sexuality is central to the novel.

The most fantastical of Bloom's traumatic repetitions occurs within the "Circe" section of the novel, where in a surrealist play format, both Bloom's need to substitute his

³⁹ Even though Leopold and Molly Bloom have a daughter, she does not figure into National Family Allegory role. Daughters are considered little women and potential mothers. The text also refers to her as a smaller version of Molly, a copy of her.

dead child with replacement objects and his fears about sexual purity combine. Within the scene, Bloom stands accused by women, ranging from prostitutes to housewives, of a variety of sexual deviances and personal character flaws. These women with varying levels of culturally acceptable sexuality show Bloom's concern for chastity, particularly in regards to paternity. He is taking on the mother role, a replacement for Molly, and whether or not she is committing adultery is foremost on his mind, so the accusations substitute for his own critique of his wife/mother figure. For example, Mrs Bellingham states: "He urged me (stating that he felt it his mission in life to urge me) to defile the marriage bed, to commit adultery at the earliest possible opportunity" (380). Other women then state that he did the same to them. Since Bloom is at present the victim of his wife's sexual behavior, this accusation is an internalization of Bloom's guilt at the destruction of the family unit. He feels that somehow he contributed to her extra-marital relations, and this guilt fuels his fertile imagination. The accusations continue on and off extensively throughout the scene. Bloom is taking on Molly's role as adulterer (even if falsely accused), a first step in becoming her replacement and filling the empty space in the family that her sexual abandonment of him has created.

However, the crux of the "trial" becomes increasingly related to Bloom's gender, and the references to Bloom become a hybrid of masculine and feminine terms until finally Bloom emerges as a full-fledged mother figure. A doctor gives testimony that "Dr Bloom is bisexually abnormal...I have made a pervaginal examination and, after application of the acid test to 1427 anal, axillary, pectoral and pubic hairs, I declare him to be *virgo intacta*" (402). In the logic of dreams and surrealism, the doctor's seemingly

contradictory statement brings about Bloom's transformation. Although the doctor describes Bloom's sins and sexual deviances at length, in looking at his vagina, he declares Bloom to be a virgin. The contradiction can be explained though, if the reader sees the masculine Bloom to be the one who has sinned and has lust, but through becoming a woman, is restored to chastity and sexual purity, a Mary/Mother Ireland figure. That transformation presented in an avant-garde form, nonetheless supports conventional gender ideologies of the National Allegory. The next doctor to speak supports his ability to be both masculine and feminine simultaneously by stating, "Professor Bloom is a finished example of the new womanly man," but uses the image of Bloom as mother most prominently in order to allow the court to forgive him crimes:

Another report states that he was a very posthumous child. I appeal for clemency in the name of the most sacred word our vocal organs have ever been called upon to speak. He is about to have a baby (403)

When Bloom takes on the role of the virgin, and, like Mary, gives birth to miraculous children, his sexual crimes can be forgiven. Through his power to create sons for himself, the conversations about adultery and sexual deviance disappear within the dialogue. He can fulfill the roles of both mother and father briefly, and with the addition of the miraculous children, he can create an entire, stable family himself and reconstitute his broken National Family Allegory.

The sacred word, being singular, most likely would refer to "baby," which is indicative of Bloom's internalization of his loss in reality. The fantasy baby is sacred, both because of his virgin birth in fantasy, but also because somewhere in his mind,

Bloom knows that it is possible to lose a child. The loss has made the baby more valuable. He is conflated with the very children that he will have, and this might represent a re-birth of himself through the birth of a child.

Bloom does not seem to know that he is pregnant when the doctor announces it, and says, “O, I so want to be a mother” (403). It is soon after his statement that he begins what seems to be a quick and painless birth process, which makes it likely that his desire and statement make the birth occur:

(Bloom embraces [Mrs Thornton] tightly and bears eight male yellow and white children. They appear on a redcarpeted staircase adorned with expensive plants. All the octuplets are handsome, with valuable metallic faces, wellmade, respectably dressed and wellconducted, speaking five modern languages fluently and interested in various arts and sciences... They are immediately appointed to positions of high public trust in several different countries as managing directors of banks, traffic managers of railways, chairmen of limited liability companies, vicechairmen of hotel syndicates” (403).

Again, the painless birth is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. Bloom’s fantasy children are unusual, but perfect. Like Jake’s, Bloom’s progeny are already fully formed and well educated. They are full grown and immediately take up positions of power in the adult world, which represents two of Bloom’s major concerns. He wants children that cannot die during childhood, and the added description of “metallic faces” may be a representation of solidly made and armored children, engendered to withstand harm so his stable family structure cannot be destroyed again.

Also, he wants a legacy of financially, socially, and academically successful male heirs. Since Bloom has lost a son, the fact that all eight of the children are male indicates the compensatory nature of his fantasy. Additionally, without a woman participating in the conception or birth, Bloom knows for certain that he is the father of the children, true paternity being on his mind due to Molly's affair.

In contrast to his Madonna role, Bloom's later representations as a woman represent him as having been coerced into the whore role, which is the beginning of his return to reality and realization that his family structure is not able to be reconstituted. This, combined with Bloom's earlier thoughts about Molly, may represent the opposite to the pure mother and shows Bloom's belief that his wife is not only betraying him as a wife, but also as a mother. The "whoremistress," Bella Cohen's description, has masculine overtones, such as the fact that she "has a sprouting mustache" (429). As the scene progresses, she is called Bello and is referred to in masculine pronouns, while Bloom is referred to in feminine ones. In response to Bloom's submissive responses, he/she forces upon him a transformation into a whore:

What you have longed for has come to pass. Henceforth you are unmanned and mine in earnest, a thing under the yoke. Now for your punishment frock. You will shed your male garments...and don the shot silk luxuriously rustling over head and should and quickly too...(points to his whores) As they are not so will you be, wigged, singed, perfumesprayed, ricepowdered, with smoothshaven armpits" (436-437)

The changing of gender pronouns seems to be representative of a change in power. When Bloom enters the whorehouse, he is in the role of a possible patron, but once placed in a feminine role, he no longer has the power. Sexuality in the whorehouse is not indicative of creation, and Bello's ability to "unman" Bloom comes from changing his outward appearance. Although Bloom did say that he would do whatever Bello asked him to do, in this case, he did not ask to be made female or a whore as he expressed his interest in being a mother. He is powerless and being punished. The narrative demonstrates through this scene that Bloom cannot overstep his gendered role in reality.

Yet, this scene expresses another repetition of Bloom's internalized trauma in several ways. Bloom thinks about Molly as a prostitute at several points throughout the narrative, usually only in speculation and in trying to construct what he believes is going on in his bedroom at that time. Again, this is a reaction to his wanting a stable family structure with certainty in his fatherhood. For example, Bloom thinks:

Ten bob I got for Molly's combings when we were on the rocks in Holles street. Why not? Suppose he gave her money. Why not? All a prejudice. She's worth ten, fifteen, more, a pound. What? I think so. All that for nothing. Bold hand: Mrs Marion...Shark liver oil they use to clean. Could do it myself. Save. Was that just when he, she?

O, he did. Into her. She did. Done (302-303)

In the rambling narrative, Bloom is constructing a possible sexual encounter for his wife, but also speculating on whether or not her lover would give her money, meaning that she would be taking on a role temporarily as a prostitute. This allows his previous

hallucination of himself as mother/whore to become a conflation of himself and Molly. His Mother Ireland is described as a prostitute and this is problematic for the National Family Allegory, where she should be a virgin mother. Another example is when he thinks, “Petticoats for Molly. She has something to put in them. What’s that? Might be money” (312). In obsessively reconstructing the lovers’ possible sexual acts and speculating that Molly may be sexual for profit, Bloom allows her image to conflate with the prostitutes of his imaginings. The narrative equates her genitals and money; both are things that she could put in her petticoats. Molly, he fears, has all of the power, and her “prostitution” has “unmanned” him and stripped him of his father role.

In the Madonna and the whore scenes, purity and birth are oppositional to sexuality and deviance and shown as destructive forces to the traditional family structure. Molly can no longer be the pure and chaste mother for Bloom, and this mentally, once and for all, precludes him from having any more children with her to replace the son that died. She also refuses to have any more children outright. His hope of re-birth is gone. His fantasy of himself as mother disintegrates, leaving only the images of himself as whore as the chapter winds down and reality begins to set in. The “Bloom as mother” scene highlights, by pointing out the impossibility of his giving birth, Bloom’s powerlessness to create a family in reality. By the end of the novel, Bloom returns home to his wife, and the audience never sees whether the family structure can be reconstituted, but his return to the home allows him to avoid the type of madness that Pussy suffers.

On a national level, Bloom’s imaginary births demonstrate a paternal (those in power) fear of lineage, need for legacy, and the helplessness of masculine roles to ensure

the legitimacy of the next generation. There is a fear of relying on the feminine for future Irish culture, but the men cannot overstep their gender roles to fulfill the missing idea of nation, showing the need for a stable national identity.

Whether attached to religious images or not, all the texts show protagonists, whose trauma springs from destruction of the family, and whose imaginings and fantastical life attempts to reconstruct that same missing family through their spontaneous child creation and their adoption of alternative objects. All three also show that destruction of the family create problems for future generations, since they are perpetuating the cycle of incomplete family in their own realities. Their childhood losses and their lack of stable family role affect their abilities to have a whole identity; without a family, the male protagonist cannot function and can be mentally unstable. None of these protagonists can heal and move on. By its absence, all three novels point to the absolute importance of having the traditional family structure and its relationship to personal identity. Traumatic family life is repetitive and unending. The expressed and implied need for family and for the traditional National Family Allegory roles to define the characters overwhelms the stories told in which the past affects both the present and the future without showing a clear exit to remove oneself from the cycle of destruction of family and self.

CHAPTER III

“YOU CAN’T PROTECT YOUR WOMEN”:

MALE IRISH PROTAGONISTS AS PROTECTOR IN POPULAR AMERICAN AND IRISH FILMS, 1984-1998

The Jackal (Michael Caton-Jones 1997), loosely a remake of the film *The Day of the Jackal*, not only questions where the line should be drawn between war and terrorism but also portrays an I.R.A. terrorist in a way that has become a trend in this genre, as a protector of those that he loves.⁴⁰ This portrayal seems to be a particularly Irish phenomenon, not mimicked in the films containing terrorists of other nationalities. The line, “You can’t protect your women” is repeated four times throughout *The Jackal* and becomes a major part of the plot, and it also represents a larger ideologically fueled allegory present in many of the depictions of Irish terrorists in film. Through embodying a combination of victim, martyr and savior roles in his quest to be a protector, the protagonist in these films recreates the National Family Allegory. The responsibility of the protagonists in taking on the “son” role is to protect both his mother – and by allegorical extension the nation in her guise as Mother Ireland -- to fight for her and to sacrifice himself in the process.

This chapter will focus on the son/young man role in the National Family Allegory by examining young men who turn to terrorist activities both to protect the nation as

⁴⁰ Unlike *The Day of the Jackal*, which portrays a British Jackal attempting to assassinate the President of France, *The Jackal* has the United States trying to help Russia find an American Jackal (hired by Russians) trying to assassinate the First Lady of the United States. The role of the “good” terrorist, or any I.R.A. member, attempting to help find the Jackal is not present in the earlier version. These changes most likely are a reflection of the current climate of politics at the time. Both films, however, do follow the general plot line of the original novel at least in the Jackal’s ability to change personalities and nationalities easily.

women (on an allegorical level) and to protect the women in their families (on a narrative level). These roles are played out (with very little meaningful variation) in contemporary, popular films made during the time period when Irish terrorism in film was most depicted.⁴¹ In the American films, *The Jackal*, *Blown Away*, *A Prayer for the Dying*, and the Irish films, *The Boxer*, *The Crying Game*, and *Cal*, the Irish male protagonist finds himself in a situation, because he is guilty of some crime, where he must choose to be a masochistic martyr or lose a woman that he loves.⁴² The protagonists choose the former action and sacrifice themselves and in doing so, redeem themselves for their former crimes. As the Mother Ireland figure has been conflated with the Virgin Mary, the sacrificial son role has Christ-like qualities and representations in these films. As protector of the woman, the son role generally consists of three aspects, the victim, the martyr, and the savior, which can be played out simultaneously or in progressive states.

Protector roles are nothing new for male characters, but it is the importance of sacrifice and guilt that defines it as Irish and as a representation of Catholic guilt.⁴³

The protagonists are all also literally guilty of previous crimes, for which they must all atone. Unlike depictions of terrorists from other nations, the Irish male protagonist is

⁴¹ The Irish terrorist as stereotypical character diminished noticeably after 1998, which most likely was due to the Irish peace treaty and later became passé with September 11th, when film terrorism changed its nationality. Although I am not claiming that there are no films depicting Irish terrorists before or after this time, this is when most of these films were made.

⁴² Admittedly, *The Crying Game* is difficult to include within these parameters due to the fact that the love object has male genitals. However, the majority of the film shows her as a woman, both in physical appearance and in verbal reference. The male persona, in fact, is used only as a disguise, and she reverts back to her original appearance at the end of the film. Therefore, I think that this film can express an attempt to protect a female figure. The changing gender of Dil throughout this film functions as an attempt to subvert the traditional roles, but by the end of the film, those allegorical roles are reconstituted, which negates the subversion.

⁴³ This is markedly different from films like *Die Hard*, where the terrorist figure shows no remorse or guilt for any past or present crime.

spurred on by his guilt into the typical Irish sacrifice for the woman. Guilt and martyrdom go hand-in-hand, and the internal struggle of the protagonist is another type of sacrifice for the woman/Nation. The sacrifice, defined here as giving up their personal freedom or placing their very lives in mortal jeopardy, is played out in the same way in each film: the protagonist has an opportunity to walk away and leave a loved one in danger, but instead, masochistically chooses to accept a life threatening position in the hope that by giving his own life or freedom in exchange, he will allow her to live.

Male Masochism and the Son Role

White males taking on a masochistic role is not unusual in contemporary depictions. The term “male masochism” has been defined by literary critics in a multitude of ways as Carol Seigel examines in *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love*. Seigel argues for expanding the definition beyond the “linguistic difficulties by limiting the term *masochism* to a description of sexual pleasure in pain (what Freud calls erotogenic masochism)” and examining literary texts through varying modes and with consideration of context (5). The type of male masochism that occurs within post-Independence representation of Irish men in film is not directly tied to physical sexuality, although certainly the (sometimes sexual) desire for the woman/mother is present, but is a purposeful destruction of self for love of woman, representative of nation.

In this vein, post-Independence Irish masculinity poses some difficult questions in relation to male masochism due to gender identity and its relationship to power. During colonization, the Irish were “feminized” through British colonial rhetoric; this includes male members of society. This placed upon them the passive, victim identity. Hence,

much of the political rhetoric of rebellion dealt with the “remasculinization” of Ireland and internalized the myth of Mother Ireland to utilize the concept of “sacrificial sons” for its own war purposes. Patrick Pearse’s speeches, some of which are quoted in the introduction, are an example of this. The “victim” gained power through becoming a “martyr,” revered in Irish culture. In post-Independence in the South, at least in representation, the Catholic white male regained power and control. This may explain the need to place the Irish woman in the home in Article 41 of the Constitution, which created a legal authorization for a representation of male patriarchy. The North remained under British control.

When post-Independence films by male directors utilize male masochism, especially in such a politically charged role as one involved in terrorism, it is difficult to separate the Catholic white male as victim of British feminization and that of post-Independence patriarchy. The former is a minority figure and the latter the culturally dominant group within their own country.⁴⁴ The difference between the two is important when considering current criticism dealing with masochism, which demonstrates that white males in power can use the “guise of powerlessness” to empower themselves (Modleski 149).⁴⁵ However, I would argue that through the creative power of allegory, the “son”

⁴⁴ Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* examines how the Catholic Irish were treated as minority equivalent to African-American when they emigrated to the United States.

⁴⁵ Siegel argues that critics should see oppressed groups representations differently. She states, “Masochism has been deemed unnatural in members of the culturally dominant group – white heterosexual males – at the same time that it has been naturalized as essential to the character of all women, homosexual men, and male members of subordinated minority groups. For this reason, it would seem that discussion of the putative masochism of members of oppressed groups must address very different issues than those central to discussion of the putative masochism of white heterosexual men” (21-22). In regard to the representations of white males and power, Sally Robinson examines this concept in *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*: “It is through the performance of crisis that white masculinity both expresses its

role can actually represent -- through conflation -- the white Irish Catholic male as simultaneously both empowered and disempowered; however, this representation is different from white males whose power has been solidified in their culture by having power for a longer period of time. I would argue that male masochism is only part of the National Family Allegory's depiction of the "son role," which works with the other aspects, influenced by powerful social, political and culture ideological forces.

Son as Victim, Martyr, and Savior

The three major influences on the evolution of the national myth that have conflated to define the National Family Allegory roles -- British colonization, Irish rebellion rhetoric, and Catholic doctrine -- have each affected the Irish son role and how he protects the woman/mother figure in depictions of Irish protagonists in connected to terrorist activities in film.

Sons are portrayed as victims. Generally in these films, the protagonist is a victim of circumstances out of his control, sometimes British violence against Irish characters. Often, one or more family members, friend, or loved one is the victim of violence, giving the protagonist motivation and sympathy from the audience. The character has to have a noble motivation, be cast as a victim or have some type of family tragedy in order for his later sacrifice to have impact.

This "victim" or passive and helpless role seems to correspond to the depiction of Irish males during British rule. Oppressed and unable to "protect their women" from the

disempowerment and works toward a new conceptualization of power. Masochism, as a psychological and artistic strategy, is perfectly suited to express the doubleness" (93).

violence of an outside force, allegorically the protagonists are experiencing colonization, whether or not the violent and oppressive force is actually British or a substitute force.

In response to this victimization, the protagonist may act violently; however, he is visually removed from or shown not to be the cause of the violence. He cannot lose the victim aspect of the son role entirely or the sympathy of the audience would end. Rarely does he do the shooting or plant the bomb, although he can be present in the scene. Often the camera angles used allow the protagonist to be placed in the background or the violence is shown only in pieces, allowing the audience to not actually *see* it occur. He can be implicated in the violence, but if civilians are attacked, then it was only by mistake or a very personalized political necessity. This is usually the catalyst for his rejection of violent acts. The protagonist only kills when he or his immediate family has been physically attacked first.

Flashbacks are often employed for this same effect. Not only do they serve to show the violence experienced by the protagonist as located safely in the past, but they also desensitize the viewer by the repetition. As Jane McGonigal discusses in relation to horror and terrorist films and their connection to both real and fictional terrorism, an audience begins to anticipate a scene when it is repeated. With each and every repetition, the violence is less shocking, less scary, and less likely to distance a character from the audience, even if he is peripherally involved: "This repetition, rather than wearing me down, gives me a kind of confidence. From experience, I know that I am being conditioned to withstand the inevitable echoes of an original assault that is so essential to the horror genre" (McGonigal). The flashbacks give the viewer time to adjust to the

violence until it does not register as such and instead becomes a source of sympathy in the way that the protagonist must live with such a horrible event. The use of flashback in these instances also seems to be a particularly Irish phenomenon, which “has no equivalent when the malefactors are Arabs” (Lockett 294).⁴⁶ The flashbacks function to allow sympathy for the protagonists and to allow for them to be seen as protectors and not as cold-blooded killers.

The audience must feel that the protagonist not only has a cause, but also has no other options and that his victimization is just reason for retaliation in order for this type of depiction to succeed in winning viewer sympathy. We need to believe in the sincerity of his sacrifice for him to fulfill the son role, and the audience must struggle with the moral dilemmas in order for us to have sympathy for them. Sympathy is important because we must feel the loss of his sacrifice in order to reenact the loss of the nation. These are depictions of the greater national reenactment of previous trauma and the struggle of the nation to find out what is the moral answer to an impossible situation, colonization.

As a foil to the guilt-ridden protagonist, often films depicting I.R.A.-related terrorism include a stock character who is an insane, remorseless terrorist or murderer. When this is the case, the protagonist must counter and often kill the terrorist who has stepped over the line of what is “right.” Most often, when there is a flat, guiltless Irish murderer, he is

⁴⁶ For example, *The Siege* (1998) depicts an Arab informant who has been a terrorist throughout the film without knowledge from the American government. His character is cold, flat, uncaring, and never developed with any sense of humanity. *The Jackal* shows Russian terrorist in its opening scenes who kill civilians in cold blood and immediately seek revenge. *Die Hard* (1988) portrays Frans Gruber, a terrorist from an unstated foreign country, who seeks money and attempts to kill all the innocent people in the building by bombing the roof during his getaway. None of these depictions include flashbacks to their past or any sense of guilt or conflict about their participation in their acts.

removed from direct membership in the I.R.A. organization, even if he had been a member in the past. In *Blown Away* (Stephen Hopkins 1994) for example, Ryan Gaerity, played by Tommy Lee Jones, originally created bombs for the Irish cause, but later, when killing indiscriminately in the United States for revenge, the film reveals that he acted on his own and not under orders from the I.R.A. or any other organization. Gaerity's character allows the audience to feel for Liam, the protagonist. When living in Ireland in the past, Liam was just as guilty in planting the original bomb, which is not shown on screen. Liam, who is haunted by this guilty past, is attempting to make amends for his previous violence, whereas Ryan Gaerity has completely lost touch with reality and any real cause. These foils allow greater sympathy for the protagonist because they remind the audience that it is only acceptable to kill for the cause and only when he is willing to accept responsibility and guilt. When there is no guilt in a character, the character becomes inhuman and unsympathetic and functions to push sympathy for the rational, victimized character within the film.

Sons are portrayed as martyrs for the mother/nation. Corresponding to the *Cathleen ni Houlihan* inspired rhetoric of rebellion, a son's duty is to sacrifice himself for the woman/nation. In each of the six films analyzed in this chapter, there is a crisis moment when the protagonist must at least attempt to martyr himself in order to save Mother Ireland. This sacrifice, read politically, is the son as supreme patriot, to be revered as protector of the nation. Whether or not he becomes a martyr seems irrelevant, since it is the act of willingness to fight and protect the nation that matters.

Sons are portrayed as saviors. Obviously, this portrayal is influenced by Catholicism. Protagonists most often become a Christ-like figure through their attempted martyrdom. Although portrayed as sinners in one way or another at some point in the film, self-sacrifice or allowing themselves to be punished negates the earlier crimes. In each film, the protagonist cannot “protect” his women, but he can ultimately “save” them from danger through self-sacrifice. The helpless, arguably feminized, position accepted by each of the protagonists shows a recurring theme that violence and aggressive, typical male qualities are ineffective, while Christ-like sacrifice can make a difference and allow each character to make up for past sins. Those characters that continue to follow a violent path inevitably die, but those that sacrifice their autonomy through the helpless position, find some kind of solace and break out of the cycle of violence or die trying.

Each has to pay for his crimes or sins and can only progress through the redemption found in self-sacrifice. Usually, the protagonist has failed to protect a loved one in the past or has been involved in some type of traumatic terrorist event. It is the past that haunts. It is the past that is the catalyst for the terrorist to feel as if he needs to redeem himself by protecting the current loved one. His failure motivates him to put his very life on the line for those he loves, whether or not that goes along with the cause.

Punishment is also a major component of these films. More often than not, the protagonist is in prison at the beginning of the film for previous crimes or will be caught and imprisoned at the end, unless he dies. If the opening shows him imprisoned, he must make amends for his involvement in previous violence throughout the film. This is never entirely possible because his past is never far behind him. If caught later, he sacrifices

himself to incarceration, usually due to the woman figure. Prison functions as a reminder that violence cannot go unpunished, but incarceration does not fully alleviate guilt. Although much of the time the audience knows that the protagonist is guilty⁴⁷, there is still sympathy due to the circumstances around the crime and because prison is never relief from the character's conscience. Each has guilt because he is *actually* guilty. He must have sin in order to have redemption. The real punishment presented in the films occurs within his own mind, so whether or not physically imprisoned, the protagonist is portrayed as always haunted by his crime. Prison is simply the manifestation of the cultural conscience, a double of his own, and generally a road to redemption.

These three aspects of the "son" role can occur simultaneously or separately, but the majority of protagonists will fulfill all three parts of the portrayal. Sometimes these aspects are so inexorably intertwined that it is impossible to define which one is the catalyst for a particular action or scene, and often all three influences can be seen at once. However, I do not believe that it is coincidental that the allegory allows for the son figures to represent victims of colonization, martyrs for Irish nationalism, and Christ-like saviors, but instead, this most likely represents how the three major influences on the national myth have shaped the son role and his need to protect the "mother"/nation. All three combine to embody the National Family Allegory's role for the young man.

⁴⁷ Although there are exceptions, such as *In the Name of the Father*, where the protagonist is falsely imprisoned, I believe that one of the defining qualities of Irish males in some films is that the audience does know that they are guilty. Although not all of these are imprisoned, several examples of films with protagonists that the audience knows are guilty are as follows: *Cal*, *A Prayer for the Dying*, *The Crying Game*, *Blown Away*, *Michael Collins*, *Some Mother's Son*, *The Devil's Own*, *The Boxer*, and *The Jackal*.

American vs. Irish Depictions

American and Irish film depictions of Irish terrorism tend to follow these trends in a similar fashion; however, there are some differences. American depictions tend to have stricter lines on which characters are “right” and which are “wrong.” In Irish depictions, these lines tend to get blurred, and often the same protagonist who was fighting for the I.R.A. is often fighting against them by the end of the film. More often, in Irish films dealing with terrorism, the “bad terrorist” is an I.R.A. member, who attempts to get the protagonist back into the fold after he has left the organization. Irish films also often include characters that defy being placed into fixed moral categories. For example, Joe, Maggie’s father in *The Boxer*, supports the I.R.A. and functions as a negotiator during peace discussions, but he also gives the order for Harry’s murder because this lieutenant has become power hungry and excessively violent by I.R.A. standards. The film does not definitively categorize him as a right or wrong character, but as someone trapped in the middle of difficult circumstances. Irish portrayals, function in a similar fashion to the American mobster movies in which once one has become a member of the organization, even if one is being forced over the boundaries of personal right and wrong, one cannot leave without risking physical injury.⁴⁸ Yet, those boundaries inevitably are tested, and the character must decide for himself when violence is necessary or acceptable and weigh it against the consequences of disobedience to the organization. For some, this is harder than for others.

⁴⁸ Irish films may function similarly to Italian-centered mobster films due to the Catholic connection between the two.

The Jackal: Declan Mulqueen as Sacrificial Sharpshooter

In *The Jackal* (Michael Caton-Jones 1997), the repeated line, “You can’t protect your women,” challenges Declan Joseph Mulqueen (Richard Gere), former I.R.A. sharpshooter, to play the “protector” role as he helps both the American F.B.I. and Russian KGB to thwart a merciless terrorist, who targets not only women and children but also any women that Declan cares about.⁴⁹ In order for Declan to fulfill this role, he is given the stereotypical characteristics, including victim status, removal from terrorist violence, a “bad terrorist” foil, attempted martyrdom and redemption.

To emphasize the difference between the violent “bad terrorist” and Declan’s helpful terrorist, the film begins by portraying him as the former rather than the latter. The first time the audience sees Declan, he is boxing alone in a cell of an American maximum security prison. The fact that he is shown isolated from the other prisoners both functions to show him as “dangerous” and as different from them. In the preceding scene, the FBI discusses the possibility of using Declan to further their case in exchange for a reduced sentence. During the conversation, one of the American agents states, “Don’t promise too much. After all, he is a terrorist.” Yet, this depiction is countered by the first dialogue the agents have with Declan and their willingness to be in such close proximity with him. Preston (Sidney Poitier) and Witherspoon (J.K. Simmons) are agents of the FBI, and Major Koslova (Diane Venora) is a Russian agent helping them with the Russian controlled terrorist attack by the Jackal (Bruce Willis) on the United States:

Preston: “Besides gun running, you’re a known killer of British government

⁴⁹ American and Irish depictions of Irish terrorism are discussed in most recent to least recent chronological order.

personnel”

Witherspoon: “Not to mention all the women and children you’ve probably
blown up.”

Declan: “It’s not my war. I was never a bomber.”

Koslova: “I don’t see the distinction. You still took human lives.”

Declan: “The distinction is that I killed in a war. Now I want to go home.
Simple as that.”

Koslova: “Simple for you perhaps.”

Declan: “Look, even in Russia, soldiers go home when the treaty’s signed.”

There are several important distinctions made within this dialogue. Declan’s position as a sharpshooter allows him to separate himself from the stereotypical depiction of an I.R.A. member as someone who kills civilians. A sharpshooter would have specific military or governmental targets, and his abilities as a sharpshooter actually save the first lady and defeat the Jackal’s plans at the end of the film. Hence, his I.R.A. training is actually used positively rather than negatively. Declan, as sharpshooter, directly opposes the Jackal’s random shooting into the crowd.

However, Declan’s own language contradicts itself. He states that “It’s not my war” and then his next statement is “The distinction is that I killed in a war.” Although in both statements he is referring to the Irish/British conflict, he splits himself off from certain aspects of the I.R.A. His dialogue creates two separate wars, one that kills civilians and creates mass damage through bombing, and one with soldiers who shoot to kill military

targets. In this way, the character is distanced from indiscriminate violence, a necessary criteria for the protector role.

A secondary purpose of the passage is to imply a difference between Declan's involvement in the I.R.A. and the Russian depiction in the film. Koslova states that to her killing is killing and that she cannot see a distinction in Declan's role from that of a murderer. Yet, early in the film, the audience sees a tape where the Russians use what looks like electrodes to interrogate a subject who eventually dies from their methods.⁵⁰ It is explained that the subject had an undiagnosed heart condition, but the image of the screaming man strapped to a table and being tortured overshadows the very flat and unemotional explanation for why this was done. Also, Koslova actually admits that the Russian K.G.B. had used the Jackal as an operative in order to carry out several assassinations for the Russian government in the past. Koslova tells the F.B.I. this information, "Since 1983, K.G.B. provided funding for five direct action missions. One bombing and four assassinations by gun shot. The Jackal was the operative used." The Russians hired an American-based assassin to carry out their plans, while Declan fought for a cause in the film. The Russians are depicted as supporting the type of violence that Koslova opposes here. The contradiction allows Declan to be a much lesser evil, allowing him to invoke sympathy in the audience later.

Declan evokes further sympathy when Preston accuses him of taking a gun from a hotel room drawer. He makes Declan put his arms out, Christ-like, a pose that he holds for a relatively long period of time, and open his shirt, which exposes several old, circular

⁵⁰ One of the Russian agents explains that it is chemically enhanced interrogation, but the image does not correspond to this in that no needles or pills are present.

bullet wounds across and down his chest and that Declan is helplessly weaponless. His “innocence” is doubly portrayed. Additionally, this shows Declan to be a “victim” of British violence. He states, “Souvenirs. British hospitality.” Preston apologizes for his mistake, and this scene functions as a plot device, explaining Preston’s trusts in Declan throughout the rest of the film, and showing that Declan has a legitimate and personal reason for having fought for a cause.

Early in the film the Jackal’s repeated taunt, “You can’t protect your women,” is introduced. The incident is related to Preston after the agent’s first contact with the Jackal:

Preston: “Look, this is a manhunt, not your cause. Don’t make it personal.”

Declan: “What do you fucking know.”

Preston: “I’ll tell you what I know. I know the Jackal set you up in that arms deal in Libya. I know Isabella was wounded when you walked into the trap. I also know that it was the business you had chosen.”

Declan: “Did you also know that Isabella was pregnant when she got shot? That our child didn’t survive? Don’t tell me it’s not personal, Mr. Preston.”

Although this kind of “this time it’s personal” dialogue is not unusual in action films, in this case it is not just personal but tied to the national mythos as well. In this incident Declan failed to protect a to-be mother and his own child. Declan did not protect the “mother,” which in relation to the national myth is the role of any young man, and in the process he also became a victim, losing his role as father (and his unborn child) in the process. The linking of “cause” and “personal” within Preston’s dialogue connects

protecting Isabella with Declan's fight for Ireland. It reinforces the recurring theme that violence is acceptable only when it is to protect a loved one, particularly a mother, representative of nation.

Declan also fails protect Major Koslova, who is killed with several other agents by the Jackal. Ironically, she dies in an attempt to protect Isabella (Mathilda May), who is now an informant for the F.B.I. The Jackal points out Koslova's femininity and that his motivation is to kill everyone that Declan loves in a cold, inhuman revenge by painting a heart on her cheek with her own blood, leaning over her in a mildly seductive manner, before giving her the message, "Tell Declan, you can't protect your women." Koslova doubles for Isabella in the scene. Once again, Declan has failed in his protector role both on the national and on the familial levels.

As seems to be a pattern with American film depictions of Irish terrorists, Declan uses his I.R.A. training in order to "save the day".⁵¹ As a sharpshooter, he can "protect" the First Lady (the actual target indicated in his coded reference to Declan's unprotected women) by shooting the assassin's gun device (avoiding all of the civilians present) and foiling the Jackal's plans. Yet, the violent confrontation does not fulfill Declan's role entirely. In this instance, he is "protector," but without the necessary self-sacrifice, which occurs in the scene directly after the First Lady shoot-out. When the Jackal, during his escape attempt, takes a young girl, "Maggie," hostage, Declan has to choose between the death of the girl and his own.⁵² Of course, Declan drops his gun, kneels in a

⁵¹ This will be demonstrated in *Blown Away* and *A Prayer for the Dying*.

⁵² Although this scene takes place in the United States, the use of the name "Maggie" invokes the image of an Irish woman, and this choice of name does not seem to be arbitrary.

submissive position with hands behind his head and accepts his own death in order to save Maggie. It is this moment of martyrdom that redeems Declan, and also allows Isabella, her own revenge.

On the surface, the film suggests a gender role reversal, a subversive retelling of the typical National Family Allegory. Yet, the clichéd Hollywood ending undoes the reversal to normalize the scene. The Jackal is not quite dead; it is Declan's shot that finally kills him. Both Declan and Isabella enact revenge, but Declan particularly is redeemed by protecting Isabella, the exact thing he failed to do when she was pregnant earlier.⁵³ Declan can atone for his violence as an I.R.A. sharpshooter by sacrificing himself for the Mother. As an allegory, the film demonstrates that the Mother (as nation) cannot fight for herself but ultimately needs a young man to save her.

Blown Away: Liam's Heroic Sacrifice

It is not unusual for an Irish protagonist to play the sacrificial protector rather than the "hero" typical of American films. In *Blown Away* (Stephen Hopkins 1994), Jimmy Dove, a.k.a. Liam McGivney (Jeff Bridges), becomes a victim of the same kind of terrorism in which he was previously involved when Ryan Gaerity (Tommy Lee Jones) reenters his life and threatens everyone that he loves. As young male figure, Jimmy must protect his new wife and step-daughter from Gaerity, a self-referred "mad bomber".⁵⁴ He becomes the victim, willing to sacrifice himself in order to protect and eventually save

⁵³ We see Isabella's children quite clearly during the previous interactions between Declan, the F.B.I. and her. Although she has lost Declan's child due to the Jackal, she is still clearly a mother figure, and her motherhood does not seem arbitrary.

⁵⁴ Jimmy, who works for the bomb squad, had previously grown up in Ireland and after a traumatic incident, came to the United States where he changed his entire identity.

his wife and step-daughter. Unlike Declan, Jimmy has to give up the credit, his hero-status, as part of his sacrifice.

It is not unusual for an Irish protagonist to play the sacrificial martyr rather than the “hero” typical of American films.⁵⁵

The first two scenes set up Ryan and Jimmy (Liam) as foils and allow the audience to have sympathy for Jimmy. This is necessary for the audience to understand the significance of the protagonist’s sacrifice. The hero persona, which Jimmy must later sacrifice, also begins in the first scenes. Yet, through brief flashbacks dispersed throughout, the film shows that Jimmy’s heroism both comes from and is tainted by his violent past. The recurring vision of a young woman lying on the ground crying, “Liam, help me” flashes through Jimmy (Liam’s) mind. Jimmy’s past contains a failure to protect from harm the woman that he loved. From this death Jimmy chooses to use his bomb-making knowledge to stop bombers from harming others in the present; this is also the source of his guilt. Jimmy discusses this guilt with Max (Lloyd Bridges), Jimmy’s uncle, also from Ireland and a former police officer:

Jimmy: “When did you know it was time to get out?”

Max: “I think I knew it was time as soon as I started asking myself if I thought it was time. It’s time my friend. You’ve done your penance.”

Jimmy: “Yeah? Then why don’t I feel absolved?”

Max: “Don’t know, Jimmy. How come, huh?”

⁵⁵ Even though this is an American film, it does have some Irish film qualities.

Because of his violent Irish past and his failure to protect Ryan's sister from Ryan's bomb, no matter how many people Jimmy saves from bombing attempts, he cannot feel "absolved" until he is put in the situation that he must martyr himself for a woman that he loves. Jimmie is unable to settle the debt of his past; as a National Allegory, the film demonstrates that the cycle of violence cannot be avoided but continues to reappear. The traumatic past haunts Irish culture, and the only way to atone for the individual or national past is through the self-sacrifice of young men.

After Gaerity's second bomb attack when he kills two other members of the team, Rita (Caitlin Clarke) and Cortez (Christopher de Oni), Gaerity's phone conversation combines the two major repeated and oppositional ideas of the film: guilt and heroism. Jimmy is obviously traumatized already from losing his two friends, but Gaerity plays around; he does not feel any pain or remorse for his bomb, and this allows the audience to see that he is insane. He is also playing with children's toys throughout the phone conversation, a strange fascination for his character throughout, which is jarring in its mixing of childhood innocence and cold-blooded murder. Jimmy often disowns his hero status, but more in this scene than in the others:

Gaerity: "Jimmy Dove. Much more lyrical than Liam McGivney. Much less Irish.

Listen to me. I've come to bring you a gift."

Jimmy: "What gift is that Gaerity?"

Gaerity: "It's the gift of pain, of course."

Jimmy: "You're the reason they died."

[Flashback of Ryan's sister screaming, "Ryan, Don't!"]

Gaerity: “Blame, blame, blame. And I suppose I’m to blame for the death of your new pals as well. Who was right? Who was wrong? We were at war. Your conscience ended up causing the death of your own, Liam. You’re a bad boy. You made me trigger the bomb too early.”

Jimmy: “I was trying to stop you. You said nobody would get killed. There were people everywhere.”

Gaerity: “And look who paid. Your own sweetheart, your friends, me. While you’ve been in America, a hero, I’ve been a man without a country. I spent the last 20 years of my life in jail or on the run because of you... I’ve come to Boston...And what do I find? My old pal on the telly. If they only knew what you’d done.”

Jimmy: “I did what I did because you told me I was a soldier! But I never killed anybody!”

Gaerity’s dialogue shows a conflation of past and present, and that his present bomb killings are in retribution. Even though the sister’s cry of “Ryan, don’t!” places the blame squarely on Gaerity, he attempts to escape any guilt for killing Blanket, Rita, and Cortez, by placing the blame on Jimmy and through jealousy of his “hero” status.

Due to Gaerity’s role as a “bad terrorist,” the script makes a point of divorcing Gaerity from any actual I.R.A. operations in two different conversations. Katie assumes that Jimmy and Ryan were I.R.A., and Jimmy responds, “No. [Ryan Gaerity] was too crazy for that.” Also, Max discusses Gaerity with an I.R.A. member living in the United States, “If you’ve done [Gaerity] any favors, you’ve done the cause a huge big harm.” It

is common for films to divorce the “bad terrorist” from I.R.A. membership. It is a way for the film to make the guilty protagonist more sympathetic by having a character that has no ethics or morals to his violence, and not implicating any real to life organization in senseless violence.

Like Declan, Jimmy finds himself being reminded of his previous failure to protect his “sweetheart,” Ryan’s sister, and through comments later in the same dialogue, he understands that Gaerity is targeting his wife and child.

As much as Gaerity represents the guilt of Jimmy’s past, Anthony Franklin (Forest Whitaker) represents Jimmy’s heroic nature through doubling. Anthony, a young black man and a new member to the Disposal team, immediately is referred to as “Jimmy’s replacement”.

Anthony: “Everybody loves a hero and I’m a hero, so there it is.”

Jimmy: “You know what happens to heroes in this outfit? They get blown away.

Which wouldn’t be so bad in your case. Problem is, they tend to take other people with ‘em. You ain’t brave, asshole. You’re dumb.”

The word “hero” repeats quite frequently while defining it in sacrificial terms. It is only the man who is martyred who can be heroic in the logic of this film.

Jimmy’s heroism emerges in a final sacrifice in two acts. Katie and Lizzy are unaware of a bomb planted in the family car. Without thought for his own welfare, Jimmy climbs into this car and dismantles the bomb before it can go off. He finally does protect his women and redeems himself. Yet, with the negation of the guilt, Jimmy must also give up his hero role in the public eye and relegate himself to domestic life.

Anthony has found out Jimmy's secret, and he must decide what to tell the Bomb Disposal Unit or the authorities:

Anthony: "Don't you ever get tired of being a hero, Jimmy. I'm sorry. It's, ah, Liam..I gotta tell [the captain of the department] the truth. I gotta tell him how I tracked the terrorist. I disarmed the bomb and I saved the day. And I'm a hero. And everybody loves a hero. So you just go back to your wife and you leave this here for us heroes. It's not in your heart anymore, is it, Jimmy?"

This Jimmy is more than happy to do so, because he realizes that being the famous hero is not important, only being the hero protector of those he loves is. Yet, giving up the need to save everyone from bombs is important. He is free from the guilt that had made him follow that career path. He no longer needs to be reckless and endangering his own life in some form of redemption, because his last acts have made up for the earlier loss. The concepts of guilt and the heroism are intertwined throughout the film, and Jimmy cannot lose one without losing the other. Interestingly, Anthony still does not understand what being a hero means and is happy to have false glory, but that may be because Anthony still sees being a hero as an ideal. Jimmy, having been redeemed from previous failure, gets to avoid prosecution for his past, which is very similar to Declan's situation and the whole conflict is quietly resolved. Jimmy/Liam cannot benefit from his violent past, which is why he must give up his hero status. As an allegory, the film demonstrates that Irish culture cannot run from violence or the cycle continues. Jimmy's atonement is found not only in protecting the mother but also in giving up his hero status. The nation does not become reborn through heroes, only through martyrdom and atonement.

A Prayer for the Dying: Martin as Religious Sacrifice

In *A Prayer for the Dying* (Mike Hodges 1987), Martin (Mickey Rourke), the protagonist, initially fails to protect innocents. Martin is a willing participant in the I.R.A., but he finds himself running from them as a marked target after a traumatic incident. He accidentally becomes involved in another type of terrorism created by a British mob family. For Martin, however, the traumatic incident does not involve a single woman that is killed, but a busload of female children in school uniforms and their female teacher. Although part of the I.R.A. operation, Martin does not plant the bomb that ultimately kills them, but he feels guilt for their deaths. The bus explosion is obviously an accident. The target was the two obviously military vehicles that preceded the bus on the road, but when the school bus passes, it triggers the bomb. The camera focuses on the military vehicles and then the school bus and back again in such a way that the audience cringes, knowing that the intended target is not going to be the one to explode.

During the scene, Martin is physically placed farther back than the others and away from the bomb, divorcing him from direct participation in the violence, but the guilt remains nonetheless, so much so that he moves to London without notifying the I.R.A. or anyone else. Martin is also shown as so shocked by the violence that he is the last one to leave the scene, standing motionless even when the others flee. Docherty (Liam Neeson), who was part of the operation, and Siobhan (Alison Doody) are sent to track him down and bring him back, and it is within his conversation with Docherty that the audience gets to see the extent of his guilt over the bus incident:

Docherty: “Tell me, why’d you leave? Why’d you pack everything in?”

Martin: “Why did I pack everything in? Listen I don’t want to keep waking up every night hearing the screams of young children. I lost something a long time ago. Everything. Everything got very black like dried blood and something started to stink. Every day it got worse, sometimes so bad I couldn’t get out of my bed. I sat there in the dark like a wee scared boy not being able to breathe or speak my name. I saw myself lying on the street, dying, not wanting to die. Maybe there’s something wrong with me.”

Docherty: “Always was something wrong with you. You’re only realizing that now?
Martin, we have to live with it.”

Martin: “I can’t.”

Martin not only suffers from the guilt over the killings but also he conflates the death of the children with his own death. Through the dialogue, his lying in the street dying is a reaction to his nightmares, and it makes him feel like a child himself (“a wee scared boy”) not able to defend himself; he makes the analogy and places himself in the place of the victim rather than in that of the aggressor. Since he is identifying with the victims, it is impossible for him to return to the I.R.A. or to the violent life that he has lived. The death of the little girls changed his perspective, and his abandonment of the cause makes him a target for the I.R.A. Martin has to decide what is worth fighting for, and he decides that the cause is not it.

Yet, the film downplays the I.R.A.’s manhunt for Martin. Only two people, Docherty and Siobhan, come after him, and although Docherty had orders to shoot

Martin if he refused to return for an “inquiry,” he allows Martin to leave in respect of their past friendship. This kindness is his death sentence, as Siobhan executes the order to kill Docherty. Similar to the other films previously discussed, the I.R.A. members present do not represent the “bad terrorist.” Here, the actual I.R.A. members are a mixture of mercy and violence, and mainly just used as a subplot to give motivation to Martin’s need to leave the country.

The “bad terrorist” character, Jack Meehan (Alan Bates), owns a funeral parlor as a front to his criminal activities. Although Meehan is not a terrorist for a particular country, his methods are those of a terrorist, including setting off a bomb at the local church. He uses terror for control. Meehan exploits Martin’s need to flee due to the government and the I.R.A.’s search for him and attempts to recruit him, through Kristou (Ian Bartholomew), a middleman, to take out his criminal competition in exchange for a clean passport, passage out of the country and money. Even though this would solve Martin’s current situation, originally he shows his disdain for violence and refuses the job due to personal ethics:

Martin: “No. There’ll be no more killing.”

Kristou: “One more make no difference.”

Martin: “I said, ‘No.’”

Kristou: “Just one. A piece of slime. You’ll be back. Every policeman is looking for you, and so are your old comrades in Ireland. I’m all you’ve got.”

Kristou does not see a difference between killing for hire and killing for a cause as Martin does. As in the other films, even though the protagonist wants to move on and get out,

the plot makes it impossible for him to leave his past behind. Meehan makes it clear that he has no other choice than to commit one more murder, even if it goes against his morals, or he will be murdered. Similarly, the Irish culture is haunted by its violent past and is mired in the continuing conflict. It is not possible to end the conflict, even if there is a need to move away from that very violence. Given the lack of choice, Martin has to agree to continue killing:

Martin: "You set me up."

Kristou: "I had to. It was the only way I could get you back. For your own sake, just one more. How many did you kill over there? Dozens."

Martin: "I never killed for money or favors. Never because I enjoyed it. There was always a reason."

Kristou: "All for the glorious cause. That's fucking right. Look where it's got you. Now, even you own people want you dead. Look at you. A hunted animal. Not a living soul who wouldn't turn you in or put a bullet in you. Not one! Just one more and you'll be free forever. His name's Krasko. Gangster. Murder, drugs, whore, extortion. Same business as Jack Meehan. Now Meehan's taking over"

Martin: "All this killing that seems to follow me about."

Martin, having no choice except his own death, chooses to accept Meehan's deal, which he later comes to regret. Kristou's dialogue consistently demonizes Krasko, Martin's target, in order to allow the audience to continue to have sympathy for Martin's plight. This film deviates from the typical Irish terrorist depiction in that this protagonist does

not choose to follow through on his moral beliefs, but instead to save himself originally, before he gets onto the path of redemption. Also, unlike other films of the same type, Martin is shown shooting Krasko. Although the murder is necessary as a catalyst for the relationship between Martin and Father Michael (Bob Hoskins) and for Martin's later spiritual redemption, the film must compensate for showing the Irish terrorist committing a violent act on screen. Yet, since this is before Martin meets Father Michael and becomes a Christ figure, it is merely a way to see him sinning, so he has reason for redemption later. If Krasko is portrayed as a "gangster," then his death can be considered justice by the audience. Additionally, the fact that Martin spares Father Michael's life when he witnesses the assassination, allows the murder to show that Martin does still have some kind of moral code. These are the only deviations from the overall pattern, but in general, the film follows the same types of trends.

As with *Blown Away*, *A Prayer for the Dying* contains the two oppositional characters that represent parts of the protagonist. Jack Meehan asserts that he and Martin are "Two of a kind. You and Me," and he represents the darker, violently criminal path available to Martin. Father Michael, a former military man turned priest, represents the path to spiritual redemption by overcoming violent tendencies, although Father Michael does have some violent outburst himself, but only against Meehan's goons. Father Michael also compares himself to Martin. He says, "I've been exactly where you are now. You've made the choice. You turned your back on the horror. And who's going to forgive you? Believe me, you cannot live without forgiveness." Ultimately, Martin realizes that he can find forgiveness for his past through the help of Father Michael and

the influence of Anna (Sammi Davis), Michael's blind niece, who he has had a romantic affair with, but he can only find forgiveness after he sacrifices himself to save their lives.

The final conflict pits Jack Meehan against Father Michael, and Martin must then make his choice. Meehan never truly believed that the rules of the confessional would keep Father Michael from becoming a witness, so Meehan buys a bomb with Irish components, so he can blame the explosion on Martin Fallon. Meehan and his men capture Father Michael and Anna, tie them to the church tower and start the clock on the bomb. However, Martin intervenes to save them both in a gesture of martyrdom. Once Michael and Anna reach safety, Martin and Meehan struggle, knocking Martin off the tower and on to a larger than life-size, hanging crucifix. The scene shows Martin clinging to Christ in order not to fall; the Christ imagery in the film is heavy handed, but the scene clearly depicts Martin as the savior son. Ironically, Meehan is killed by his own bomb, and this same bomb makes the crucifix fall fatally on Martin, figuratively crushing him under the weight of his own sins. This bomb brings about Martin's redemption in the same way that the first bomb brought about his loss of faith, creating violent book ends for the film. As Martin lies dying still under the crucifix, Father Michael convinces him to ask God for forgiveness, and the film implies that Martin has found spiritual forgiveness at last. In saving Anna and her uncle through his Christ-like sacrifice, Martin negates his earlier violent acts and is redeemed. *A Prayer for the Dying* conflates the savior son and Christ-figure directly, implying that in order for the Irish nation to redeem itself from the sins of a violent past, a choice must be made as to which path to follow: that of continuing violence and murder or of sacrifice and redemption. In order for

Ireland to find atonement for its past sins, there must be a Christ-like sacrifice of its young men.

The Boxer: Danny as Peaceful Pugilist

The concept of protecting women is central in *The Boxer* (Jim Sheridan 1997); however, how a man protects his women (nation) is in contention throughout. The storyline puts Danny Flynn (Daniel Day-Lewis), a former I.R.A. member who served fifteen years prison time for them, against the heads of that same organization. His fight against the I.R.A. becomes two-fold; Danny attempts to win back his former sweetheart, Maggie (Emily Watson), who is now the wife of a current I.R.A. prisoner and daughter of Joe Hamill (Brian Cox), a leader of the organization. Meanwhile, his role as a prominent boxer in Ike Weir's (Ken Stott) non-denominational community center becomes more and more political, since the I.R.A. in the film dislikes the fraternization of Protestants and Catholics. Their peaceful co-existence, even in boxing, (which operates as a container for sectarian violence), is taken as a threat against the I.R.A., whose political ends necessarily needs the conflict between the religions to continue. Danny no longer works for the I.R.A. and ironically, through boxing, he protests violence and fights for peace and even romantic love. Danny's sacrifice occurs before the film begins during his time in prison, and this sacrifice is rewarded in the film by allowing him to have a family. Through Maggie, Danny can establish a stable home, although not in Ireland, that fulfills all the roles of the National Family Allegory.

Although Danny's actions directly affect Joe the most, his real foil throughout the film is Harry (Gerard McSorley), a former friend and current militant member of the

I.R.A.⁵⁶ Harry allowed Danny to take responsibility and jail time for some criminal action that both men were involved in, something large enough that Danny serves fifteen years. Again, the actual acts committed by the protagonist are not discussed or shown, but Harry shows his guilt in their conversation:

You're a strange man, Danny. All you had to do was walk across a prison corridor and shake hands with some of your old friends in the I.R.A. Snubbin' people is not nice. But you never named names, and that's why you're a healthy man, understand? What are you looking at? It's not my fault you got caught.

You should have run away.

Harry's preemptive statement about "fault" shows his lingering guilt that he did run away and left Danny to take responsibility. The conversation also points out that Danny, even in prison, has divorced himself entirely from the organization. Similarly in the boxing ring (and even there he shows mercy), Danny never commits a violent act on screen, and we first see him being released from prison, not in it.

Unlike Danny, who has taken the time in prison to change his views and his life, Harry has become even more committed to violence and is resentful of Danny's rejection of the I.R.A. and new belief in peace. Harry is responsible for several acts of on-screen violence, including the killing of several police officers and the shooting of Ike Weir, a helpless, old man, who was publicly critiquing Harry's past actions. Harry becomes a wild card character, ignoring the orders of the I.R.A. leaders and staging attacks against

⁵⁶ The "former friend" turned into antagonist or enemy is common throughout these films. It may be an attempt by these filmmakers to show how political unrest tears apart personal relationships, and of course, it intensifies the drama when the two end up going head to head.

his own personal targets. Harry functions as the “bad terrorist,” the character that acts out of self-gain rather than from what would be the greater good for the organization or the country and for that, he must eventually be defeated.

The main difference between *The Boxer* and those films previously discussed is the ways that both Danny and the I.R.A. are attempting to “protect the women” or more specifically in this film, the “prisoner’s wives.” The opening sequence of the film depicts a young woman marrying a prisoner and celebrating in a reception attended by a large number of I.R.A. members. This functions to point out that there is a clear belief that a women’s role is to be loyal to their husbands and to show what Danny gave up. If he had not gone to prison, then ironically, he could have been married to Maggie.

The Boxer, even more than the other films discussed here, supports the traditional family roles, including the differentiation of the male public and female private spheres. The film indicates that women should be mothers and keep the family together in the home.⁵⁷ Men should be protecting the family from outside influences; both of these create a very conventional depiction. As Fidelma Farley contends:

Similarly, the father heroes of *In the Name of the Father*, *Nothing Personal*, and *The Boxer* signal the possibility of a shift in Northern Irish society from ‘bombs and bombast’ to ‘love and protection.’ However, they do so through the mobilization of conventional gender divisions...In other words, rather than a re-

⁵⁷ Reminiscent of Article 41 of the Irish Constitution.

configuration of the traditional family structure, the films gesture towards its re-establishment (205)⁵⁸

The adamancy of the I.R.A. in protecting the wives from other men comes through clearly when one young man who oversteps his bounds with one such wife and is told by a random I.R.A. member, “Her husband’s stayin’ five years in prison. If you go near his wife again, understand, I’ll shoot both your kneecaps off.” Joe, in a less violent fashion, also emphasizes the importance of the wife role within the cause. He tells the bride and other guests:

I want to tell ya how proud we all are of ya. How you stood by your man. I know that when I was inside, it was easy to do my time because I had a strong woman behind me. My wife, Eileen, God rest her soul, stood by me and remained faithful to the cause. And now my daughter, with her brave son, Liam, keeps her house together until her husband, Thomas returns. On one day, and that day may be sooner than you think, all the prisoners will come home. And, [pause] and the Brits will be gone and we will have peace in Ireland. And you – you women who stood by your men will be remembered as the bravest of the district.

Within the speech, Joe conflates fidelity to marriage with fidelity to the cause. Any type of adultery or extra-marital complications would undermine the faith of the members of the I.R.A. that are incarcerated, so in order to allow for the prisoners’ peace of mind, the

⁵⁸ I agree with Farley on the conservative nature of the films and their establishment of family. But my terms differ from Farley’s. By “father heroes,” Farley includes not only actual fathers in the film but also “potential fathers” (203). I contend that there is a distinction between father figures, who Farley agrees are often portrayed as incapable of protecting the family (203). The potential father would qualify in my classification as a son or young man figure, which would place Danny in a different category than Ike, Harry, or Joe. Yet, Farley captures the general idea of the conservative view of family in the film.

organization protects those that are left behind. Women, who are not shown fighting or working for the I.R.A. within the film, can only support the men by marrying and waiting, a helpless, but necessary position.

Joe makes Maggie an ideal for others to follow and uses her son as a poster child, literally, in flyers about freeing the prisoners. Yet, this sets Maggie up as a pawn for Joe and Danny. If Maggie is not loyal to her incarcerated husband, then not only do the bonds of matrimony break but also Joe's belief in the place of women as integral to completion of the cause. Maggie, as mother, is a national symbol as well as part of the plot. The I.R.A. wants her to be faithful to the cause, even if this precludes her happiness, so they can fight for her. On the other hand, the non-violent Danny wants to remove her from the violence entirely and for them to live in peace together. As national allegory, the film implies that the mother can be saved by peace and sacrifice, not by continued fighting and war related violence.

Danny is portrayed as a repeated victim of I.R.A. violence. Not only does he lose his mentor to Harry, but his house is shot at as well. Although the attack only breaks a mirror, the I.R.A.'s intention to kill Danny for being a public figure in support of peaceful coexistence in the boxing arena is clear. Harry continually marks Danny as the biggest threat to the I.R.A.'s cause, particularly in conversations to Joe, such as the following:

Harry: "Leave the fighting to Danny" means that all the people who are in prison, who died, who didn't surrender to the Brits – that means that their sacrifices aren't worth a lousy, fucking boxing match. He's spreading dissent, Joe.

Joe: Maybe you're the one who's spreading dissent, Harry.

Harry believes that Danny's participation in the "non-sectarian" boxing at the community center undermines the political cause. The boxing becomes a representation of the political fight, similar to the way in which marriage is portrayed as fidelity to the cause.⁵⁹ Hence, in Harry's viewpoint, Danny is doubly guilty of subversion. Yet, Joe, who is working on a peace agreement with British officials during the above conversation, does not see Danny as a threat, but sees Harry's vendetta against Danny as one. Joe seems to understand Danny's position as a victim of Harry's personal guilt and hatred.

Additionally, in anticipation of Danny's helpless, sacrificial position at the end of the film, verbally Danny's name is mentioned four times in the film in connection with Jesus Christ. For example, Ike Weir states, "Danny Flynn. Jesus Christ. It is you." Although in normal conversation this could be considered a typical statement of surprise, the repetition of this same comment repeated so often seems intentional and supportive of his Christ-like role.

Danny shows his need to protect Maggie several times throughout the film. For example, Maggie tells Danny that she cannot be with him after her father convinces her that this is the best way to keep Danny alive, yet Danny's overdramatic answer is, "I'm not a killer, Maggie, but this place makes me want to kill." He refuses to accept her breaking it off, even if it puts his own life in danger or makes him a murderer, which

⁵⁹ This connection between boxing and politics occurs not only with Danny, but also in a reference to the fact that Maggie's husband, now in prison for the I.R.A., was also previously a boxer. Maggie's dialogue acknowledges and subverts the masculine assertion that fidelity to marriage as fidelity to the cause in her conversation with her father, "My marriage was over even before Liam was born. I'm the prisoner here. You and your politics have made sure of that."

would put him back into prison. Danny even later tells Joe of his intention to protect her whatever the cost:

Danny: "I'm back for Maggie."

Joe: "Will she be safe with ya?"

Danny: "She'll never be safer...I'll not put her life in danger. No one's going to drive me out of my home."

In his comments, Danny conflates Maggie and "home," which also simultaneously conflates her with Ireland. As is the case with most depictions of an Irish young man or son, Danny's role is to sacrifice himself in order to keep the Mother Ireland safe.

Ironically, this same attempt to protect and love Maggie puts both of their lives in danger and eventually puts Danny in a position where he is completely helpless. After Ike's funeral, Harry catches Danny and Maggie driving together. He tells them both, "I'm not gonna let you drive around with a prisoner's wife...You're a prisoner's wife. You know what that means, don't ya? You know what we sacrificed in this fucking war." As was foreshadowed in the first scenes, Harry considers a man who tries to have a romantic relationship with a prisoner's wife to be a threat to the cause, but even more than his relationship with Maggie, it is Danny's involvement in the peace process that puts Harry over the edge. He makes Danny get on his knees in a submissive position with his hand behind his head in an execution murder style and puts a gun to his head, stating, "End of story, peacemaker." Danny fails in his protection of both Maggie and himself, and it is only through another male, Maggie's father, that the two of them live and escape

Northern Ireland together. Yet, his non-violent response to Harry allows himself to be a martyr nonetheless.

Yet, even though Joe neutralizes Harry's renegade influence, Danny, Maggie and her son cannot build a life in Northern Ireland, so Joe's protection can only go so far. Yet, they represent a new family that can live in peace and make a home together elsewhere. Since he continues to strive for peace and love, he is rewarded by attaining a stable family that fulfills the National Family Allegory.

The Boxer implies that Irish cultural identity cannot thrive in Northern Ireland in that Mother Ireland and her family must move South in order to exist as a stable, functioning family. It also advocates passive behavior, sacrifice in peace rather than violence, as the way to save the Mother (nation).

The Crying Game: Fergus as Substitute Savior

The protagonist of *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan 1992), Fergus (Stephen Rea), finds himself in a similar situation in that his membership and actions in the I.R.A. becomes a source of guilt, and eventually he fights against the organization in order to protect his "woman" from harm. Ironically, it is his attempts to atone for his guilty past that puts Dil (Jaye Davidson) in danger. Fergus and others in his "cell" capture Jody, a black British soldier, and hold him captive. During this time, Fergus and Jody form a bond that makes it difficult for Fergus to kill him when the ransom does not come through. When Jody is killed by British forces as they come to raid the I.R.A., Fergus moves to London to track down Dil, whom he has seen only in pictures. Once there, he starts a romantic relationship with her, only to find out that she has male genitalia. The

rest of the film is spent with Fergus attempting to protect Dil, his substitute Mother Ireland, from the I.R.A. and his own past.

According to Van Lenning, “Half of the characters in the film are different from what is initially assumed” (88). This comment responds to the doubling of roles and the ambiguity of many of the characters’ gender or sexuality. I contend that this is true also on the level of an overt attempt to subvert the National Family Allegory, particularly the woman/young man role that the film eventually supports. Christopher Lockett in his essay, “Terror and Rebirth: ‘Cathleen ni Houlihan,’ from Yeats to ‘The Crying Game,’” discusses the Cathleen figure/Mother Ireland and its connection to the film. However, Lockett identifies the Cathleen figure as Jude. Although this is reasonable because Jude is the only Irish woman in the film, and the national ideology that Lockett also discusses is so present within the film, I would argue that it is precisely because Dil is a black, British woman/man that the film uses her as Fergus’s choice for woman/Cathleen figure.

Jude, described most often as the *femme fatale*, does not compel the men around her to sacrifice themselves for her. The closest that she comes to this is her seducing of Jody in the opening sequence and her coercion of Fergus to assassinate for her later. The former does not fit the mythos due to the fact that Jude is not having Irish young men die for her, but instead functions as a seductress of the enemy. In the latter scene, Jude uses Dil, not herself, as the bargaining chip for the coercion. Katrina Irving discusses this aspect of Jude, as anti-mother figure:

Equally, the nationalist construction of the mother as a figure of “unmediated naturalness” is satirically undercut in the figure of Jude, who, despite her maternal

ministrations in matters of nutrition, is presented as pathologically violent. Her vicious and unprovoked assaults on the bound and helpless Jody are a parodic inversion of the deification of the passive mother common in nationalist ideology (302)

Although Jude does serve food to the I.R.A. men and to the prisoner in the beginning of the film, she becomes more and more the femme fatale as the film continues. Kristin Handler supports Irving's view of Jude: "Jude doesn't have a dick, she *is* a dick. When Dil metamorphoses into one kind of feminine stereotype, her character continues to demand a sympathetic reading; Jude, in contrast, has an entirely antipathetic part to play from the start" (36). Ironically, in many ways, Jude is just one of the boys by the end of the film, losing anything that makes her feminine and taking on a very male role. She is Dil's opposite, and she functions to complicate the idea of national identity in the fact that she does not fulfill the Mother Ireland role for Fergus but instead becomes the danger from which he must protect her.

It is true that as a black, British woman/man, one would not generally assume that Dil could fulfill the Cathleen role, but as this dissertation asserts, a woman does not have to fill a biographical, geographical, or nationally appropriate role in order for him to *choose* her as a substitute. All that matters is that she fulfills the functions of Mother Ireland, and Dil may have been chosen in order to question that very role. Although the choice could have been controversial, it is played out too well. The film portrays Dil in the stereotypical way women are usually portrayed:

For the patriarchal spectator watching the film, Dil is the woman only and openly as an image of woman, a performance of woman. However, it should be noted that if the fact of the transvestic performance has been overlooked (or consciously apprehended, or perhaps in some cases subconsciously registered and suppressed), it is because Dil as performance of woman is duplicating the only image of woman that has been available to us as spectators of popular cinema. Thus in relying on the conventions of popular cinema, Jordan undercuts the subversive potential he had at his disposal in that through *The Crying Game* he had the unique opportunity of (re)presenting the performance of woman by foregrounding woman as performance (DuttaAhmed 63).

Dil's character could have represented "woman" in a way that was unconventional in film, but the audience wants to see her as a woman. Even after the "secret" is revealed, she continues with the conservative female persona, which makes it very difficult to see her as a man or as subversive. As Van Lenning states, "Yet behind this mask of subversion, dominant forms are reasserted. This is the key to explaining the popularity of the film" (99). Although this is stated in relation to gender roles, it applies just as well to the national identity, which is so connected to these roles.

From the opening music of the film, "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Percy Sledge, the choice of music continues the theme that when love is involved, a man must do all that he can to protect the woman that he loves⁶⁰. Yet, in direct contrast, Jody's

⁶⁰ Several scholars have pointed out the irony of the song, both in Fergus's discovery of Dil's genitalia and also the fact that it is during this scene that Jody is abducted. Yet, there is a certain sincerity to it as well in the relationship between Fergus and Dil.

sexual advances toward Jude (Miranda Richardson), who turns out to be undercover I.R.A., do not follow that idea.⁶¹ The audience later learns that Jody's actions were unfaithful to Dil, who he claims to have loved all along. Jody must confess his inappropriate behavior to Fergus and ask him to make the situation right by conveying Jody's love to Dil if he cannot. When Jody fails to be there for Dil, Fergus becomes a surrogate.

From the opening scenes where Jody is kidnapped by the I.R.A., Fergus is portrayed as different from those around him in order to create the necessary sympathy for the character, even though he is partially responsible for Jody's death. The film further underscores that Fergus is different than the others through Jody's dialogue with him and through his fable about "the frog and the scorpion." Jody defines the nature of the I.R.A. as cruel and unyielding:

Jody: "They're not going to let the guy out, and you're going to have to kill me."

Fergus: "They'll let him out."

Jody: "You want to bet."

Fergus: "I'm not a gambling man."

Jody: "And even if they do, you can't just let me loose. It's not in your nature."

Fergus: "What do you know about my nature?"

Jody: "Talking about your people, not you."

Fergus: "What the fuck do you know about my people?"

⁶¹ Jude's name invokes the allusion to St. Jude, the Catholic Saint of hopeless or impossible causes. As a representation of the I.R.A. and only living member of the original I.R.A. cell of which Fergus was a member, the film, through this allusion, allows the organization and particularly her part in the violence as a hopeless and desperate cause.

Jody: “Only that you’re all tough, deluded, mother fuckers and it’s not in your nature to let me go.”

Here, Jody separates Fergus from his “people,” which refers not to the Irish but specifically to the I.R.A. Jody implies that although the I.R.A. is certain to execute him, Fergus, however, has a different “nature” than the others, which allows him to be a victim of circumstance, not a murderer. This distinction continues in their conversations when Jody tells Fergus the story about the frog and the scorpion in which the scorpion stings and kills the frog that has given him a ride across the river, killing both of them, solely because a scorpion cannot change his “nature.” After the story, the dialogue continues in this vein:

Fergus: “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Jody: “Makes fucking sense. A scorpion does what’s in his nature...Take off the hood man.”

Fergus: “Why?”

Jody: “Because you’re kind and it’s in your nature.”

(Fergus takes off the hood.)

Jody: “See I was right about you.”

Within Jody’s context of the fable, Fergus is the frog, willing to help others, while the I.R.A. is the scorpion, a malevolent and destructive force. The distinction allows the audience to see Fergus as different and separate from the organization.

In order for Fergus to be a sympathetic protagonist, like the others, he must be divorced from directly shown violence. Hence, when Fergus is ordered to execute Jody,

his hesitation allows Jody to run off and his sense of fairness or honor does not allow him to shoot him in the back, so Jody has the opportunity to escape. However, when Jody is run over by a police vehicle, Fergus still experiences guilt over his death, since he placed him into the situation where he could be killed, even though he was not directly responsible.

When Fergus goes to England to find Dil and fulfill his promise to Jody, he finds Dil immediately in need of protection. Fergus follows Dil into a local bar, The Metro, where David, one of her previous male relationships, walks up to her and slaps her and later forces her to come with him down a dark alleyway. Fergus follows, hits David and restrains him with his foot on his throat, using his skills for violence in a positive manner to protect her from harm. Fergus tells Dil that his name is Jimmy for the same reasons and also to protect himself from detection from the I.R.A. while he is in England.

Soon after the aforementioned scene, Dil is once again in danger. A car on the street attempts to run the pair over:

Fergus: “That Dave?”

Dil: “The things a girl has to put up with. I’m frightened, Jimmy. That’s not like him.”

Fergus: “Are you going to be all right on your own?”

Dil: “But I’m not on my own.”

Later the plot reveals that the car contains Jude and Peter, and that Fergus’s attempts to protect Dil are actually pulling her into his own situation. Yet, this particular dialogue places each of them in a gender role and highlights the idea that Dil is not safe on her

own because she is a “girl,” and that she, too, believes that she is safer with a man by her side. Dil also expresses the idea that violence and harassment are simply part of being female and that these things are to be “put up with,” if she were on her own. Ironically, Dil acts as if Fergus / Jimmy is the answer to the present male violence in her life, which later proves to be untrue.

Fergus cannot protect Dil, even though he professes his intentions to do so. He becomes more and more obsessed with Jody, asking numerous and repeated questions about Jody and his relationship with Dil, in order to become Jody’s substitute. An example of one such conflation is the following:

Fergus: “Did [Jody] come here too?”

Dil: “Is this an obsession of yours?”

Fergus: “Maybe.”

Dil: “He did sometimes.”

Fergus: “He danced with you?”

Dil: “What do you want with me, Jimmy?”

Fergus: “I want to look after you.”

Dil: “What does that mean?”

Fergus: “I heard someone say it once.”

The “someone” is a reference to Jody’s mandate that Fergus “look after” her at the beginning of the film. As Helen Hanson points out, “However, as Jordan makes clear in his discussion of the origin of the story, the importance of the relationship between Dil

and Fergus is that it is mediated by their connection to Jody” (53).⁶² Fergus’s guilt over Jody’s death haunts him so much that he cannot stop dreaming about him or forget his vow. This guilt is the catalyst for Fergus to want to step into Jody’s role and to do everything that Jody would have done for her. These flashbacks occur tellingly during Fergus and Dil’s only sexual encounter in the film: “The moment of Fergus’s climax is disrupted by his thoughts of Jody; the film shows a ‘dreamy’ image of Jody running up to bowl a cricket ball” (Hanson 55). Subconsciously, he seems to believe that he can protect her and look after her if he takes on that surrogate male protector role and in that way he can *be* Jody.

Psychologically, this same role is jeopardized when Fergus finds out that Dil does not have female genitalia. Fergus has openly expressed no interest in the homosexuality that would be necessary for any intimate sexual relationship. More importantly, the change in gender roles equally explains Fergus’s difficulty with accepting the revelation of Dil’s biological status.⁶³ Sexuality is not the only thing at stake. In a traditional role as Irish male, Fergus cannot protect his woman if she is not a woman, and this he both struggles with and eventually uses to protect her. In trying to reestablish the appropriate gender roles and to deal with his emotions, Fergus once again compares himself to Jody:

Dil: “A girl has her feelings.”

Fergus: “But you’re not a girl.”

⁶² Eve Sedgwick discusses this type of triangle as a “homosocial” relationship in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

⁶³ One scene between Jody and Fergus obliquely foreshadows Fergus’s confrontation with homosexuality and his repulsion and attraction for the same. Since Fergus can not undo the prisoner’s hands, Fergus must hold Jody’s penis while he urinates, something that he at first is not willing to do, but which eventually he accepts as a necessity. At the end of the scene, Jody sympathizes with Fergus and tells him, “I know that wasn’t easy for you,” to which Fergus replies, “No, the pleasure was all mine.”

Dil: "Details, baby, details..."

Fergus: "I should have known, shouldn't I?"

Dil: "Probably."

Fergus: "Kind of wish I didn't."

Dil: "You can always pretend."

Fergus: "That's true. Your soldier knew, didn't he?"

Dil: "Absolutely."

Fergus: "Won't be quite the same, will it?"

For Dil, being a woman consists of living as a female and genitalia falls under the category of "details." Her solution for Fergus to simply pretend that she is female shows this same mentality. For all intents and purposes, she is female. She believes that he just needs to see her as female, and then there would be no problem. Fergus, even in his attempts to fill Jody's shoes and keep his promises, has difficulty pretending. He cannot simply break it off and leave her due to his guilt about Jody, his need to protect her, and his emotional attachment to her.

His conflict over their appropriate gender roles and his need to be her protector are catalyzed by the surfacing of his old I.R.A. members in England. He must make a rapid decision about his feelings for her in order to save her from this escalated danger. Jude, in particular, threatens Dil in order to attain Fergus's participation in an I.R.A.

assassination:

Fergus: "No way, Jude."

Jude: "You're never out, Fergus. Maybe you don't care about yourself. Consider the

girl for a second, the wee, black chick.”

Fergus: “Leave her out of this.”

Jude: “Jesus, Fergus, you’re a walking cliché. You know we won’t leave her out, unless you concur.”

Fergus has little choice if he does not want Dil to become a target; he must either do the assassination or somehow get her out of harm’s way. Fergus attempts to do both without letting Dil know what the current situation is or his involvement with Jody’s death, which ultimately backfires on both fronts.

First, Fergus “changes” Dil into a man by cutting her hair and dressing her in Jody’s old cricket clothes. Although Fergus’s responses about gender up until this point had been based solely on biology, the fact that he uses the word “change” to describe the process of changing Dil only visually shows a difference in attitude. It implies that Dil is a woman, and that he can make her into a man based on that outward appearance. By changing Dil into a man, she has a better chance of protecting herself, not only because the I.R.A. does not know of her biological status but also because it is women, not men, who have to be protected in the common Irish film ideology attached to terrorism. Additionally, by dressing Dil in Jody’s clothes, she becomes a double for Jody. Fergus can now do what he could not earlier, save Jody by saving Dil and thereby relieving some of the guilt for his death. The flaw in this plan is the fact that Fergus does not tell Dil exactly why he wants the gender change, but simply agrees with her assumption that he would simply like her better that way. Dil, not understanding the danger that she is in,

disobeys Fergus's request that she stay in the hotel and unknowingly undercover. She instead goes back home, the place that the I.R.A. is most likely to find her.

Second, Fergus agrees to complete the assassination of the British official. He collects the equipment from Jude and would have made every effort to follow through on what he has been forced to do. Once again, Dil complicates the situation with the help of Fergus's guilt. When Fergus confesses to Dil, who is drunk and medicated at the time, his participation in Jody's death, her delayed reaction is to tie him to the bed and interrogate him. Of course, she has no idea that he is late for the assassination attempt, and mostly, she wants Fergus to calm her fears of abandonment by promising that he loves her and that he will never leave, which she elicits from him at gun point. The scene is a reversal of power in that Dil, dressed as Jody, now has Fergus as hostage, and she is now in Fergus's previous position of holding her hostage's life in her hands. As Fergus did, she eventually lets her hostage go, allowing her emotions to dictate her actions over feelings of revenge. The scene's sense of catharsis stems from this reversal of and giving back of power and the placement of Fergus in the helpless, subjugated position. The fact that Dil's stated reason for not shooting is that "Jody will not let her" further conflates her with him and allows the scene to represent a sort of supernatural expression of Jody's forgiveness of Fergus in response to his confession.

Dil still has the agency for the rest of the scene when Jude comes to take her revenge on Fergus, after she has just witnessed Peter's death in attempting the same assignment assigned to Fergus. Yet, again there is a reversal. Jude's revenge turns into Dil's revenge for Jody's murder:

(Dil shoots Jude, who is holding a gun pointed at Fergus.)

Dil: “Were you there too when you got my Jody?”

Jude: “You sick bitch.”

(Dil shoots Jude again.)

Dil: “You was there, wasn’t you? You used those tits and that ass to get him, didn’t you?”

Fergus: “Dil!”

(Dil shoots again. Jude dies.)

Dil’s anger at Jude is two-fold; she hates her for her part in Jody’s death, which she intuitively guesses correctly, and her jealousy of Jude’s attempts to take away both of her men, Jody and Fergus. By murdering Jude, Dil also saves Fergus’s life, since if she had not intervened, Jude would have most likely succeeded in killing him. Like *The Jackal*, the end of *The Crying Game* has the woman taking revenge for herself and having the power to physically protect herself.

Also similarly, the woman figure does not have the last moment of power, as Fergus takes back control of the scene in a clearheaded way that allows him to be blamed for Jude’s murder rather than Dil. His decisive action and obvious sacrifice of himself, ironically, places him in a position of powerlessness within the walls of a prison system, a martyr saving his Mother Ireland. At the very end of the film, Fergus is in the most secure section of a prison, sitting next to an armed guard and talking to Dil through a glass wall, and the two discuss the reasons for his sacrifice:

Dil: “Fergus. Fergus. My love. Light of my life.”

Fergus: "Please Dil."

Dil: "Can't help it. You're doing time for me. No greater love as the man says. I wish you would tell me why."

Fergus: "As the man said, it's in my nature."

Dil: "What's that supposed to mean?"

Fergus: "Well, there's this scorpion, you see..."

"The man" is referring to Jody in this dialogue, and Fergus ties back in his fable to explain his choice. Dil sees it as love, but the language shows that it is not only love of Dil, but also, the influence of Jody that combined in order for Fergus to give up years of his life for her. Fergus's "nature" could not allow him to continue killing and could not allow him to continue with his I.R.A. activities without his conscience getting the better of him. He had to be the kind man that Jody saw within him, and he could never naturally be the scorpion that hurt others just because he could. His choice was natural. He had to atone for the past that haunted him and his dreams. It is only through this sacrifice of his own freedom that he could deal with his past and move on. He could not protect Dil from the physical or emotional harm caused by the I.R.A., but he could save her from incarceration. On a national level, the film implies that it is necessary for Irish culture to deal with the violence of its past, which is cannot escape, and that it is only through taking responsibility for that violence can Ireland be redeemed.

***Cal*: Protagonist as Redeemed Sinner**

Similarly, in *Cal* (Pat O'Connor 1984), the film allows the guilty protagonist to be haunted by his past and attempt to redeem himself by protecting a mother figure. The

film not only visually removes Cal (John Lynch) from violence, showing him as a victim throughout the film, but also it obscures the entire opening sequence where Marcella's (Helen Mirren) husband is murdered. Cal is involved, but the audience only sees through a rainy windshield on a dark night, an image repeated multiple times throughout the film. The only other images are someone putting on black gloves, a hand on the steering wheel bearing a nightclub stamp, a silencer being put on a gun, and a minute later the dark figure of the murderer in the doorway of the house where the gun is fired at Robert (Brian Munn), a Protestant police officer, and his father (Seamus Forde). The images are flashes, short and somewhat impossible at this point to piece together into a cohesive whole or to see which character actually pulls the trigger. The image of the rainy windshield in particular is used as a repeated reminder of Cal's guilt. It is when Cal has sex with Marcella as part of their evolving relationship that the flashes reappear to flesh out the whole incident and show Crilly, not Cal, as the one with the gun, as well as Cal's reluctance to participate in the murder. Still, his sexual guilt is combined with the guilt of the past, which works as a catalyst for Cal to want to protect Marcella from further harm, which he later does through his own form of self-sacrifice.

Cal's character gains sympathy when he tries, unsuccessfully, to get out of the terrorist organization multiple times:⁶⁴

Cal: "I want out."

Crilly: "But you're not fucking in."

⁶⁴ The terrorist organization is never identified as the I.R.A., although they are a Catholic based organization run by the teacher, Skeffington. Even though they are a smaller group, it is obvious that they have power over Cal and others within the community through their terrorist activities, which include shooting and bombing.

Skeffington: “That word again.”

Cal: “I’m far enough in to want out. I’ve no stomach for it.”

Skeffington: “It makes things very awkward.”

Cal: “If it’s only for fun, then it’s just once. Then get somebody else”⁶⁵

Skeffington is flattering and threatening at the same time, and the audience feels his power over Cal, who obviously has to summon up a large amount of courage to even say that he’s “out.” Crilly’s statement that he was never “in,” works in two separate ways simultaneously. He allows the audience to see Cal as not responsible for the actions of the organization, as he is not even considered a part of it. It also points out the problem of Cal’s situation. Even though he is considered “in,” or perhaps because of it, Cal can never be “out.”

A similar scene occurs at the end of the film. Cal has been hiding at Marcella’s house to remove himself from Crilly and Skeffington and their violent endeavors, but Crilly finds him while he is Christmas shopping (because the former is planting a bomb in the shop that Cal is in) and forces him into a car with Skeffington. Once in the car, the intimidation continues despite Cal’s attempts to pull away from them:

Skeffington: “Why didn’t you let us know where you were?”

Cal: “I’m out.”

Crilly: “I was just telling him about your friend [Skeffington glares at Crilly]. I’m just trying to put him in the mood...”

⁶⁵ The terrorist organization is never identified as the I.R.A., although they are a Catholic based organization run by the teacher, Skeffington. Even though they are a smaller group, it is obvious that they have power over Cal and others within the community through their terrorist activities, which include shooting and bombing.

Skeffington: “Cal is no longer on our side. [To Cal:] You stay so we can keep in touch.”

Cal: “And if I say no.”

Skeffington: “This isn’t a game you know.”

The conversation is cut short by a British road block, the only reason that Cal can remove himself from the situation. Again, the members of the organization imply that if Cal does not do as they ask, he will be physically harmed. Skeffington’s comments function as Crilly’s did in the earlier conversation by both pointing out the impossible situation that Cal is in. He is clearly NOT one of them, but Skeffington is not about to let him disassociate himself either, creating Cal as a victim of circumstances.

The film further allows us to see Cal as a victim due to the frequent verbal and physical attacks from the Protestant community. While watching the Orange March go by their house, Cal’s father, Shamie (Donal McCann), states: “No Protestant git is going to drive me out.” Yet, later a note is placed through the door of their house that says, “Get out you Catholic scum or we’ll burn you out”. As it turns out, these are not idle threats as Cal and Shamie’s house is later set on fire, driving Cal to take up residence at Marcella’s and mentally devastating the father. This incident is the final catalyst to Shamie’s mental break down that places him in an asylum.

In another incident, Cal is attacked by three young men, one of whom is wearing a distinctive British flag t-shirt and the other two are dressed in black from head to toe. Cal eyes the men cautiously while he walks down a darkened street and tries his best to pass them without incident. The men grab him and initiate the fight, punching him and

throwing him to the ground several times, while Cal does not fight back, only trying to get free. He finally gets away and is chased by the men until he gets home and locks the door. The brutal attack is clearly not Cal's fault and is motivated by the fact that he is Catholic.

Most of the verbal discrimination towards Cal comes from the foreman, his boss through most of the film, who works for the Mortons (Marcella's in-laws). He constantly says things like, "If they were all like Shamie, there'd be less trouble around here." The "they" refers to Catholics. Later, after hearing about more violence, he states, "You listening to the news. They're at it again... Sometimes I think Hitler had the right idea." There are plenty of other comments made by the foreman, who does not treat Cal badly per se, but makes anti-Catholic comments to Cal's face throughout the film. The foreman represents the bias of the Protestant community and the innocuous way that prejudice emerges. Cal's victimization is not only physical, but also emotional, and his treatment functions as a way to gain greater sympathy.

Cal's failure to protect Marcella begins with her husband's murder. Similar to *The Crying Game*, the protagonist does not kill the woman's significant other, but he feels so responsible for his death that eventually he takes on the other man's role. In *Cal*, Robert's last word is "Marcella," representing his love for her but also his inability to protect her from harm. Marcella later gives Cal her husband's clothes, which he wears for much of the film, and which identifies his mental transformation as her new protective male.

A second failure to protect Marcella occurs when the terrorist organization holds up the library where she works. Unknowingly, Cal is the driver for the heist, and once Crilly returns, his first concern is for Marcella:

Cal: “What happened to the women?”

Crilly: “I made them lie on the floor.”

Cal: “Jesus Christ, I thought you’d killed them.”

Crilly: “It was easy, a cinch, they were shaking in their fucking high heeled shoes, couldn’t get down quick enough.”

Here, his position is helpless due to the fact that he cannot interfere with the heist since the armed gunman in the car would most likely kill him, but his concern for her welfare and fear for her death is a catalyst for his later motivation to personally protect her. Yet, Cal eventually realizes that his very presence around Marcella puts her in danger.

Marcella’s role as mother to Lucy and as object for self-sacrifice for Cal is not only typical of the National Allegory but even more blatantly religious than many of the other films discussed. Lucy, the daughter, is a peripheral character who appears in only a handful of scenes and who has only one speaking line.⁶⁶ Due to the unnecessary nature of the child character, it may be assumed that Lucy’s inclusion is simply a device to point out Marcella’s role as Mother.

Motherhood is connected to sainthood through Marcella’s dialogue during a dinner conversation with Cal. In discussing a saint, she says: “The man who killed her took communion with her own mother... We thought the mother should have been the saint.

⁶⁶ Lucy wanders into the barn where Cal is working and says, “Hello,” to him. This is a plot device to allow Marcella to follow and to initiate a conversation with Cal.

To have that much forgiveness.” This follows a short story about how when Marcella was a girl, she and her friends used to have a test for whether or not a boy was worth a romantic relationship. The test was, “Would you die for him?” The placement of these two different stories right after one another brings together the ideas of sacrifice and forgiveness. This is also supported by the painting presented briefly in the film:

For instance, there is a very clear intertextual reference [in the novel *Cal* that the film is based on] to a painting by Grunewald, the sixteenth-century painter best known for his depictions of the crucified Christ. Perhaps the most famous of these paintings is described in detail in the novel and given momentary visual prominence in the film. Closely identified with Marcella its role is curious: it seems to suggest an analogy between herself and the Christ’s mother, Mary. If so, then further parallels might be suggested between the figure of Christ and her dead husband, Morton, or even Cal himself (Simpson 143)

Although I agree with this statement, I would add that it does not matter if it is Morton or Cal who would be connected to Christ, since Cal attempts to fill Morton’s role in being Marcella’s lover. The mother is presented as sacred and simultaneously as a source of forgiveness for even the worst crimes. Cal sees her as a symbol of hope for forgiveness for his past, but only if willing to die for her, the typical Christ figure. It is right after this conversation that Cal, dressed in Marcella’s husband’s clothes, attempts to kiss her, again tying his guilt from the murder to sexuality. This is blatantly reinforced by a later scene, when before the sexual act, she kisses Cal and asks him, “Would you die for me?” This, of course, is reminiscent of Cathleen ni Houlihan who asks the sons of Ireland to sacrifice

themselves for her. This brings back the flashes of the murder, showing the man who did die for Marcella, and reinforcing the fact that Cal must sacrifice himself if he wants to fulfill the husband's role.

Cal's masochistic reaction to the guilt of his past manifests itself before the final scene. After one of the flashbacks of the rainy windshield, Cal sits shaking in a chair, takes a cigarette in one hand and burns the palm of the other. This foreshadows his acceptance of his need for punishment for his crimes, and his love for Marcella is the motivation for his martyrdom in order to free her and himself from his past. When running from the police due to the actions of Skeffington and the others, knowing that he is likely to be caught, Cal comes to Marcella and gives her a partial confession:

Cal: "There's something else. I would die for you. You remember you'd asked me if I'd ever done anything really bad. Well I have. A while ago. A year ago."

Marcella: "No. Don't."

Cal: "I want to tell you, but I can't. Remember that. Remember that."

The film includes Cal's statement that he would die for her to emphasize that what might seem to be a passive action is in actuality a thoughtful, masochistic act. Cal returns to the shed on Marcella's property and waits for the police to burst through the door, violently accost him, and take him to prison. He does not run or fight, actions that he previously engaged in. He knows that he will lose his personal freedom, and by doing nothing, he is acting to pay for his crimes, be redeemed, and allow Marcella to move on. This is the only way Cal can protect Marcella and bring closure to his haunted past.

The Irish protagonist involved in or against terrorist activities has all but disappeared in both Irish and American film since the Peace Treaty of 1998 and the major change in the face of terrorism in the United States after September 11th 2001. On the surface, films made previous to this time can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the difficult political and cultural situation of the time and the ethical dilemmas inherent in war-related terrorism as it relates to the individual. Certainly, the films show how years of political unrest have affected not only society but each member, and of course, the family as well.

Yet, the repeated nature of the National Family Allegory, the same roles being played over and over again, split down gender and age lines, allows the films to show how mired Irish culture is in the past. The ways in which the sons sacrifice themselves also reflect the major influences on Irish identity: colonization, political rhetoric, and Catholicism. The main characters are guilty of a crime and admittedly so (even if the audience does not see the actual events). The Catholic guilt over a bloody and violent Irish history is culturally reflected within the son's need to sacrifice himself for the nation. Although the meaning of the allegory is different in each film, the repetition of the same typical son figure demonstrates that Irish culture has not established a new national identity for young men, but instead, continues to be haunted by its past violence for which it demonstrates a need for atonement and redemption.

CHAPTER IV

ARTICULATION AND STASIS:

THE SON AS HAUNTED ECHO OF THE FATHER IN MCCANN'S

SONGDOGS

Colum McCann's *Songdogs*, an example of a novel concerned with the Irish diaspora, shows just how ingrained these conservative Family roles are within Irish culture.⁶⁷ The National Family Allegory replays itself even in a novel that spans four countries and describes an international journey of both father and son. It does not matter that the characters emigrate from and return to their native country because the allegory stays with them no matter where they are geographically. These allegorical roles are played out in the typical pattern demonstrating a stasis in Irish culture. It shows that in spite of attempts to change and develop new patterns and identities, the typical patterns can not be disrupted. As a National Allegory, *Songdogs* implies that Irish culture is static, trapped in the past in the search for a national identity, represented by the missing Mother Ireland figure.

Songdogs tells the story of Conor's return to Ireland where he is reunited with his estranged father, who he discovers is dying. The flashbacks placed throughout this main narrative show Conor's journey to regain his past, a journey that takes him through three countries. He has to piece together his past with little information, only his own

⁶⁷ The narrative of *Songdogs*, told by the son named Conor, supports it as a novel of the diaspora due to the fact that Conor, who spent his childhood in Ireland, is half Irish and half Mexican and during the present time of the novel is a resident of the United States. If the novel had been from the father's perspective, a man who has been an Irish citizen throughout his travels through other countries, then the novel would be considered purely Irish, but the choice of narrator indicates an international perspective without losing the centrality of Ireland to both of the main characters.

memories, the family's stories and his father's photographs. His main objective is to understand his mother, Juanita's, abandonment of him after she finds that Michael, Conor's father, has published nude and semi-nude photographs of her without her permission or knowledge.

Songdogs's characters fit the National Family roles. Michael's role is to control the family, which is typical of the father role in contemporary Irish literature described in this study in that it is a failing enterprise.⁶⁸ Conor's role is to protect the mother, which he also fails to do. Juanita's role is challenged by the photographs, since she is supposed to be the virginal Mother Ireland, which is the catalyst for her leaving, but she can fulfill the role even in her absence.⁶⁹ She is more important as an object than an actual figure and continues to be the object negotiated by father and son; she is the catalyst for both men's international journeys and creates the major conflict between Michael and Conor. Mother Ireland does not have to be present to inspire a son's sacrifice or a father's attempt to control; in this case, the latter occurs by freezing her within the photographs in order to possess her in a static state. Any progress, any type of "articulation" in the novel circles back on itself and resembling a circle, it ends where it begins. *Songdogs* shows an Irish culture mired in the past, not only unable to move forward but haunted by personal tragedy.

The novel utilizes two different mediums for expression that both attempt to thwart the inevitability of death, Michael's photographs and Conor's narrative. The novel

⁶⁸ The role of the father is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

⁶⁹ Laura Lyons discusses the conflation of Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary, which is discussed in the introduction.

implies that there is a problem with both photographs and narrative in regards to reconciling the past of each character. The problem is that once the photograph is taken or the narrative is written, it exists in a stasis, in a junction between life and death where nothing changes. Additionally, as Roland Barthes explains, a difficulty with photographs (and additionally I would add the narrative that Conor creates based primarily on the pictures) is that since we see it as a form of evidence, it often takes over and distils the events that occurred to that one moment. “Not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory...but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes counter-memory” (Barthes 91). This “counter-memory” occurs due to the gap between actual experience and the created experience. The photographs are already removed from the original event; they are not the event itself, but instead they are one moment caught in time, lacking the details to explain exactly what is going on within the photograph, the emotions and situations that occurred directly before and after and other gaps in detail. They are capturing a moment out of context, so that when Conor writes a narrative based on those individual events or moments, the experience has become doubly removed from the original moment. The reader is getting a story twice filtered and distilled.

It is this distillation process that creates what the novel refers to as a “quark.”⁷⁰ Within the context of the novel, a “quark” is the smallest moment or event that still has meaning, a condensation of prior experience which, although it lacks detail, retains the quality of the original experience. It is the origin of a larger universe of experience. The

⁷⁰ The word “quark” has a history in Irish literature; James Joyce invented the term in *Finnegan’s Wake* (“quark”). McCann most likely uses the term due not only to its meaning in physics but also because of its history.

novel seems to indicate that the photographs and the narrative are merely “quarks” due to the fact that it is impossible to capture the grand detail and momentary emotions of an entire life. But one can capture its essence in a condensed and somewhat lesser version. The photographs and the narrative function in this fashion; they condense the parents’ (and to a certain extent Conor’s experiences in present time) to a manageable core of moments that a person can grasp and understand. However, Conor’s problem with a “quark” as the source of a narrative is that because it is condensed, when he attempts to expand the “quark” to see the entire picture, what is created is “counter-memory” as he attempts to fill in the gaps. The general problem with trying to capture and hold on to the past is that there is no medium, not photography, not narrative, not memory, that does not become distilled over time. The experiences can be condensed and expanded, but each time they are revisited, the memory loses detail, becomes both true and false simultaneously, a fiction based on facts, so any attempt is doomed to function only in a narrow manner, never as a complete whole. The “counter-memory” also takes over as “reality” and creates a static history that cannot be changed; it becomes the authentic story in place of the parents’ real experience. As a National Family Allegory, the concept of the “quark” calls into question the authenticity of any medium to capture history, personal and national. The past can not be captured or reenacted, but there is a cultural need to continually try to experience the past as a way to understand the present.

Articulation

Definition 1. “The action or process of jointing; the state of being jointed; mode of jointing or junction.”

Definition 2. “A jointed structure or series.”

Definition 6. “The utterance of the distinct elements of speech; articulate voice.”

Definition 7. “Utterance; speech.”

(Oxford English Dictionary)

Songdogs reflects the varying definitions of “articulation,” a word repeatedly used within the narrative in unusual and surprising ways that reflect its importance both in content and in relation to the narrative’s structure. Yet, the different kinds of articulation are shown to be masturbatory due to the fact that no form of articulation can be authentic and describe a whole experience. Therefore, articulation is simply a form of self-gratification. The attempts at articulation of the past (and even to an extent the present) can only yield a “quark,” the smallest representation of experience that still retains meaning, which through the loss of experience and detail, can never entirely capture a whole experience; this “quark,” creates a “counter memory” that replaces those experiences. For example, the new details placed on the photographs by Conor as he describes them in the narrative take over and give new meaning to them, a counter memory *in place of* the original experience. It is the counter memory that *becomes* the past for both father and son. It is in this way that the articulation both juxtaposes and eventually actually creates the stasis that haunts the novel and which demonstrates the very obsessive need for the family structure that is lacking in both the lives of the son and the father. Both characters try to establish the family structure by constructing or reconstructing it, the son through narrative and the father through photography. As discussed in the introduction, the traditional, patriarchal family is written into the

constitution of Ireland and repeated over and over in the culture. Even narratives that seem to subvert the politics of the family story show an obsessive return to that model, which may indicate ambivalence between a desire for change and nostalgia for the stability of a patriarchal culture. For example, the lack of mother figure is a space for the text to subvert the National Family Allegory, but the text utilizes the flashbacks and Conor's ability to embody photographs to counteract her absence, place her back into the novel.

In reference to the first two definitions, the narrative is jointed through its cyclical repetitions of events and geographical places and through its treatment of time in both a linear and non-linear fashion and through the junction of the son's story and the father's life. The novel interweaves time, allowing the reader to follow forward through the present, while flashbacks and descriptions of photographs constantly stop time's progress and give it a static feel. Both men are haunted by the past, by the lack of the mother figure, and by the inability to heal from her abandonment. They cannot move on and figuratively live in the world of the dead and dying, which joins the two characters in healing, their fragmented relationship damaged by Juanita's disappearance. Yet, even with some amount of progress for the characters, the jointed structure of the novel, the repeated junction of father and son's stories, suggests the cyclical nature of the National Family Allegorical structure. Similarly, as much as the narrative moves forward, shown in the titles of its chapters (which are all days of the week) that represent Conor's week stay with his father in Ireland during the present, this movement in time is negated by the interrupting passages describing the past.

As for the latter definitions of “articulation”, the narrative itself represents one form, and arguably, photography defines the other.⁷¹ Conor and Michael, his father, both attempt to preserve life and stave off death through differing media. For father and son, the problem with recording an authentic experience within these media, however, is that both the narrative and photographs reside in the junction between life and death. Once the words are written, they are fixed and unchangeable. Even the content reflects its connection to death, as the major linear story line revolves around Conor’s visit with his dying father, and no amount of storytelling can change that inevitability. Similarly, once the photograph is taken, the moment and event are preserved, but they cannot be relived except through memory, which is shown to be faulty. It is the preservation or capturing of the events that ironically places what were dynamic experiences into stasis, allowing for them to be both articulations, monuments to life, and at the same time, connected inevitably to death.

Articulation is also examined through the concept of the “Songdogs,” presented not only as the title of the novel but also as a complex symbol of creation indicated first in the epigraph. Conor recounts the Native American mythos and then adds to it when he applies it to his parents:

Years later, in America, I was told that Navajo Indians believed coyotes ushered in the Big Bang of the world with their song, stood on the rim of nothingness, before time, shoved their pointed muzzles in the air, and howled the world into

⁷¹ Although photography does not specifically fit the definition of “speech” or “utterance,” the fact that photography does communicate, even though visually rather than through specific language, I argue that it does have an utterance, a message, a communication with the viewer, and therefore can be seen as an “articulation” in this way.

existence at their feet. The Indians called them songdogs...Long ago, when they told me their stories about Mexico, Mam and Dad, I believed they were true. And I suppose I still do. They were my songdogs...They tried hard to tell me how much they had been in love with one another, how good life had been, that coyotes really did exist and sing in the universe of themselves on their wedding day. And maybe they did...But the past is a place that is full of energy and imagination. In remembering, we can distil the memory down. We can manage our universe by stuffing it into the original quark, the point of burstingness (72-73).

Conor wants to be a songdog, like his parents, hence the narrative, but in attempting to capture, to articulate his parents' stories, he finds that he cannot sing/tell their entire lives into being, not in full detail. It is too large a world and one that he can never verify as being true because he must piece it together from old stories, early childhood memories, and from his father's photographs. The narrative, like memory, must "manage [his] universe," which inevitably "distil[s]" it to the smallest, most important events, which then substitutes for living life. Conor cannot become a songdog in its fullest sense, despite his desperate need to do so. Like his parents, his song does not create a full world. The passage also reveals Conor's need to create a family structure. The world of his parents is sung into being not at their birth but at their marriage. It is the family life that Conor attempts to create, but he can only know the "quark," the minute origin of the family, which has potential to create an entire world. Yet, it takes a songdog to do so, and

he does not have that kind of power. His articulations are minute compared to the grandness of reality.

The epigraph of the novel, also told by Conor, in connection with the passage quoted above, demonstrates the reason why Conor cannot be a songdog. Conor is reconstructing the past; he is haunted by it. The world he is trying to create is already past, already dead:

Just before I came home to Ireland I saw my first coyotes. They were strung on a fencepost near Jackson Hole, Wyoming... Two near bullet holes had pierced their flanks where brown merged white... Muzzles and paws hung down in the grass and their mouths were open, as if about to howl. The hanging was a rancher's warning to other coyotes to stay away from the field. If they trotted nearby, a paw raised to the chest, an ear cocked to a sound, a tail held in motion, the rancher would bullet them back to where they came from. But coyotes aren't as foolish as us – they don't trespass where the dead have been. They move on and sing elsewhere (epigraph)

Dead songdogs cannot howl, cannot create, even if caught at the very moment when they were about to sing a world into existence; they are suspended in time, a warning to others that creation needs movement, needs change and progress. Even though Conor understands this, his narrative is attempting to howl that world, but he is “trespass[ing] where the dead have been” (epigraph). His song is about death, not creation. His articulations re-sing an old song, and in this way they create stasis.

The narrative reinforces this idea of stasis by connecting the Songdog concept with the polluted river and Michael's repetitious fishing:

It's the lethargy of the present that terrifies us all. The slowness, the mundanity, the sheer plod of each day. Like my endless hours spent strolling through Mexico. And my father's constant casting these days. His own little songdog noise of a fishing line whisking its way through the air (73)

The description shows outright the stasis of the day-to-day of the present, and his father's constant fishing without ever catching anything over and over each day demonstrates the inane nature of his attempts at articulation. It is unproductive and repetitious because the river is polluted, like Michael's past. Yet, he feels compelled to go through the motions unceasingly in the same way that culture represents repetitive stereotypical identity roles.

Similar to the inability of Conor (and later in his life his parents) to be songdogs and to create a lasting world from stories, Michael's photographs function in the same way. They communicate ideas, try to preserve the past and try to detail the lives of Michael and Juanita. Yet, it is just this being tied to the past, to the time there was a Family structure, which makes the photographs static. They are not the same as living that one moment's experience, even when Conor can manipulate them by metaphorically walking in to the photo to become participant as well as viewer. It ultimately fails to tell the whole story; it is not the same as being there.

With this in mind, the fact that the narrative's description of some of Michael's photographs connect articulation to masturbation in Conor's viewing and interaction with them continues the idea that photographs are not enough to fully understand an event.

The metaphors contained in the description show that the “utterance” that they make is self-pleasing and eventually inane, both in their content and Conor’s interaction with them:

There were as many pictures of prostitutes as there were of bread. The prostitutes held a peculiar fascination for [Michael], girls who rolled their skirts up on the rubble of their thighs...The men around them were articulate with their penises, a natural extension from the barrel of a rifle to the absurd freckle sitting on any man’s undershaft. One of the shots shows a line of men in a tent, Germans, Spaniards and Moroccans, impatient with sweat, waiting in queue for a thin pockmarked whore in baggy underwear, panties around one ankle. She is kneeling down in front of an equally thin soldier with her mouth at his crotch. At the back of the queue another soldier raises an air-punch in anticipation of the soldier’s climax. His fly already open and his scrotum leaks out like an underwater polyp (21-22)

Even though the passage includes some description of the female prostitute involved in the sexual acts, the focus of the description is on the male soldiers. The two sexual acts specifically described, the oral gratification of the one soldier and the masturbation of the other, are acts that are solely for pleasure and unproductive. They do not result in creation. The men are “articulate with their penises” in both the primary and secondary definitions. The men are joined by their masculinity, the penis being a synecdoche of masculinity and what binds the men in the camaraderie of male sexuality. The second soldier connects himself to the first through their shared climaxes. It is a junction of the

two sexual acts and due to the fact that it is a photograph that Conor is viewing, it is a junction not only of the different soldiers, but also of Conor's male sexuality to that of the soldiers. Conor's viewing of it also gives it meaning to him; it tells a story of what his father saw during the war and therefore, it is an utterance of Michael's experience in that one moment.

The penises of the soldiers are compared to the "barrel of a rifle," chosen most likely for visual similarities, but this metaphor compares the meaningless sexual acts to the war and violence. In *Songdogs*, the political is peripheral to the personal stories. Michael sees and photographs the war, but he is not involved. He walks through history as an observer. As James Brown states in reference to Michael's politics:

The photographer's politics are strictly personal; he is more concerned with the health of his boyhood friend who is fighting the Communists than he is for any of the ideals over which war is being waged: 'He had no politics, my father, he was only a photographer, shooting visions, but he placed the holy medal at his neck for safety' (20). Of course, having no politics is itself a political stance, especially in Ireland (46).

Although the narrative gives no opinion on war directly, Michael's relationship with Manley allows the reader to see that war destroys male identity. The personal story becomes the political, and the narrative implies what it does not directly state; war is harmful to masculinity, creating stasis and death.

Manley, whose name begs an allegorical reading of stereotypical masculinity, fulfils the son role by going off to war, although it is not for his mother country. Manley loses a

leg in Madrid, and despite Michael's attempts to nurse his friend back to health, Manley disappears suddenly:

One afternoon [Michael] found Manley's crutch along the banks of the Manzanares...and he felt sure his friend was dead, although the body couldn't be found. The photos that they had taken years before in Mayo, with Manley in his outrageous suits, became my father's most vibrant memory of his friend. When the old man talked of Manley he remembered him as a sixteen year old with a lustful glint in his eye, rather than a legless soldier who reeked of piss at night
(23)

Manley's character functions only when in the stereotypical role; once he is injured and cannot fight, he can no longer fulfill this role, and he loses his identity way before killing himself. He can no longer be a man. Michael, too, cannot deal with remembering his friend in a less than whole state and instead uses the photo to memorialize his friend. He freezes him in time, using the photograph to create a static identity in place of the one that was destroyed.

Although some writers and texts use war to show the bonding of brotherhood in war and the initiation qualities that make men to show a particularly masculine experience, *Songdogs* does the opposite. Through Manley's character, the novel implies that war is detrimental to masculinity, and it breaks apart the "brotherhood" between Michael and Manley, as well as breaking Manley physically and psychologically. Hence, the metaphor that connects penises to guns ties that representation of sexuality to the destruction of identity. War is directly connected to sexuality in its destructive nature

throughout these passages: “In makeshift hospital tents there was as much syphilis as shrapnel” (22). The photograph’s articulation is masturbatory in the sense that it is meaningless, static, and unproductive, attached to destruction and death, and yet pleasurable at the same time. The photo freezes in time the masculinity of the soldiers in the same way that Michael uses Manley’s photograph, and this stasis is a form of death as well.

Conor’s interaction with the above photo and several others connects articulation to masturbation directly as well:

I was a teenager when I discovered [the photos]. I’d sit, perched on a slat of wood in the attic, thumping away at my body, in the beginning of its own articulation. I became the camera, became the cameraman, and all the time hated my father for being privy to these visions. I walked into the photos, parted the canvas doors of the tents, stood, bemused at first, talked to the women. The women smiled at my curious appearance beckoned me backwards to the 1930s, asked me sly questions...The women would move around in the photographs for me, come behind the camera, take me by the hand and lead me somewhere no lens could watch, let me touch them, open my shirt buttons with a flick of their fingers, let me wander, sleep beside them (22)

Conor has the ability to articulate a new story, expanding the flat, black and white confines of his father’s photographs, expressing his own sexuality through the narrative. Conor’s masturbatory acts are blamed on his father, even though the narrative is a different experience from what his father went through in taking them. He is doubly

expressing his sexuality through the act itself and his description of it years later.

However, his hatred of Michael, the reader later find outs, stems from his publication of nude photographs of Conor's mother, which is the catalyst for Juanita's leaving the family, never to return. His masturbation over his father's photos is inevitably linked to his later repulsion in response to of the pictures of his mother. In a Freudian way, Conor hates his own sexuality because he cannot handle his father's sexuality in relation to his mother. He becomes his father, the "cameraman," the voyeur to the event, but also the one who controls what is photographed. He can bend the photos as if he were taking them himself. He is also the "camera" in the sense that the narrative that he is creating functions in the same way as the photographs, capturing an experience, an event. The photographs are a junction between Conor's life and his father's, binding the two time periods, the 1930s and the present, a combining both of their experiences.

He is in control of his version, but his narrative is ultimately fictional. The reader knows from the narrative that Conor's father never touched, slept with or talked to the prostitutes. In his description, Conor goes "somewhere no lens could watch," which seems to show a form of guilt that his imaginings go farther than his father's real experience. He is hiding from the camera, from his father, literally the cameraman in order to engage in sexual actions, which depicts a sexual shame. He hates his father because he can only imagine what it would have been like to be there with the prostitutes and the photos of the prostitutes are linked within his mind to the photos of his mother. He cannot become his father through constructed and imagined events, and he seems to

know this. Just as with the picture of the soldiers and the whore, Conor's narrative is created for his own gratification, both literally and figuratively.

Within the novel, articulations in narrative and photographic form attempt to fight death and capture or reconstruct life, but what they create is ultimately false, distilled, or expanded. Memory is just as unreliable as photographs without context and experience. It is the gaps in the story, the lack of detail, which makes the possibility of recounting or showing a life in its entirety impossible. Both father and son can only articulate the "quark" of their lives, and by doing so, they place the past in a cyclical stasis, a representation of a nation trapped in its past. It can be re-articulated but never relived, reconstructed but not authentically duplicated.

Stasis

Just as there are different ways to view articulation in the novel, there are two different kinds of stasis present: the static as paralyzed and the static as cyclical repetition. In general, Michael's life and his photographs tend to be the former, while Conor's life and narrative are the latter. Michael uses photography to try to control the world around him and to keep the world in stasis. As Susan Sontag discusses, photographs have the ability to appropriate a sense of power:

To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power...photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire (4)

The use of the word “acquire” implies ownership, as if by taking a photograph one can actually own a piece of reality. This owning is the source of the power. Michael attempts to do this same kind of acquiring of life -- he appropriates his life and others’, capturing everything as if it were an object to be held on to, which includes the human subjects of his photographs. Yet, it only seems *as if* this were possible. It is only possible through imagination and stasis; hence, stasis confers power on him. He can own and acquire these pieces of life, but the price is to kill the moment, to own it in stasis, not in reality.

Conor’s life is in many ways an echo of his father’s, going the same circuitous route geographically and in regard to family. His life is static, not in time, not in appropriating the past, but in not being able to do so. He goes in circles because he cannot own his past. He is haunted by it, and therefore cannot move on, but is compelled to nonetheless move through the same patterns that his father did before him. Similarly, the novel’s narrative is set up in a cyclical way in regard to time due to its intermittent flashbacks. Whenever the narrative goes forward in time, it takes one step back in time by flashback before going forward again. Although this is movement, it is movement in a circle, which makes it static. This is how Conor lives his life within the text, one step forward and one step back.

Death and Photography

The novel directly states that Michael uses photographs in order to freeze time and to live in the past. Michael not only captures experience and time in the case of Manley but also for his family’s life as well: “[Michael] didn’t know it then, but the camera would

burst him out on to the world, give him something to cling to, fulminate a belief in him in the power of light, the necessity of image, the possibility of freezing time” (9). The camera is Michael’s way of holding on to his Family structure, living in a past that included his wife, Juanita, and times of youth and friendship. The camera allowed him to see the world, but only as an outsider, a voyeur, and not to live it. It captured his life, but then trapped him within that freezing of time. Now that he is dying, he lives his life in a cycle of fishing and sleeping in the present time, but he is also haunted by the photographs that he took, a life already lived. As Conor later states about his father:

It was something the old man often did – if a moment existed in a photograph, it was held in that particular stasis for ever. It was as if by taking a photo he could, at any moment, reinhabit an older life – one where a body didn’t droop, or hair didn’t fall out, or a future didn’t have to exist. Time was held in the centre of his fist. He either crumpled it or let it fly off. It was as if he believed that something that *was* has the power to be what *is*. It was his own particular ordering of the universe, a pattern that moved from past to present, with the ease of a sheet dropped into a chemical bath (23)

In the same way that the narrative can jump from present to past, so can the photographs. It gives Michael the power only to appear to relive and not to change, which is shown in the cyclic and routine daily existence that he lives in the present. He is waiting to die, but through the photographs, Michael can pretend that there is no death, no future. His belief that “something that *was* has the power to be what *is*” is a belief and no more; it does not change the fact that his body does droop and that he cannot hold on to time. Yet, it is the

belief in the power of the photograph that keeps him in the past, haunted by it. It is the repetition, the haunting nature of the Family allegory that makes it ideological; it replays in creative and subconscious ways.

As Roland Barthes explains, it is easy for one to mistake what is in a photograph as alive, but the photograph by nature is showing only what is dead:

For photography's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts, the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photography surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead (79)

Barthes theory indicates that no matter whether or not the subject of a particular photograph is in reality dead, the moment in time when it was taken has past, and from the moment that the photograph is taken, the subject in that exact form, in that exact expression, in that exact setting is "already dead". As applied to *Songdogs*, Michael is living life as if he were already dead due to the fact that his power is only over the dead, what "has-been," but which he mistakenly takes as "Live".

Additionally, one needs memory (does not have to be his or her own) to place a photograph into historical context. What seems to be going on may not be, but if he takes the photograph as evidence and applies meaning to it, then he can reconstruct events. For instance, when Conor views the picture of the soldiers and the whore, he seems to assume that his father was involved in the sexual acts in some way, and yet he was not. His lack

of memory to analyze the photograph leads to him creating a “counter-memory,” one which will create a new bubble of meaning, a new stasis for that particular event that exists only in Conor’s mind and not in Michael’s memory.

The photographs are Michael’s legacy, but they are also a monument to everyone that he has lost from his mother to Manley to Juanita. His pictures are often of tragedy, both his own and other people’s. The camera itself is tied directly to Michael’s past; he named his first camera, Loyola, after one of the two women who raised him (9). It is only after losing his mother figures that Michael begins to take photographs, perhaps in a way attempting to compensate for their deaths. The house that Michael occupies in Ireland is a monument to Juanita in the same way. Michael keeps all of her dresses in the closet (77), a picture of Juanita on the mantle (16), and the house in the same condition it was when she left with the exception of accumulating dirt and dust. Conor remarks on the lack of change in the house by asking his father, “How about we open a museum?” which in many ways it already is (60). It is as if the house itself were a photograph, trapped in time, living only in the past when there was Family there, documenting the family’s profound losses. Just as the house has not changed since the nuclear Family was under its roof, neither has the culture changed that national Family structure. The house cannot change because the Family cannot live in the present, cannot create new identities, but instead, must live in the same roles from the time before Juanita left. The house is symbolic of this lack of change both on a personal and on a national level.

Doubling and the Cyclical Life

Conor's character functions as a double of his father's, and this doubling of lives allows for narrative junctions in time and space between father and son and implies that one can never escape one's past. Since the family is allegorical for the nation, and the personal is inevitably political in Irish literature, this doubling of Michael and Conor's lives implies a nation that is haunted by its past, its losses, and its tragedies, and trepidatious of its future.⁷² It is shown as a land of "Nothing but old men" (27), and the young men will eventually become those old men.⁷³ There is no new masculine identity because the son inevitably becomes who his father is, a dying and fragile man. The missing mother in both Michael and Conor's lives implies a lack of national and personal identity for which both characters are desperately searching, but it is impossible for the characters to stop the cycle of loss because as Michael states, "You learn finally that some things aren't meant to heal" (205). Without healing, there is not progress, only going in family based circles, never moving on.⁷⁴ This mimics Irish culture's inability to heal from its violent past and the stasis that goes hand-in-hand with it. Trauma repeats without healing and no new identities are created. The National Family Allegory roles are a demonstration of this being caught in the past.

⁷² Nancy J. Curtin and David Lloyd, amongst others, make the assertion that the personal is political in separate articles.

⁷³ This statement may be influenced by "Sailing to Byzantium" by William Butler Yeats, whose first line begins "That is no country for the old," which in turn was influenced by the story of Tuatha de Danaan, the country of the young. Michael is discussing emigration of the young people from Ireland, which left the town he lived in populated mostly with old men. This is a jab at Conor, who has emigrated and left his father alone and without family in Ireland.

⁷⁴ Even though Conor does not live in Ireland, the entire week experience is the focus of the novel. He is only shown outside of Ireland in flashback. He is haunted enough by his father and the country to return to it. The given reason in the novel is to renew his visa (connecting him politically as still an Irish citizen), but he stays much longer, and the narrative seems to support the idea that he is really there to deal with his father and his past.

As Eamon Wall writes, “In *Songdogs*, the characters are bound together by some elemental binary twists and journeys. Both Michael and Conor Lyons, father and son have been abandoned by their mothers” (282). The flashbacks begin with the father’s early life, the pattern upon which Conor’s life is placed. Michael’s mother, considered a madwoman by the townspeople, left Michael after birth: “The madwoman, my grandmother, was nowhere to be seen, although a trail of her clothes, including the one-sleeved dress, led inland towards the mountains” (6). His father, who had not married his mother, was a soldier killed in the Great War. Michael entered the world as an orphan, but he was found by two Protestant spinster women, only one of whom the narrative actually names (Loyola), but both of whom Michael calls “mammy” (6). He then loses both of his replacement mother figures to a freak drowning incident; Michael has lost three mothers before his teenage years. It is then that Michael begins to photograph, something that becomes a catalyst for all of his future geographical moves and leads him to Mexico and Juanita.

Michael’s photographs seem to be a latent Oedipal response to never having had a mother, never exploring the early sexual attraction to the mother figure, and hence, the women that he photographs in erotic poses and in various stages of undress with the camera named after his mother figure may be an attempt to reenact this stage. This is another similarity between Michael and Conor -- both go through a fascination with the sexuality of a mother figure. Each character grows up without a mother, and the missing mother becomes a central obsession in each of their lives. The Oedipal dynamic in the novel mirrors the political stasis in Ireland. No matter how many different family

structures are invented, the Oedipal complex asserts itself; they both function ideologically. Similarly, in spite of Ireland's Republican and egalitarian impulses in its revolutionary period, patriarchal and Catholic structures dominated in the independent state.

There is an added layer to Michael's experience. Loyola's name has an obvious religious connotation, and Michael rejects the Protestant women to a certain extent due to their religious affiliations and remains Catholic, even renaming himself with a Catholic name in order to respect his real father (7). The fact that his camera is named after Loyola is ironic in this sense, as his choice of subjects gets Michael into trouble with religious organizations several times throughout the novel. He ignores the priest's sermons condemning his photographs, and he never believes in religion in the same way that Juanita does and will not even go to mass in his adult life until Juanita's mother makes him. On a personal level, he is both searching for a replacement for Loyola and simultaneously rejecting the religion that she represents.

Conor does have a father, although it seems as though his photographs guide him more than his father, from whom he is estranged. So even though this is a difference in their two stories, it does not negate the overwhelming similarities. Conor's mother leaves when he is a young boy due to the fact that his father published nude photographs of Juanita without her prior knowledge. The disgrace of her sexuality being made public is more than Juanita can take, and, after burning down his darkroom, she leaves forever. The rest of Conor's narrative tries to understand that abandonment and to reconstruct her life in order to reestablish the Family structure that they had as a child. Through the

narrative, Conor's mother is tied to Michael's directly through his father's speculations about her abandonment of them both: "Thought she'd be back. Swore it to myself. Didn't give it much thought until a few hours later. Then a day. Then two days. Three. Sometime I even think she could have walked her way down to the river beyond. She was awful depressed, you know" (208). Michael's mother killed herself next to the river, and he imagines that Juanita might have done the same, conflating his mother's abandonment with his wife's. The two mother figures combine to create one abandoning mother archetype.

The next geographical step in Michael and Conor's journeys does differ. Michael took photographs of the war, while Conor emigrated to England. However, once leaving Ireland, both of them (after their original stops) are lead by photographs to Mexico. Michael finds a Mexican with a worn picture of his sister: "The photo had already grown yellow around the edges, but the soldier wouldn't part with it. Instead, my father took a picture of the Mexican holding the picture" (29). Even though he never meets the soldier's sister in real life, it is the man and the photo that convince him to go there. For Conor, it is not only his father's photographs of Mexico, but also guidebooks that serve as his catalyst:

A childish voice inside me asking: 'Who the hell are you anyway?' In bookshops on Charing Cross Road I looked at guidebooks to Mexico, wondering if my mother might step out from the pages and appear to me, maybe a sarape around her, maybe standing under a clothesline, flutter her thinness out towards the Chihuahuan desert. In those bookshops – with the smell of words, the promise of

existing in another place, the feet moving by me as I sat lotus-legged on the floor, the clerks staring me down from the register – I decided that I would make my trip to my mother’s country, find her, make her exist for me again (43)

Just as Michael is lead by pictures, so is Conor.⁷⁵ Whereas Michael finds Juanita there, Conor does not: “As I went looking for their house there wasn’t a weather vane in sight. And Mam wasn’t there, not her, not her ghost, not her image, hardly even her memory” (52-53). Conor has not completed the geographical circle of their lives; he’s only at the beginning of their family’s story, and he must go through all of their stops before he can have any kind of understanding. He must follow in his father’s footsteps first.

Ironically, it is Michael’s photographs, the first set of nudes of Juanita, spread around the Mexican town, hastens Michael and Juanita’s international wanderings, but it is the lack of image that keeps Conor searching. It is also a job as a photographer, which falls through, and they end up in Wyoming. America becomes the intermediary place between each of his parents’ homelands, and where Conor lives in the present day.

On Conor’s journey, Wyoming is where he seems to find a voice of his own, to begin relying on narrative, his art, rather than his father’s visual art. Due to his lack of viable Spanish, Conor was unable to interview anyone to collect stories about his parents in Mexico; however, in Wyoming Conor tracks down Cici, the woman who convinced them to settle there and a very close friend of his mother’s. Her stories are added to the photographs and the stories that Conor heard as a child to flesh out his parents’ experience there. It is probably no coincidence that the novel focuses the discussion of

⁷⁵ Even if these particular guidebooks do not have photographs, which would be unusual, it can be argued that Conor’s mental pictures are virtually the same thing.

Songdogs there, not only because it is a Native American concept but because this is where Conor's center is and where the stories are most prevalent.

New York, like San Francisco, is a temporary stop and ends when Juanita gets sick; this time with a miscarriage. Conor does not describe being in New York himself, and it is the most reconstructed and pieced together part of the narrative. He is there, however, through the photographs⁷⁶. Through them, he talks to his mother, but he is also most repulsed here by his mother's sexuality. He feels himself to be a "peeping Tom" in their lives and their bedroom (143). Yet, he still feels compelled to follow them, even through their most intimate of moments. His compulsion to document in narrative even the taboo and the most painful of events mirrors his father's. Conor states, "Perhaps it's because he can't help it; his itch to describe everything, even who's behind the camera stems from a curiosity, a need to capture the moment that is no different than Michael's own" (Slack 84). The narrative is an attempt to explore and expose, in a way similar to the photographs, but it does not mean that Conor necessarily can psychologically deal with what he finds there or that he can entirely internalize it. Conor, like the Irish nation, is stuck in a repetition compulsion. On a national level, Conor's journey represents a new generation following the same path as the previous one with very little change; only the medium that he uses to record it is different. Conor is obsessed with the past, which implies that without a sense of national identity, (Mother Ireland has abandoned them), Irish identity continues to go in circles.

⁷⁶ Conor's dialogue with his mother places him geographically in the apartment with them, even if he is not physically there. The narrative often blends reality with the imagined in a way that portrays the imagined as real.

The last stop, Ireland, is the final junction between past and present as the current narrative and the flashbacks finally meet. Conor's description shows Ireland as a place caught in the past: "They move onwards and backwards – always onwards and, for the first time backwards – to a place where some wisps of grey De Valera mist still hang..." (148). The sense of moving forward and yet not progressing is typical of the narrative. It implies that Ireland is caught in the time of De Valera, haunted by his presence and the ideas of pre-Independence. Conor, once again, is following his father's geographical route, but this time he catches up with him, ending the cycle and reliving the moment when his mother left, the "quark" of the family's destruction. It is also in Ireland when the division between Michael as young man and Michael as dying, old man is made most clear. It is also at this point that Conor's narrative no longer has imaginative or reconstructive power. He is as powerless as his father, who tells him, "Ya can't change the past. You know, you try to change the past, but you can't" (206). The narrative has to end here, even though Conor is planning to leave Ireland once again because he has come full circle. He learns that nothing can change and that all that is left is acceptance. They silently agree to live in that imagined and reconstructed world, which we can see from Conor's response to his father about the Salmon that he has been trying to catch. Conor tells him that he sees the fish, even though he saw "not even a ripple" (211).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The choice of a "salmon" as the fish that cannot be caught is an allusion to the Celtic myth of Demnes, renamed Finn and his interaction with the "Salmon of Knowledge" (sometimes referred to as the "Salmon of Wisdom"). "The River Boyne was home to a magical salmon that ate nuts from a hazel tree and was known as the Salmon of Knowledge. A druid had foretold that whoever ate first of the flesh of that magical salmon would have knowledge of all things. After many years of watching the salmon, Finnece finally caught it and told his apprentice Demne to cook the fish. A hunter and warrior Demne might have been but those skills would not protect him from the burning his thumb while the salmon was cooking. He sucked his thumb to ease the pain, thereby tasting the salmon. Demne told Finnece what had happened and his

In *Songdogs* past and present are jointed through the similarities of Conor's and Michael's lives. Although the motivation for the geographical journey somewhat differs, Conor's following of the same loop creates him as a double. He lives his father's life in the same way that Michael tries to hold on to it. For all the attempts to capture the past, the doubling shows that the past is dead and gone for both characters. Yet, it not only haunts the present, it has force to shape it, to recreate the same difficulties in forming a personal and national identity in the absence of a strong family structure. Although Conor's parents are from different nations, the novel takes place in Ireland and concerns itself with Conor's identity in relation to his father, who is Irish. The narrative focuses on the Irish part of the family, and family is nation. Conor in his fight for his mother fulfills the traditional son role.

However, any type of articulation that these characters can make is for their own gratification and will only continue the present stasis. All the forward movement in the novel, especially when considering time, is no step forward at all, because the characters end up exactly where they began. There is no reconstructing the already broken family structure. There is no healing. There is no changing the past.

Juanita: The Center of the Circle

As explained in the introduction, the missing mother figure is common within Irish literature, and Juanita's role is defined more by her absence than her presence. Even though she is Mexican by birth, her role within the novel fulfills the role of Mother

mentor decreed that the young Demne was the one intended to eat the salmon and changed his name to "Finn". Henceforth known as Finn mac Cumhail, he received three gifts that would make him a great poet: magic, great insight, and the power of words" (Friend). In *Songdogs* Michael does not have the power of words, but Conor does.

Ireland and the allegorical pattern typical of Irish texts, particularly in her role as victim of sexual exploitation. She exists as a ghost in the novel, showing up only in scenes from the past, as the object that both Michael and Conor must negotiate. Michael's photographs and Conor's childhood stories and memories are the only evidence they have of her life. Conor must use the photographs to reconstruct her life, but the photographs show only the erotic nature of his mother. It is an incomplete picture and one that sets him at odds with his father, both in being unable to deal with his mother's sexuality and also with blaming his father for her leaving.

As symbol of national identity, Juanita shows a lack and emptiness through her absence.⁷⁸ The object their family should revolve around is missing. The circle of their lives goes around her (a sort of ghost version of her), but never defines her, never captures her, never can quite get to who she is and therefore, who they are in relation to her. Father and son look to the past to define themselves. She is the center of their circle, a space left empty by lack of detail, gaps in the story. Michael's photographs cannot control and shape her identity, and she frees herself from his power by leaving. Michael never understands the fact that he is trying to define her, as he believes that he is just sharing his "visions" with others. Conor's narrative cannot make his father's mistakes go away. None of this is as important, however, as is the circuitous journey, the playing out of the allegorical roles.

⁷⁸ Despite Juanita's Mexican birthright, she is still a mother figure, and therefore, is Mother Ireland within the novel. Often contemporary Irish texts allow for mother figures who are not typical due to their race, nationality or gender.

The Objects of Michael's Photographs

It is important to understand Juanita's photographs within the context of the type of photographs that Michael took in order to understand her reaction to them. In general, Michael's photographs depict the shocking and taboo, particularly relating to death and sexuality. For example, the majority of the photographs of Juanita described in the novel depict her nude, but these are not the only type of Michael's pictures that are included. There are also scenes of death during the war, severed limbs, prostitutes, and other taboo images described in the narrative.

When these photographs are kept privately, they represent tokens of Michael's individual or married life, his experiences. However, when exposed repeatedly to the public eye, they cause uproar within the community and generally have negative consequences for Michael and his family. From this, the narrative seems to indicate that photographs can document a personal life, but when shocking pictures reach the public, they undermine the Family structure. One cannot have a sexualized Mother Ireland; it is too unthinkable, too taboo.⁷⁹ The woman figure, which has been conflated with the Virgin Mary, can not be sexualized in the public forum; she must remain the chaste Virgin Mother. The photographs counteract Juanita's required image and undercut her role as Mother. Although the community is influenced by the taboo images, it reacts against the images through its outrage and social exile of the photographer and his family. It is the community's response, and her consequent inability to function as a

⁷⁹ Of course, in reality, becoming a mother means becoming sexualized. Yet, since Irish culture has conflated Mother Ireland with the Virgin Mary, and the history of Ireland as a woman figure representing "virgin" territory waiting to be conquered, the irony and disbelief in having a virgin mother is minimal within contemporary Irish texts. It is an impossible standard for woman, but it still exists.

mother figure that eventually leads Juanita to abandon her family. The taboo is allowed in private life, but it can not be tolerated in the public eye.

From the beginning of his photographic career, Michael receives reprimands for his attempts to take unorthodox photos:

Once he got caught trying to take photographs of the church housekeeper in the outhouse behind the priest's place. The door was left open, revealing the housekeeper with her skirt hitched high around her hips and her knees ajar. [Michael] had hidden in a clump of bushes but didn't have time to take a single picture. The priest, a former hurley player, discovered him and knocked him to the ground with a single roundhouse, opened the back of the camera, held the glass plates to the light as if reading the holy scrolls. He gave a thunderous sermon the next week, passages from the Old Testament about graven images, feverish words flying around the pews (11)

Michael is unabashed at the sermon and actually swaggers out of the church, becoming a local legend in the process. The photograph steps over the ethical line in three different ways: she is naked from the waist down; she is evacuating her bowels, and she is connected with the church. He also tries to take the photograph without her knowledge or permission. It is a violation both of her and, by the Priest's estimation, of the church as well. The housekeeper is somewhat sexualized in the description, although the language is not specific. The fact that her "knees [are] ajar" means that Michael most likely had a shot of her vagina. Yet, this is made even more taboo by the fact that she is urinating or defecating, which is not a usual subject of photographs because it is

considered a private act.⁸⁰ Had Michael taken this photograph and made it public then it would have publicized a private event. This becomes a trend in his work, much to the chagrin of some of his subjects.

A similar incident occurs when Michael photographs Juanita's mother in her undergarments without her permission:

But he got in a fierce amount of trouble one morning, just after dawn, when he snapped my grandmother as she prepared to go to church. She was wearing only her undergarments, a corset that could have come from another century, lace zigzagging across it, breasts stuffed into it like a sausage roll, a patina of age upon it... 'Pig!' she shouted at him, 'Go back to your pigpen!' (45)

She refuses to talk to Michael again until he agrees to go to mass each week for the rest of his life (45). There are similarities in this incident and the one above. The woman does not know that she is being photographed, and although the grandmother is not entirely undressed, she feels as if she is improperly attired for a picture. She is on her way to church, and certainly her mandate about Michael's need for church in his life is connected to the incident. The religious connections make the violation of a private moment even more powerful for the reader, since church often implies the sacred and in many ways the virginal or chaste. She does not want her private sexuality, indicated by the focus on her breasts in the passage, public. He has violated her sense of propriety, as well as her privacy. These photographs set up a pattern and show that Michael has no sense of the inherent need for personal privacy. He does not see the camera as a

⁸⁰ James Joyce caught his share of criticism for his representation of Leopold Bloom in the act of defecation.

violation, but only as a way to show the world what he sees. This is his fatal flaw.

Ironically, it is this lack of social awareness of the taboo that allows Michael to take his most successful and politically compelling photographs, which indicates that there is a difference between photographs of the outside world and those taken of the family.

Some subjects, however, are volunteers. Soon after the incident above, Michael begins to take photographs of the women in the town, who actually pose for varying levels of erotic pictures:

They weren't lurid, the photos. They had a stodginess to them, as if the old man forced his hand too hard – unlike the ones he took of Mam years afterwards, fluid and sensual. Most of the women never saw their photos. But decades later, when he was somewhat notorious, he had them printed at a press in France. The book caused a minor uproar in town, giving one of the local councilors a mild heart attack when he saw a portrait of his aunt with her left nipple visible under a thin linen blouse (12-13)

At this early stage, Michael does not know how to photograph women to show their sexuality. The narrative's language, the fact that he "forced his hand too hard," gives a sense of violation that does not come through in its discussion of the mother's photographs. Although these women were willing participants, the passage indicates that the women did not expect the photographs to be published, a violation of their privacy and open exposure of their sexuality. This is the same book that causes Juanita to leave, so the mention of it so early on in the novel is foreshadowing of the later "uproar in town" that ends Michael's career as a photographer and also drives away his wife. He

does not understand or refuses to respect the line between what is socially appropriate for public viewing and what is a violation to the subjects.

Yet, not all of the subjects of his photographs are sexual in nature. Michael photographs much of what he sees as he sees it:

Suddenly there were olive trees, bloated bodies, lemon groves, *butifarra* sausage, stretchers, mangled faces. My father sent photos of severed limbs and discarded bullet shells to the newspaper editors. They chucked most of them in the bin, but every now and then one was found tucked in the bottom corners of an English newspaper, beside the colourful reports of some daring young journalists. The photos were dark and brooding – a chaplain in a field, stepping over the dead, a woman picking shrapnel from her thigh as if bored by the enormity of her wound, an obese surgeon smoking over a stretcher, the sucked-in bones of a village after an aerial bombardment... He had no politics, my father, he was only a photographer, shooting visions... (19-20)

The first line of this passage equates human tragedies to pictures of “olive trees” and “sausage,” which demonstrates the idea that Michael was not attempting to be political in his war photographs. He was trying to capture life, what was going on around him in an objective way. Yet, the photographs of “mangled faces” and “shrapnel” are most likely rejected by the newspapers for their political nature. He cannot escape others placing meaning on the “visions” that he sends them, something the novel makes apparent in various ways. His photographs are rejected because they are not socially pleasing and show, in the pictures with human subjects at the very least, an inattention to human

suffering. The subjects treat the atrocities with little attention, which implies that these tragedies are common. This is not a part of human nature with which people are comfortable, and this breaking of taboo, showing this suffering makes the photographs confrontational to the viewer and hence, Michael's visions cannot be commercial. The consequence of these photographs is Michael's failure as a photographer because his visions are not what the public "wants" to see. Michael, however, still cannot make the distinction. Michael's photography is a substitute for life and creates a stasis. He captures life within the photographs as a voyeur, but he does not live it. They take the place of his past and function as a substitute for his wife.

Other photos focus on oppression and hardship, and the repercussions are actually physical as well as social:

With the help of a few men he smuggled cameras into the mines. At the end of the week he came home coughing up red spit...He and Mam locked themselves in the darkroom, working together...The work consumed them both...But he also captured [the miners] in the bars and the whorehouses, sometimes even at home with their children, happily kicking a soccer ball outside a shack. The miners took to him, hailed him when he came down the shafts, all of them helping carry the hidden equipment. But he came home bloodied one afternoon. He had lost a fight with a foreman after taking a photo of a dead boy being carried from the mines. The boy was no more than ten...My father was hit with the long barrel of a gun...He tried a few times to go back, but the trigger of the same gun was cocked (54-55)

Again, what can be seen as simply his vision also has political implications. The photographs not only show the conditions of the miners occupationally, but all together, they humanize them. They are shown as real people doing normal daily activities, and Michael is willing to put himself in their place in order to photograph their lives and risk bodily harm. Through Michael, the miners have a type of expression, a type of articulation, which ends when those in control stop Michael. His photographs could have political repercussions, and his need to communicate the everyday story, including the painful and tragic, spurs him to continue, even when he is in harm's way. He does not consider, however, what ramifications the photographs will have or to even place meaning on them. He is not photographing the dead boy in order to make some kind of statement, just to capture what is right in front of him, and again, there are consequences, ones he does not consider.

There is a denial of the political in the narrative about the father's photographic career. The photographs are filled with joy and tragedy, every day life and the taboo, but they are connected to repression and denial. He is unwittingly documenting life. As an allegory, this aspect of the novel seems to demonstrate an Irish culture fascinated with the past and yet unable to deal with it. The distance inherent in photography points out a denial or cultural repression for subjects that it can not handle.

Within the context of the previously analyzed photographs, the ones of Juanita are both similar to and different from the others, but the end result is the same. Certainly, the inclusion of the other descriptions begs for comparison, and Juanita's pictures have many of the same traits. The major difference in her photographs is her compliance and even

encouragement. While Michael secretly photographed some of the women, Juanita is a willing subject from the first day that she meets him:

[Juanita] pursed her lips provocatively for his camera, her blouse open flirtatiously, her head thrown sideways like a film actress...Next morning, he beckoned the girl as she came outside. She moved for his camera and put her arms behind her head, unashamed by the beginnings of armpit hair (36-37)

She is not only complicit in his photographs, but she actively poses in a sexual manner. Juanita flirts with the camera as much as with him. In this way, she is distinguished from the housekeeper, the grandmother, and the whore. Conor confirms this sense of compliance from his mother from the evidence of the photographs themselves:

She almost seemed to leaf her way into the lens, a brooding silence of body, an acceptance of danger, an ability to become anything that he wanted her to become – and never once the feeling that she didn't want to do it (60)

Yet, from Conor's perspective, this acceptance of her role as subject does change her. Being the subject is "dangerous," because in "becom[ing] anything that he wanted her to become," she gives up being herself to a certain extent and exposes herself to the possibility of exposure. Her body is "silent." It is the cameraman speaking through the photograph, not her. Even though he is not "forcing his hand," Michael unknowingly is changing her. Conor realizes that even though Juanita wants to pose, there is a price to pay for being the subject/object. Michael never seems to realize this.

The first time that photographs of Juanita as sexualized object surface, it is beyond Michael's control. Although a slightly different type of situation, this is foreshadowing,

and shows that Michael should have learned his lesson about public photographs of private subjects or events have consequences, but he does not change his patterns of behavior. In this case, José, a man who had a grudge against the two of them and was also known for not speaking, spread the photographs maliciously:

Just before they left town, Jose with the Sewn Lip broke into my father's darkroom and found some of the prints, somewhat underexposed. He ran around screaming – he finally got his voice back, the people said – flinging the photos of my mother around the town courtyard like so many pieces of confetti. A picture of her was found – impaled on a hitching post – down by the courthouse steps, and the joke was that there was a new candidate for mayor. But the poppyseed priest wasn't happy, and the women in town weren't happy, and although the drunks and the men in the poolhall were delighted, they all pretended that they weren't happy either, so my parents left next morning, very early... (60)

The reactions of the community to the photographs compel Conor's parents to leave town to avoid a scandal. Even though the photographs are “underexposed,” Juanita is overexposed. José finds a form of articulation for his rage through the photographs, finding his voice again, but the message demeans Juanita. She is also “like so many pieces of confetti,” her identity is torn to shreds through this public exposure. The joke about Juanita becoming mayor is a subtle reference to the political nature of the nude photographs. Also, as a devout Catholic, the fact that the “priest wasn't happy,” would have been substantial to her, and demonstrates a critique from the religious front. Although this passage is constructed by Conor, who would have the facts only from the

family stories since this occurred before he was born, the general facts remain the same; due to the photographs she has to leave her homeland earlier than expected, never to return.

However, because she is a wife and not a mother at this point in the novel, this incident does not entirely devastate her. Since it is typical that Mother Ireland is conflated with the Virgin Mary, the traditional Irish mother role carries with it a need for a virtuous chastity, an impossible but stereotypical role. Since she is not fully symbolic of Mother Ireland at this point due to the fact that they are still in Mexico and not being pregnant yet, she can leave the country with Michael and continue on with her life. This is the difference between this incident and the later publication of photographs in Ireland when the town's gossip and peering eyes become too much for Juanita to take (174-176). This time, her response is to get rid of as much of the evidence as possible:

Out in the firepit she had burned herself, made a pyre of her past, a giant cardboard box of books with the ends of flame around it, licking the edge of herself in the same way that the mountain fires did, a wale of fire upridged on the books. I poked around the flamed edges with a stick, around the mosquito net that the walrus man loved so much, around a dozen different bedrooms, around a tumult of skin, a dressing-table photo unburnt, a grove of trees ashy at the edges, a leg prominent from the knee down, a bedsheet disappearing (182)

The narrative is invested in the non-sexualized Mother role of the national Family allegory, and Juanita's abandonment implies that she is affected by the culture as well. The description of the different photographs in this passage matches the ones described

within the text. This is Michael's life's work collected in the books, which mostly focused on Juanita. She cannot deal with her sexuality being made public, and her role as Mother Ireland cannot have her placed in the same context as the naked townswomen and the whores. She has to "burn herself," because Michael has already destroyed her allegorical role and exposed again the private to the public. Her life was captured in the book as well, and the burning of the books and the father's darkroom (196-197) allows her to negate her past entirely and then leave to start a new life, develop a new identity to replace the one that has been destroyed by Michael. She purifies herself with fire; it is a cleansing ritual that leaves her finally free from being the object for Michael and free from a life of gossip and public ridicule.

Yet, the patterns created within all of the photographs give the reader a sense that Michael is a flat character. He never understands the flaw in his thinking because he never sees the photographs as political, more as capturing a single moment or event and wanting to share it with the world. Michael is not described as malicious, as Jose is, but instead, he is portrayed as not understanding social mores and taboo subjects. It seems, to Michael, that urination, naked bodies, severed limbs, groves of tress, prostitutes, mangled faces, dead bodies and children playing soccer in front of shacks are all equivalent, all just life. His photographs focus on both the parts of life that are common and those that are hardly ever seen, and these he shoots indiscriminately. It is true that he is drawn to the shocking and taboo, or at least these are the photographs that Conor describes most – the reader never gets to see the whole collection, but he does not understand the social repercussions or how his photographs affect reality. As the

character in the present, a broken and dying old man who no longer photographs life, is sympathetic. Of course, all of this is being diluted by Conor's narrative, which is trying to give life to the photographs, embody them, understand them, but inevitably he is limited in his power. This past, like Ireland's, that is captured and relived again and again cannot be understood and the characters can not be healed. Again, there is stasis.

Juanita's abandonment of them seems to be the event that ends Michael's photographic career. He never admits culpability in destroying his wife's identity and social life, but he also does not have a life in the present time worth recording either. The narrative implies that even though Michael does not acknowledge it, the personal is political; in the same way that communities are not interested in the gory war photographs, they are not tolerant of anything that undermines the National Family Allegory either. The ideological power of the family allegory is too strong and breaks Michael rather than allowing him to break out of the stasis of representation.

His punishment for breaking social taboo is to live a life forever stuck in that past.

Photographs as Evidence and Conor's Oedipal Response

Conor has two ways of interacting with his father's photographs; he uses them as evidence to piece together his mother's life and also to exercise an oedipal attraction and repulsion for her, which conflicts with her as Mother Ireland figure in the same way discussed above. Yet, even though the photographs prove that certain events occurred in certain places, the pictures do not contain her identity. They are not enough for Conor to reconstruct her as a whole person, especially due to the fact that the majority of the

photographs demonstrate only her sexuality, only one side of Juanita's identity, which is problematic for him as her son.

Roland Barthes describes his attempts to recreate his mother through photographs, and his experience is similar to Conor's:

I never recognized her except in fragments, which is to say that I missed her *being*, and that therefore I missed her altogether. It was not she, and yet it was noone else. I would have recognized her among thousands of other women, yet I did not "find" her. I recognized her differentially, not essentially. Photography thereby compelled me to perform a painful labor; straining toward the essence of her identity, I was struggling among images partially true, and therefore totally false. (66)

Conor's narrative mimics these feelings in several ways. Most often, he focuses on the bodily parts of his mother in the photographs, seeing them separately, rather than as a complete part of the whole. He also does not have anything but the photographs to go on, so his reconstruction is true, as the photographs are evidence of a particular events, but also "false," as there are gaps in detail that he fills on his own. It is very true and "totally false" at the same time.

Yet with the novel itself, the reader is doubly placed outside of the original experience. The narrative is constructed from the photographs, which already have a gap between the original experience and the viewing of them. The end result is layer upon layer distilling the original experience. The narrative removes Conor from his mother's actual experience, creating the "counter memory" discussed earlier. The reader is even

more removed, since we must rely on his perspective, his “counter memory,” and never get his mother’s or father’s perspective first hand.

Conor’s narrative shows a varying level of interaction with the different kinds of photographs. He has the unique ability to walk through, talk to the people depicted, and even touch the subjects of some of the pictures, those that depict the prostitutes (mostly taken during the war) and those of his mother. The other photographs do give him information to flesh out the parents’ stories, but he does not have this same ability in them. This links the prostitutes to the mother through the similarity of Conor’s experience, and it also explains to a certain extent his anger at his father for taking them and his feeling of voyeurism in looking at his mother’s photographs:

Their apartment has a bedroom and a living room – but it is in this bedroom that all the living is done. I feel queasy about stepping into this private domain, a voyeur, a Peeping Tom...She lies, as if on a throne. The dress is purposefully off the shoulder. It falls down and exposes the top half of a dark nipple. The shot is loaded with more sexuality than almost any of the others – something to do with its casualness (143)

Up until this point in the narrative, he is easily walking through the photograph and talking to his mother, as an adult. The reader knows this because Juanita asks him to remove the earring from his ear, and he did not even pierce his ear until he moved to London, years after Juanita has abandoned him. Because of this detail, we know that Conor is not interacting with her as the child he would have been at the time, but as the man living in the present time period. It is a junction in time. The way in which time is

arranged within the novel mimics the cyclical stasis of the character's relation to the politics of the Family. However, the narrative changes in the above quoted passage. Once the description moves to the bedroom, he no longer can interact with his mother as a person. He becomes a "Peeping Tom," an observer rather than a subject. He seems attracted to her "casualness" in her sexuality, but once the passage moves back to a description of his father's reaction to her posing in the photograph, Conor "move[s] away from them, out of their bedroom, and into a print given to me by Cici" (144-145). Since Conor is described earlier as masturbating to his father's photographs of prostitutes and hating the fact that his father had those sexual experiences, it is not a leap to see Conor as overlaying the pictures of the prostitutes to those of his mother. This could account for his repulsion, and in an Oedipal way, for Conor's hatred of his father for having a sexual relationship with his mother.

Conor, unlike Michael, understands that there must be a line drawn between the public and the private, and he cannot see his mother's sexuality becoming public, even to him. He has this attitude when describing the published book:

But something other than her life was on display – it was the moments of her body. Her neck and breasts and stomach and legs and spine and moles and pubic hair and ankles and eyes and raven-dark hair under mosquito nets, near fire towers, in a pine-pole camp, in a dark Bronx bedroom, screaming out for some sense of place, lost between the cheap covers of a book (171)

Juanita's sexuality becomes "cheap" when taken out of context, when brought out of the bedroom and the domestic relationship with Michael and into the public eye. The book is

not Juanita, only her body; her identity has been usurped by Michael's posing of her. She has been "lost," and only the body remains.

His childhood response to the book of photographs is less defined and more emotional. He tells his mother: "I hate him, too, Mam. I hate him, too, he's a bastard! I hate him!" (182). The narrative connects this statement immediately to an incident in which boys his age told him that they would like a "blowjob" from his mother, and he had to ask his friends what the word meant. He also dreams about the book after having seen a copy himself:

I had a dream that night. The book was on the coffee table and my schoolteachers were in the house. They picked up the book and smiled, comparing different shots, bits of chalk circling her breasts. I kept grabbing the book and tucking it behind the pail of peat near the fireplace so that they wouldn't see a leg leap from the glass of the coffee table, or a nipple emerge from under a plate of biscuits, or a belly button give an eye from beneath a teacup. But the teachers kept tut-tutting at me, taking it back, some of them holding it up in the air. A giant bamboo cane was raised by the headmaster and I woke, tremulous, walked out into the landing and hunched down, inventing ways of killing my father: make him swallow his chemicals, thump him to a black and white pulp (174-175)

Subconsciously, he wants to protect his mother, keep her sexuality and body to himself by hiding it from public view and other people's hands. It is similar to the way that he hides from the lens with the prostitutes, avoiding the cameraman father. As is typical of a young male, he fantasizes about killing his father, ironically in ways that relate to the

photographs in the language. The “chemicals” are literally the photographic chemicals, and the “black and white” pulp obviously refers back to the fact that the pictures are not in color. The dream is an obvious oedipal response for a young boy. The “schoolteachers” and the “headmaster” represent authority figures, the force that decides what is socially appropriate, and the transferred image of the father figure. In the dream and in reality, Conor cannot keep his mother’s sexuality from public critique or from his father; he does not want to share her with anyone. He wants her body in all of its various parts to himself, but he also subconsciously knows that he cannot save her from this public disgrace, not from the father, a manifestation of his superego. This anger and hatred continues throughout Conor’s life to the present situation when he comes back to Ireland to visit his father. He still carries the pain of the missing mother and his inability to save and protect her, which he cannot do when she is not there to be saved.

Conclusion

In some ways, Conor wants to *be* his father, in which case he could have first hand knowledge of his mother’s life, and it is the desire for his mother that spurs him on to become his father’s double. Yet, in living his father’s life over again, he ends up in the same place that Michael does, haunted by the mistakes of the past, stuck in a life that is a museum filled with “quarks,” made from static images, never to be able to bring his mother back from the “dead.” There is only “counter-memory” and present day experience, no way to get back to an authentic past and very little future left with his father. Conor will never find his Mother Ireland because she does not exist in the present. All of the characters are trapped in trying to perform their allegorical roles in the same

way that the narrative and photographs are trapped in the past. For all of the movement forward, in time and narrative, the same patterns continue and stasis reigns over articulation.

CHAPTER V

FAILING FATHERS AND COPY-CAT SONS:

THE MYTHIC FICTIONS OF THE PATERNAL ROLE

“You’re just like your father. And that’s no compliment”

- Granny Nash in *A Star Called Henry*

As discussed at length in the introduction, the same creation myth that gives Mother Ireland a central role primarily allows for the older male/Father role to represent the controlling power of the British Empire, responsible for the “rape” of Ireland and the subjugation and feminization of the Irish population. Britain as Father figure in the national myth had political control; the Empire is a patriarchy in direct opposition to Ireland’s distinct matriarchy. In post-Independence the literary depiction of those in power, at least in the texts examined here, are generally male. The Father is a symbol of discipline and control, expected to keep Mother Ireland in her place. However, the role of the Father in contemporary Irish literature, like the other roles of the National Family Allegory, has evolved and been conflated with other depictions, especially those of the Roman Catholic Church, and Irish myth.⁸¹ Although these particular forces are mutually contradictory, the common power between them is that they each enforce their own cultural norms as a metaphor for the “law”.

The idea that Father Britain and Father Church could be conflated within one literary father figure may at first seem contradictory, since the Irish/British conflict has roots in religious difference. Yet, the very title of Father, given to Roman Catholic priests, along

⁸¹ This is not to say that Britain, the Roman Catholic Church and Celtic myth all have the same agendas. They do not. Ideologically though they are all forces with prescript moral, social, and sometimes legal behavior. Each functions individually, but due to the allegorical nature of the representations, one father figure can represent more than one force simultaneously.

with the patriarchal cultural depiction of the empire makes that conflation easier to see culturally.⁸² Additionally, the political power and influence that Catholicism has had on Irish politics is ubiquitous, as seen in the Irish Constitution. Edna Longley gives an example of this type of religious and political conflation within Irish culture: “De Valera as ‘the chief,’ national founding-father and as custodian of the past, managed to fuse the auras of father as paterfamilias and father as priest” (92). Inexorably intertwined, religion and politics help define Irish culture. The Church, a force of morality and social control, functions similarly within the cultural ideology as the British governmental power. Father Britain, Father Church and founding-father (those men credited with the creation of an independent Ireland at the turn of the century, like Pearse and DeValera) all act in opposition to revolution to keep the country in order and ensuring the status quo as much as is possible. Ideology functions as a negotiation with the status quo and continually keeps men in power; father figures are the most direct representation of this. All are culturally and politically connected through the idea of the father, as metaphor for the traditional role of patriarchy.⁸³

Through the differing literary representation of the role, father figures in contemporary Irish literature are expected to control the family in the same ways that the government (whether Irish or British) and religion have cultural power over the country.

⁸² Patriarchy literally means father’s role. Anthropologists in the 1960s began to use the term to apply to social orders ruled by older men who took their social power from the model of the family. In the 1970s patriarchy was adopted as a critical term in feminism to signal male dominance as a wide-spread social power. In this chapter, patriarchy returns to its more anthropological definition to indicate the ways in which power roles in a family are translated to the level of the nation and back into the family.

⁸³ Although Beth Kowalski-Wallace warns in “Reading the Father Metaphorically” that reading the Father as metaphor for patriarchy, even though it has traditionally been read as such, is ignoring the human flaws of fathers and giving them an anti-feminist power, I believe that the metaphor of the father as patriarchy is so culturally ingrained, especially in a colonial or post-colonial culture that it cannot be read otherwise.

This control that is a part of the patriarchal expectations inherent in the father role is both thwarted and enacted within the contemporary Irish novel. The literature's reflection of this ubiquitous need for control does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of control as an acceptable norm, but in many cases examines the ways in which Father as patriarchal power functions within Irish culture.

The family, after all, is figured as the nation; the idea of "home" is also conflated with the Irish nation. Therefore, the Father's role in the National Family Allegory is in direct opposition to the son's in a struggle for possession of the mother.⁸⁴ As the son must sacrifice himself for the mother, the father must attempt to control her, and both inevitably fail, repeating the pattern of repetition and struggle for Irish identity. In Irish literature, fathers are shown as individuals who once had power, usually through violence, but who eventually lose that power, becoming the "Old Man" living on his glory days. These Old Men (despite their ages in some cases) suffer from various physical ailments and disorders that emphasize their lack of power. These include (but are not limited to) physical handicaps, alcoholism, cancer, and in extreme cases, death. Depicted as if their actual power is in the past (and sometimes because of this), they can still attempt to control the family but only through myth and legacy. Fathers have no

⁸⁴ The Oedipal young male and father figure fight for possession and control of the woman appears in earlier Irish texts like Stoker's *Dracula*, where Dracula can be read as a Father figure, a form of patriarchy, who must be fought by the young men with symbols of masculinity, like the phallic stake, in order to save the women from the Father's control (William 445-447). The tradition of seeing the Father figure as a representation of patriarchy is long standing in Irish literature since British colonization. Joseph Valente discusses the early forms of patriarchy in Irish literature, "Colonial rule and expropriation were naturalized as the latest historical signifiers of an inherently gendered cosmos; gender hierarchy and male control were naturalized as the ultimate referents of the colonial mission" (189).

current agency and can control the ideas and actions of their progeny even after their deaths.

In this chapter I will argue that the myth of the Father's life enacts a form of control. The sons inevitably follow in the father's footsteps, allowing for the repetition of the National Family Allegory. Like the identities imposed on the Irish by British colonization, the father's mythic life story lingers throughout the lives of their children. Even though the father's control and power, once used to work for the independence of the Irish nation (in most cases), becoming "founding fathers," defining morals and political policies, they lose their power while achieving their goals.

Father characters, like Michael Moran in McGahern's *Amongst Women*, are patterned after some of the historical founding father figures, especially Eamon De Valera, who played an integral role in the revolution, became the first president of the post-independence South, and whose conservative views on women and families has solidified the National Family Allegory.⁸⁵ Moran's views mimic De Valera's throughout the novel. The fourteen men executed after the Easter Rising 1916, especially Padraic Pearse, whose political speeches often referred to the Mother Ireland myth as a way to inspire men to become soldiers for the cause, had similar influence. Contemporary Irish literature reflects these men through the father figures as their revolutionary rhetoric

⁸⁵ Patrick Pearse's political rhetoric, quoted in the introduction, utilized the *Cathleen ni Houlihan* myth to inspire participation in the Irish revolution. He used the victim mother figure and incited the sons of Ireland to remasculinize Ireland in order to fight Britain. His political speeches kept the myth alive and allowed the national myth to become part of the Irish identity (Tempany-Pearse). De Valera was influential in drafting the Irish Constitution, including Article 41, which was objected to by several feminist groups (Beaumont 566). He disagreed with women fighting, which is represented in Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*. Women's place was in the home in De Valera's Ireland, and it was the sons that should fight for her.

allowed for the *Cathleen ni Houlihan* myth that all of these roles revolve around to perpetuate itself in an Irish rather than British context for the first time.

In fiction of the independent nation, an Old Man/Father figure's power is generally in the past and nostalgic. They behave as though they still wield influence, often by exerting themselves in acts of violence, but it is evident that their power in the family, not to mention the nation, is a fiction. Their only control derives from replicating themselves in their sons. Under their influence, sons perpetuate the same conservative and failing roles in the next generation. I will examine this pattern in three contemporary novels: Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*, Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, and John McGahern's *Amongst Women*.

In these Irish novels, which are representative of trends in contemporary fiction, the father's life stories are most often larger than life, complete with mythically exaggerated events, generally connected to freedom fighting, warfare, or nationalist violence more generally. The present tense narrative, most often told from the son's perspective, undercuts or shows as false the father's reminiscences. Although there are varying degrees, father's lives are mythic and fantastic. The son, who recounts the stories or listens intently to them, most often feels overshadowed by the need to live up to the embellished life of the father. The son wants to *be* the mythic father, but he ends up following in the footsteps of his real life beyond the myth, including his flaws. Most often, the son becomes violent as well. It is most often the son who destroys the veracity of his father's mythic persona, and yet the father's past still has power, as if there is a form of denial that the Father could be anything but extraordinary and powerful.

Contemporary Irish novels take to extremes the old saying, “like father, like son.” Sons do not escape from the cycles of violence and/or warfare, but instead often outdo their fathers or at the very least follow in their father’s footsteps. The legacy of the father controls the son by making him *become* the father or at least imparting the knowledge that he will eventually become him, flaws and failures included. The cycle is perpetuated, and the traditional roles are ensured.

Michael Moran: A Legacy of Verbal and Physical Abuse

The earliest published of the three novels, John McGahern’s *Amongst Women* (1990) is the most stereotypical in its father depiction.⁸⁶ The ideological need to depict the father as currently powerless, but controlling by legacy, appears within the opening lines. If the novel had been constructed in linear time, it would have begun with the father as soldier and at his most powerful; in his second phase, that power is converted to a bullying control of the family, before declining entirely with age. However, McGahern’s extended flashback indicates the inter-relation of these three phases by presenting the first glimpses of Michael Moran as sympathetically helpless:

As he weakened, Moran became afraid of his daughters. This once powerful man was so implanted in their lives that they had never really left Great Meadow, in spite of jobs and marriages and children and houses of their own in Dublin and London. Now they could not let him slip away (1)

In the first two sentences, the reader learns that Moran was “once powerful” but is now weakening, and although he no longer has power over his daughters, his past control of

⁸⁶ Novels are analyzed from least recent to most recent by publication date.

them is still “implanted.” Moran is “afraid of his daughters” because his decline has shifted the power structure within the household, and yet, the daughters are as stuck in the past as he is in that “they had never really left Great Meadow,” a past where he controlled them with fear through occasional, tyrannical outbursts of physical violence. Had McGahern told this story in chronological order, there could be no sympathy for Moran as a bully and strict disciplinarian of his entire household. As a waning old man, now afraid of those he once terrorized, he can be seen as the Old Man figure, living in his glory days as a soldier and head of household, no longer able to wield the power of his past (which he also fears) and made harmless to those around him through his declining health. Moran does not discuss his past very often, and when he does, his tone is bitter and nostalgic simultaneously. After McQuaid breaks off his friendship, as Declan Kiberd states, “Moran senses that his doom is sealed. His long periods of withdrawal from family life, periods in which he often takes to the bed, seem to indicate a sullen revolt against the waning of his powers” (200). Unable to control the greater world around him, early in the narrative, Moran realizes that his only area of control is within his own household, “He had never been able to deal with the outside. All his dealings had been with himself and that larger self of family which had been thrown together by marriage or accident: he had never been able to go out from his shell of self” (12). The Family is his last realm of control, which he views as simply part of himself, so when Moran loses control of his daughters, he loses his last place of power.

Up until his final years, Moran uses his rage and stubbornness, as well as the family rituals, including the nightly family recitation of the rosary, to keep his children under a

military type of control. “The nightly rosary, decreed by Moran, is less a religious ritual than a means of asserting family unity (‘the family that prays together stays together’ was an old motto)...” (Kiberd 104). His role as soldier is past, but as John Cronin notes, describing his second marriage, Michael Moran blends his past as soldier into his present control:

Moran is a dangerous blend of loving father and domestic tyrant...His moods swing dangerously between brief joviality and intense rage. Even Rose is not immune and, on one occasion, when he vents his fury on her, the image employed by McGahern recalls the earlier passage and reminds us that we are in the presence of a killer (174-175)

Cronin here recalls McGahern’s eerie description of Moran, who speaks “as quietly as if he were taking rifle aim” when criticizing and raging at Rose (69). This artillery image foreshadows Moran’s later implied threat to shoot his son if he does not obey him. His past as a military man makes him even more of a threat to his family, because they know that he is capable of violence.

Michael Moran, referred to as Moran throughout the novel to underscore his patriarchal precedence and to distinguish him from his son, who has the same name, is a widower with five children, three daughters and two sons. During the course of the novel, he marries Rose, a woman described as being past her prime and therefore willing to put up with Moran’s demands on her. His choice to marry Rose comes from the comments made by his long time friend and war buddy, McQuaid, who because of Moran’s “compulsion to dominate, to have everything on his terms or not all all,” decides

to end their long friendship (21). Once he cannot control and dominate his friend, Moran realizes that he could also lose power over his children; therefore, he needs to find a substitute for his wife, someone that he can dominate and who will not move out of the house eventually as his children would:

After years [Moran] had lost his oldest and best friend but in a way he had always despised friendship; families were what mattered, more particularly that larger version of himself – *his* family; and while seated in the same scheming fury he saw each individual member gradually slipping away out of his reach. Yes, they would eventually all go. He would be alone. That he could not stand. He saw with bitter lucidity that he would marry Rose Brady now. As with so many things, no sooner had he taken the idea to himself than he began to resent it passionately (22)

He does not choose to marry Rose from a sense of love or even duty, but out of the need to control. He is compulsive in his need to have someone to take care of him, to assure himself that he will not be alone in his old age, and simultaneously to be his inferior. The choice is made with “bitter lucidity” because Moran would have preferred to control his Family forever, but he sees clearly that this cannot be a reality. A substitute is necessary but not necessarily wanted. Rose is perfect for the role because she is willing to endure Moran’s stubborn ways and occasional verbal abuse, utilizing her only weapons: silence and avoidance. It is this gentle obedience that Robert Garratt believes is McGahern’s way of subtly critiquing Moran’s tyrannical role: “Moreover, Rose’s quiet, unassuming, and non-confrontational manner in dealing with Moran provides the basis of McGahern’s

subtle critique of paternalism” (126). Rose never gains a real control over Moran, even during his decline. She spends the rest of his life as a servant, finding a role only as a typically passive Mother Ireland victim figure.

Moran’s daughters, in the same way as Rose, tiptoe around their father, careful not to arouse his anger. Their personalities change immediately whenever their father enters the room:

Alone, the two girls were playful as they went about their tasks, mischievous at times, even carefully boisterous; but as soon as their father came in they would sink into a beseeching drabness, cower as close to being invisible as they could. “How do the lamb chops look?” he demanded again. “Are these the best lamp chops you could get? Haven’t I told you time in and time out never – never – to get lamb chops anywhere but from Kavanagh’s? Has everything to be drummed in a hundred times? (8)

The father’s constant criticism -- spread throughout the novel in various levels of verbal abuse, rage, and harassment -- controls the women of the family. Even behind his back, the girls can only be “carefully boisterous,” stopped by fear from having a normal, happy existence. They cater to his every demand; though, he needs them to cook, clean and take care of him and household, his daughters never realize or acknowledge their role in the house or any kind of power that might afford them. They hide any imperfection from their father:

“Be sure the chops are well done,” [Moran] said and went out again. No sooner had the door closed than Mona, released from the tension of his presence, let slip

a plate from her hands. They stood watching dumbly in horrible fascination after it shattered. Quickly they swept up the pieces and hid them away, wondering how they would replace the plate without being found out. “Don’t worry, “ Maggie comforted Mona who was still pale with shock. “We’ll find some way around it.” They were too sick at heart to mimic or mock this mood away. Anything broken had to be hidden until it could be replaced or forgotten (10)

Moran, in his family, acts as a military man in charge of his troops, which in this case are his own daughters. They are not supposed to question his orders. A broken plate, spilled salt, a meal that is not prepared to his standards. Any small mistake, flaw or overlooked detail gives Moran the leeway to abuse; the daughters learn to hide themselves, to “move about the place like shadows” (53). They learn to become invisible, ghostlike, worried about “breath[ing] loudly” (54). The day-by-day perfectionist tension takes its toll on the daughters. Like soldiers, they learn to obey blindly even when it is against their own best interest.

Moran’s power lingers like the colonial British identities placed on the Irish; even when his power is no longer present, his version of the daughters has been repeated so often that they still live in his vision of them, not as themselves. They cannot create an identity of their own, as Irish identity struggles to define itself in a post-Independence culture. When offered a scholarship to a university, Sheila asks Moran if she can go and become a doctor. Moran -- whose fear is that his own family, especially one of the women, will outdo him by being more successful -- convinces her to take the lesser Civil Service job. She gives up a promising career in order to not confront her father; her

inability to stand up to him changes her life and limits her opportunities. Moran makes his opinion based on his own fears and ideas. He cannot see beyond his own need to have power over his children and cares only for himself and not her welfare. Yet, she gives in to his intimidations. The women's fear is so ingrained over a lifetime of tension and criticism that even when they have the chance to, they cannot break free.

The sons, however, do not receive the same treatment as the daughters. Moran merely intimidates them, while he uses physical force to beat his sons into submission. The sons, as is typical of the son role, revolt against their father; Luke leaves Ireland entirely, returning only once, and Michael by returning his physical abuse. Michael, the one named after his father, is the one who most follows in his footsteps and copies his behavior. After the first time Moran hits Michael, the latter leaves and tries to find help from his sisters; because of their fear of him, the daughters turn him back over to his father, suggesting that they supervise a "legal beating" (117). Moran finally allows Michael back into the household, but the violence continues. When Michael spills some salt on the table, Moran attempts to beat him again; however, this time Michael fights back. He lived with Moran's violence, both to his brother and himself, and by his father's example, he has learned to respond with violence as well:

Moran struck him violently but he managed partly to avert the blow, the chair falling over as he jumped to his feet...The second blow he took on the arms but it still forced him back against the sewing machine. He felt the metal against his back but no injury or fear...he jumped forward and held Moran's hand as it came down again. In the short, silent struggle he was the stronger. Moran went down,

dragging the boy with him but he wasn't able to dash him sideways against the dresser as he fell...Eventually it was the boy who pinned the father to the floor; but as he tried holding him by the arms, on rising he received several violent blows to the head from above. Shouting out with pain he let his grip go and jumped to one side (120)

Moran originally has the upper hand, but quickly loses the fight due to his waning strength. Moran pushes Michael against a sewing machine, a stereotypically feminine device, but Michael regains his masculinity by overpowering Moran physically. Moran accused Michael of being feminized earlier in the novel when he plants flowers rather than vegetables, but there is no question of his manhood as he pins his father to the floor. He uses his father's power, his physical violence, against him, and he wins. This is a turning point in Moran and Michael's relationship. It is the first time that Michael physically overpowers Moran. Once he has lost his physical power over Michael, he implies that he will use the gun in the living room to shoot him; he has to increase the threat. Not willing to risk being killed, Michael leaves, but he has already shown that he is his father's son and that the life of physical and verbal abuse has taken its toll and made him capable of violent behavior.

Michael's replication of his father's violence demonstrates that the structure of power through that violence does not change, only the man who has the power. The son can overpower his father, but in doing so becomes him. Similarly, independence did not necessarily yield a change in the power structures in Ireland. Rather a colonial state became a neo-colonial state with power in the hands of the same class who occupied

local governance under the colonial regime. Power itself does not change; it is merely passed on to new agents.

The father's familial control continues, even as his health wanes and even after his death. At his funeral, the narrative shows how the legacy of the father's power actually increases when he is gone:

It was as if their first love and allegiance had been pledged uncompromisingly to this one house and man and that they knew that he had always been at the very living centre of all parts of their lives. Now not only had they never broken that pledge but they were renewing it for a second time with this other woman who had come in among them and married him...and now, as they left him under the yew, it was as if each of them in their different ways had become Daddy. "He may be gone home but he'll always be with us," Maggie spoke for them all.

"He'll never leave us now" (183)

Although written as if it is a tribute to the father, the narrative betrays the consolatory nature of passage. Their love had to be "uncompromising" because everything had been done their father's way. He was the "centre of all parts of their lives." Without the father, they do not exist; they are without center and that is why they have to figuratively *become* him. They all speak as one, think as one, as Moran. Siobhan Holland argues that "McGahern's attention to [the father's] excessive, marvelous bids to resist, manipulate, or move outside their roles in the new state makes available for discussion the vulnerability of patriarchal aspirations, identities, and hierarchies: it exposes Irish patriarchy ...as...dependent on faithful repetition by fathers who lack faith in it" (198). While

Holland's argument has great merit, I would also note that it is not only the father who "faithfully repeats" the construction of the traditional father role; his children are complicit in its repetition as well; they buy into his myth. He will never leave them because his power lingers after his death. It does not matter that he is dead because the myth of the father lives on and controls the children. They will never leave "Great Meadow." They need their father's presence, his legacy, to survive.

The Pig and the Priest: A Legacy of Violence Intensified

Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* repeats the same stereotypical patterns of the father's violence, powerlessness, and legacy that the son inevitably fulfills and in this case, exceeds. This novel, more than the others discussed here, draws a connection between unstable Family life, national and personal identity, and mental illness. It shows the psychological damage that can ensue when the son discovers that the myths of the Father (both biological and religious) are false but is unable to produce an independent identity of his own. In this way the novel explores, on a familial level, the Irish production of independent national identity. In *The Butcher Boy* the blow caused by the loss of paternal myth is so damaging that Francie Brady, the son, replicates his father's more damaging attributes, becoming a violent alcoholic. These inherited or environmentally engendered tendencies, compounded by the physical molestation by Father Sullivan, cause Francie to have a psychotic break with reality, and when he cannot have the stable Family of the national allegory that he so desperately wants, he becomes an insane killer, taking his father's legacy to a new, more violent level. McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* implies that without a stable Family structure, a man cannot develop a

healthy and normal identity for himself. Francie's belief in his own narrative, his own fantastic stories that create a revisionist history for himself and his family may also function as a way to interrogate revisionist histories of the heroic Irish past, replacing them with stories of failure and violence.

According to Tim Gauthier, *The Butcher Boy's* narrative directly represents a culture struggling with its postcolonial identity:

The struggles of Francie Brady in *The Butcher Boy* invoke both neocolonial Ireland's anguished residual relationship with the colonizer and its search for nationhood. Francie's ambivalent relationship with the community, his search for identity, his lack of a sense of history combined with an idealization of the past, his fascination with the life led by the Nugents as adopters and representatives of dominant culture values, and finally his own self-loathing all mirror the country's neocolonial condition...Francie's crisis of identity reflects this unbalanced state as does the communal status of several characters who attempt to impose on him their limited notions of identity (Gauthier 196)

If as Gauthier suggests, Francie's inability to find an identity mirrors Ireland's struggle to shake off imposed colonial identities, then McCabe's novel attempts to revive the importance of the traditional family roles as a counterbalance (through its absence) to the struggle to define what it means to be Irish. In effect, it is the traditional Family that Francie covets and that would have allowed him to define himself, and hence, for the nation to have a more stable identity structure.

McCabe's narrative, told from Francie's point of view, shows Benny Brady, the father, as the mythic, grand musician whose relationship with Francie's mother is perfect and loving. The narrative continually returns to the parents' time spent in a bed and breakfast called Over the Waves, where Benny sang and everyone loved the special couple. This memory forms the center of the fantasy but not the whole extent of it. At the same time, the narrative allows dramatic irony to let the audience reveal Benny Brady as a drunk who verbally and physically abuses his family and dies, leaving his young son without anyone to care for him. Francie blames his father for his mother's death as much as he blames himself, conflating the two in his guilt. Each fantasy that Francie has about his father is burst by reality, leaving him with only the failed father as a role model.

Mrs. Nugent provides the catalyst that dispels Francie's belief in the fantasy father. As a foil for the Brady family, the Nugents have the same nuclear family members, but their home is stable and their family interactions are normative. After Francie steals some comic books from Phillip, Mrs. Nugent intervenes on behalf of her son by confronting Mrs. Brady about Francie's behavior. Not knowing the extreme consequences of her conversation, Mrs. Nugent repeatedly calls Mr. Brady a "pig." Francie, who overhears Mrs. Nugent's description of his father, internalizes her version of his father. From this point onwards, Francie can no longer live entirely in his fantasy. It begins to break down and reality begins to seep more and more in his narrative. As John Scaggs writes, "This gradual blurring of the border between fantasy and reality is accompanied by a simultaneous breakdown of the relationship between Self and Other, which is manifested most obviously in the relationship between Francie and the Nugents"

(56). As his ability to tell reality from fiction begins to fade, Francie's very identity begins to splinter. With only a "pig" for a father, Francie's coveting of the "perfect" Nugent family turns into a need to make them "pigs" as well, and his need to butcher their family is in direct relationship to the way in which he feels that his own fantasy of his "perfect" family was butchered.⁸⁷ The narrative shows that without the family structure of the National Family Allegory to define the son, the failure of the father causes instability in the son.

The novel implies that Benny Brady is also the result of a broken home. When Benny's brother, Alo, comes over from London to celebrate the holidays, the reader accesses the story of their own abandonment:

[Alo] started into The Old Bog Road, he said that was the one the priest had taught them in the home all those years ago. I knew as soon as he said the word *home* that he regretted it. When you said it even when you weren't talking about orphanages, da went pale sometimes he even got up and left the room (34)

Benny cannot stand to hear the word *home*, which shows how influential his father's abandonment of him was. Francie, by his narrative, implies that his father does not feel at *home* even in the family he produced himself. His response to Alo implicates their father in his childhood issues that have remained in adult life:

⁸⁷ Donna Potts discusses in detail the connection between the "pig" and Ireland historically. Ireland was referred to as "Muck Inis," which translates to "Pig Island," and pigs often appeared in Irish mythology (Potts 86). Since the Nugents are connect to England, Mrs. Nugent's use of the word brings colonial implications: "By associating Francie Brady, and indeed the whole Brady family, with pigs, McCabe alludes to the long English tradition of drawing a distinction between England and Ireland in the form of John Bull and Paddy the Pig" (Potts 87).

There was sweat on da's upper lip it shone like needles. He said: He was always the same, from the minute we were dumped in that Belfast kip. The same softie halfwit, sucking up to the nuns and moping about the corridors. You know what he used to tell them? Our da's coming to take us home tomorrow! Night noon and morning I had to listen to it! You'd be waiting a long time if you were to wait for Andy Brady to come and take you home! I told him to shut up! What did we care I said we'd manage on our own we needed nobody. I told him it was all over...Ma cried out. I never seen her face da before. Don't blame it on your brother because you were put in a home! Christ Jesus Benny are you never going to come to terms with it! After all this time, is it never going to end? (36)

Not only does this passage foreshadow both Benny's abandonment of Francie and the latter's forced placement in a similar religious institution, but it also, through the doubling of generations of abandonment implies that without a father figure, a man is never whole, never home. ALO, who continues to believe in the fantasy that his father will return, is a functional man with a life and job in London, while Benny, who attempted to live without family, who believed that he "needed nobody" ends up with a dysfunctional life and family. The simile that McCabe uses, comparing the father's sweat and "needles," intensifies the piercing power of his verbal abuse. The way in which Francie's narrative is already beginning to break down, shown in the missing punctuation and sentences that run together, demonstrates how his father's verbal abuse is affecting his mental state. Without the traditional family structure or the myth of the

father to sustain him, Benny Brady cannot be a role model for his son, and he passes down the legacy of abandonment.

Even after Alo leaves and Benny finishes his drunken rage about the orphanage, Francie begins to weave a story about their childhood, fictionalizing it, incorporating it into his fantasy. However, Mrs. Nugent's words are already internalized, and the fantasy crumbles:

I kept thinking of da and Alo standing outside the gates of the home all those years ago. How many windows do you think there are there says da. Seventy-five says Alo. I'd say at least a hundred says da. The priest brought them inside through long polished corridors. The assembly hall was crowded. They were all cheering for the two new boys. The priest cleared his throat and said quiet please. I would like you to meet our two new boys he said. Bernard and Alo. Bernard and Alo who? said all of the other boys. The priest smiled and rubbed his soft hands together. I was waiting for his to say *Brady* and finish it. But he didn't say Brady. He said: *Pig* (39)

The fiction that Francie creates begins with a revision of the previous fight between Alo and his father. He imagines them happy and talking together in a friendly way. He alters the previous scenes by going back in history mentally, creating the two boys as praised and welcomed by the others in the home, but this alteration cannot be sustained. The idea that his father is a "pig" creeps into his fantasy and ruins his revisionist family history. His myth of his father's life and identity is beginning to unravel. Also, by the use of the word Pig instead of Brady, the fantasy is erasing his family name, dissolving the Bradys

and placing on him a different identity, one that is negative and that he eventually kills to reject.

Francie needs to believe that he can have the stable structure of the National Family Allegory. Up until the point when Mrs. Nugent calls his father a “pig,” Francie can construct this normal family through imagination. This same fictionalization is so real to Francie that he incorporates it into his reality, but after Mrs. Nugent’s comment, his alterations of reality become chaotic and confused, just as his identity does. After breaking into the Nugent home and through a fantasy that Francie recounts as if it were true, he defecates on the floor of the parents’ bedroom while imagining that Mrs. Nugent and Philip are participating in his School for Pigs. He wants to make the Nugent family become like his, and the only way in his mind to do this is to make them “pigs” as well. The incident is the catalyst for Francie to be sent to the religious institution that resembles (at least in Francie’s mind) the orphanage of his father’s childhood: “Up she rose out of nowhere the house of a hundred windows” (71). The two fictions are conflated; Francie becomes his father by seeing his situation as the same and ignoring the fact that he has been placed there as punishment.

While at the school, Francie generates his own myth of himself as receiver of religious messages from Mary and the saints. This myth serves two purposes: to reconnect with his mother whose suicide has induced an enormous amount of guilt and to attract special notice within the religious community:

I told [the head priest] I thought Our Lady was talking to me. I read that in a book about this holy Italian boy. He was out in a field looking after the sheep next

thing what does he hear only this soft voice coming out of nowhere you are my chosen messenger the world is going to end and all this... Well I thought – you've had your turn Father Italian Sheep man so fuck off now about your business here comes Francie Brady hello Our Lady I said. Well Francie she says how's things. Not so bad I said (82)

The passage clearly indicates that Francie knows that his conversations are fantasies, and it also shows his motivations for creating the lie. However, later in narrative, Francie is unable to distinguish his own pretense and begins to believe the myth of his own creation:

I looked up and there she was over by the handball alley. I wasn't sure what to say to her ah its yourself or did you have a nice trip or something like that. I didn't know so I said nothing at all. She had some voice, that Blessed Virgin Mary. You could listen to it all night. It was like all the softest women in the world mixed up in a huge big baking bowl and there you have Our Lady at the end of it... I told Father Sullivan all about it and he said I had unlocked something very precious (83)

Francie has lost his mother, and he wants approval and acceptance from the Virgin Mary to substitute for the loss of his mother's love. She stands for all the women in the world, and this figure can give him a sense of forgiveness for his mother's death. Yet, the fantasy that he produces for himself eventually falls apart in the presence of the Father, manifested literally as Father Sullivan. Both of his motivations are undermined. Father Sullivan's questioning of Francie is the catalyst for the latter to lie about belonging to the

Nugent family, creating guilt in Francie for betraying his mother. The “special attention” that he craved also becomes “sullied” through the Father’s molestation of him. It would have been better for Francie to not have stood out or have had the visions.

Father Sullivan, who Francie refers to as Tiddly, represents the second failing father for Francie. Although at first Father Sullivan bolsters Francie’s new fantasy self, the molestation with the included feminization of Francie obliterates his myth of himself as chosen by the Virgin Mary and the forgiveness he feels that he has obtained from her.⁸⁸

When the molestation first begins, Francie uses his vivid imagination to change it so he can deal with it:

It wasn’t until the third or fourth time I told this story about the roses that he began the Tiddly Show. I thought it was a great laugh with all the prizes you could win out of it. Are you all right Francis he’d say. Oh I’m grand Father and dropped my eyelids shyly like Our Lady did. Sit up here he said and slapped his knees. So up I went. What does Tiddly do then only take out his mickey and start rubbing it up and down and jogging me on his knee. Then his whole body vibrates and he bends away over I thought he was going to break off in two halves (84-85)

⁸⁸ According to Clodagh Harvey’s collection and analysis of priest folklore, the priest figure was traditionally seen as a heroic figure, fighting for the Irish peasantry. However, over time, the stories began to concern themselves with what was viewed as the “most significant clerical vices,” which included “drunkenness, lust, and avarice” (36). Yet, “within the tradition, a priest who transgresses [sexually] may still gain God’s forgiveness and love” (36). Yet, later in Irish literature, this “hero priest” seems to have evolved into an unfavorable figure, “Since the beginning of the Irish Renaissance, the Roman Catholic clergy has not, in general, been accorded a favorable image by Irish literary commentators, an arresting fact in so predominantly Catholic a country” (Deane 19). Father Tiddly begins as a character that seems as if he could help Francie, a type of Priest helping out the poverty stricken, but he evolves into an abusing figure.

Francie portrays his sexual molestation as a game and as a way to get things from Father Sullivan, and the happy-go-lucky tone of the passages is what is most unnerving. From a literal reading of the passages, Francie not only does not seem to care that he is a sexual object but is complicit in the acting out of the woman role. Tiddly states that he wants to marry Francie, give him “flowers and chocolates,” and he puts him in a woman’s bonnet, all things that place him in a subjugated and feminized role (92-97). Francie plays out the role of the Virgin Mary or St. Teresa of the Roses or “Little Miss Snowdrop” the “Queen of All the Beautiful Things” (92). Under the control of the Father, Francie becomes the woman/mother and therefore cannot sustain a mythic persona as the special boy who talks to Mary, but instead becomes the woman/mother object of his fantasies. What breaks through Francie’s pretend world is Father Sullivan’s questioning of his very real home life, which brings Francie memories of his biological mother. Instead of telling the truth, Francie gives the Father information as if he was a Nugent. Feeling like he betrayed his real mother, he must revert to the son role and he fights against Father Sullivan to protect his mother’s memory. He can no longer have a myth for himself, and he can no longer take on the woman/mother role. He becomes a son again, revolting against the subjugation and feminization of the Father. When he does so, he realizes that Father Sullivan never had any real power over him. Father Sullivan is removed from the school, and Francie realizes that Father Sullivan’s secret endows him with power over even the head priest. All of these roles, whether son, father, or mother, retain the same meanings, although the character who play them change.

Unlike Benny Brady, whose control is created through self-aggrandizement in his stories of his glory days, Father Sullivan took control through changing Francie into the woman/mother figure. These two different figures represent the two types of paternal control. Benny has control over the son through legacy, which represents what Francie should be as a man. Father Sullivan controls the mother/woman by sexual objectification, undermining his masculinity. The combination of the two splinters Francie's personality. He has already failed in the son role, since he did not save his mother from the suicide. His father's myth is systematically destroyed throughout the novel; he begins to understand his father's lack of power and his helpless role. He cannot be the mother because it undermines his innate gender role and leaves him powerless. From the molestation and despite his rejection of it, Francie never has a whole personality. Like his father, he will never get over his time spent in the "House of a Hundred Windows."

Yet, even after all the devastation to his psychological state that Francie receives from the religious institutionalization, there are still more Father fantasies to which Francie clings. These, too, are eventually destroyed, causing him to lose a sense of his identity entirely. The text distinctly shows Benny Brady's alcoholism and violence, but only through slips in Francie's fantasy world. Benny beats his wife, leaves her during a mental breakdown to drink at the Tower Bar, breaks the family television in one of his drunken rages, and visits his son at the institution wielding a half-drunk bottle of Jameson. Yet, Francie does not consciously acknowledge these behaviors. He holds on to the view of his father as the famous musician who sang at the bed and breakfast called

Over the Waves on their honeymoon and who loved his mother, a father constructed from stories of the past and from his own imagination. As a representation of the national struggle for identity, the lack of a normal father figure (representative of imposed colonial identity) creates an individual whose self is splintered between an imagined self and the harsh reality of past violence, haunting the present.

In fact, Francie has so internalized this myth of his father that it survives even after his biological father has died; it is the myth that keeps him alive in Francie's mind. Benny Brady dies in his armchair in the house, and Francie treats him as if he is only ailing, not dead. Ironically, one of the reasons that the novel's dramatic irony works as well as it does and that Francie is talking to, taking care of, and working to support a man who is already dead is Benny's dramatically improved tone and behavior. He is nice to Francie, worries about his well-being, and praises both him and his deceased mother. The real father is not as important to Francie's psychological well-being as his fantasy of him; Benny does not have to be alive to affect Francie's attempts to follow in his footsteps.

Though Francie wants to live up to his father's imagined legacy of fame, love, and devotion, he cannot escape *becoming* his father as he was in reality, a violent alcoholic. He begins going to the Tower Bar himself, showing the first signs of alcoholism (145). The drunkenness gets to a point where he often lies in the doorway of the bar singing and hanging out in different pubs every weekend with one of the local drunks (146-148). If Francie was not suffering from mental illness, the text implies that he would have become an alcoholic, just like his father.

Reality, however, intervenes when Dr. Roche and the Sergeant place Francie in a mental institution after they find him pretending to have a Christmas party that reunites his father and Alo, again a revisionist history of his own past. With his father gone, all Francie has left is the story of the bed and breakfast and how famous and beloved his father was there. This is the grandest and most repeated story of his father in the novel. When released from the institution, Francie goes to Over the Waves to relive his father's glory days, but what he finds is that this story too is a fiction. He talks to the landlady of the bed and breakfast:

Please tell me I said I have to hear it I have to hear it no she said let me go. All I wanted to hear was something about them lying there listening to the sea outside the window but it didn't matter I didn't hear it anyway. When I said to her go on tell me you said you would she said: *Get your hands off me do you hear me!*

What can I tell you about a man who behaved the way he did in front of his wife. No better than a pig, the way he disgraced himself here. Any man who'd insult a priest the way he did. Poor Father McGivney who wouldn't hurt a fly coming here for over twenty years! God knows he works hard enough in the orphanage in Belfast without having to endure abuse the like of what that man gave him! God help the poor woman, she mustn't have seen him sober a day in their whole honeymoon! (193-194)

The passage subtly indicates that beyond the alcoholism, Benny Brady's behavior may have been justified. Benny was brought up in an orphanage in Belfast that was run by priests, and it is likely that Benny knew Father McGivney. It is possible that Father

McGivney may have abused Benny in the same way that Francie was abused by Father Sullivan, but the reader is not given enough information to be sure of this. Although abuse is implied, it is never directly stated. The inclusion of the stereotypical figure of the abusive father represents the ways in which the colonial, patriarchal and religious structures recreate themselves generation after generation despite attempts to change or revise these same structures.

Francie never even considers this a possibility, feeling like his one good memory of his parents (and particularly his father) has been shattered. He focuses instead on the landlady's use of the word, "pig," an echo of Mrs. Nugent's former comments. This conversation is the last straw of Francie's sanity, and it is soon after he kills Mrs. Nugent and writes the word "pigs" on the wall of her house in her blood. He goes back to what he believes had started the destruction of his fantasy world, Mrs. Nugent's use of the word "pig" to describe his father. In order to have his revenge, he must make the Nugent family into pigs, so he uses the same butcher's gun to kill her that he used to kill pigs in his job as the butcher's apprentice. He takes her body and puts it in the butcher's Pit of Guts (213). He calls himself "Francie Brady the Time Lord" (212) while he does this. In his deranged mind, if he can just make the Nugents pigs too, if he can just keep her from calling his father a pig in the first place, if he can turn back time as the Time Lord, then none of the tragedies in his life would occur. He would not have lost his Family or his fantasy father. Francie surpasses his father or Father Sullivan's ability to control "the mother" by killing her. He surpasses his father's violence, goes beyond the domestic

beatings that his father performed. At the same time, Francie is destroying the “perfect” family that he coveted but could never have.

With his Mother Ireland dead and his replacement, Mrs. Nugent, unavailable to him, Francie lives on the stories of his father’s past.⁸⁹ Fathers, however, consistently verbally and physically abuse Francie, which allows reality to overcome the fantasy and to shatter his fragile psyche. The violence that Francie demonstrates is his legacy from his father; violence begets more violence, the novel implies. The truth is the catalyst that tears Francie apart. All Francie can do is to follow his mother into madness and his father into violent behavior and no institution, whether medical or religious, can keep him from fulfilling his family legacy. The family structure, even by its absence in Francie’s life, is shown as integral in the development of personal identity.

As a national allegory, *The Butcher Boy* shows an Irish concern for the violence of the past continuing in the future, passed down from one generation to another. It also demonstrates an Irish culture stuck in the past in the myths of the Father, even when those influences are long dead and gone. The family structure is so ingrained in culture that when removed, the Irish traditional identity is destroyed.

Henry as Father and Son: A Legacy of Murder for Hire

There are three Henrys in Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry*: Henry the father, Henry the son, and Henry the ghost. Henry the father is a handicapped man who has lost one-leg and works as a bouncer for the whorehouse run by Dolly Oblong. Henry the son

⁸⁹ I do realize that there is so much to examine within the female and religious roles within this novel. Mrs. Brady, Mrs. Nugent, The Virgin Mary and female Saints supply multiple version of Mother Ireland and their roles are important to the novel. I have chosen not to include more than a surface analysis of these characters and figures in order to focus on the male roles within the story, but I acknowledge that this is a place for more academic study.

grows up in a slum and yet becomes a soldier for the Irish Republican Army and takes a role in the major historical events of Ireland from the Easter Rising onward. The third Henry was a child who died in infancy and whom Melody, his mother, worships as star in the heavens; this final Henry is the eponymous “Star” of the novel’s title. While there are other characters within the novel, both personal to the family and historical, it is the Henrys, particularly father and son, who make up the core of the novel.

A Star Called Henry creates the father role in the most stylistically mythic way of any of the novels discussed here. In the same way that the father’s presence continues to influence and control the son, colonization and the rhetoric and roles of the time period, lingers within the culture, even when the original presence is removed. The culture is captured in the power of the Father over Mother Ireland; despite revolution, despite post-colonial governmental control, it has seeped from the ingrained national culture into the ideological Family roles.

Henry the son narrates the novel, and he includes details about his father from a time period before he was born. The reader knows from the start that the stories of his father are either distilled from very early memory or were told to him by others later in life, so the authenticity of the narrative is questionable, but additionally, Henry admits that his father’s stories were a creative project:

Who was [Henry’s father] and where did he come from? The family trees of the poor don’t grow to any height. I know nothing real about my father; I don’t even know if his name was real...He made his life up as he went along. Where was his leg? South Africa, Glasnevin, under the sea. [Melody] heard enough stories to

bury ten legs...He invented himself, and reinvented...Was he just a liar? No, I don't think so. He was a survivor; his stories kept him going. Stories were the only things the poor owned. A poor man, he gave himself a life. He filled the hole with many lives (10)

For Henry the son, telling stories is a birthright. Even though he admits that he knows “nothing real” about his father, he still retells the fictions as if fact, throughout the rest of the narrative, and he lives his life in his father's footsteps as if the stories were true. His father abandons him at an early age in flight from the police; the stories are all Henry have of him. Even though Henry calls his father a “gobshite,” someone who makes things up without factual backing, Henry the son still tells the narrative as if he believes (69). It is only in a few passages, as the example above, that the reader sees just how unsure Henry is about who his father really was.

Henry the father is defined both by his handicap and his violence, the foundations for his father myth. He uses his wooden leg as a weapon as both a bouncer and an assassin, and it is both these occupations that make him a big man in the community, inspiring fear with the “tap tap” of his replacement leg:

He did other things too, my father. He was reliable, he was steady. A man created from his own secrets...Sometimes Henry wasn't on the steps of Dolly Oblong's. He was somewhere else. He gave messages, he delivered lessons. He gave lessons that were never forgotten (19)

Henry the father is “created from his own secrets” because it is his work (and the stories about his violence) that most defines him, and yet, the narrative as told by the adult voice

of Henry the son shows him also as only a “messenger,” a euphemism for an assassin, who is not in control of his own power. Yet, Henry the son’s narrative represents the father as self made, a creation of the secrets of others, which hides the truth; Henry the father was just a pawn for those with the real power, but this deconstructing of the myth occurs later in the narrative.

The narrative paints a parallel between Henry the father and Dolly Oblong, the madam, for this same type of myth creation:

She was her own invention – like him, but successful – her hair, teeth, her name, everything about her and around her. She’d created her own world and made it happen. She pulled strings from her bed – Henry almost fainted at the thought – and all of Dublin shook. People died, people lived while she sucked peppermints (49-50)

The comparison, however, indicates that both characters are at their core fictions of their own making, since the reader later finds out that both Dolly Oblong and Henry work for the same gangster, Alfie Gandon, and both are pawns to his whims. Both Henry and Dolly have only illusory power. The reader understands the fact that these figures do not have the power that is ascribed to them, but Henry the son does not acknowledge it, just as he never acknowledges his role in his own created fictional life. He sees his father having the power of fear and violence, just as Henry the father sees Dolly. Neither sees that they are merely cogs in Gandon’s business.

Henry the son, even in the narrative describing his own birth, tries to take on this same mythic self-creation power:

Where were the three wise men? Where were the sheep and the shepherds? They missed it, the fuckin' eejits. They were following the wrong star. They missed the birth of Henry Smart, Henry S. Smart, the one and only me. On the 8th of October, 1901, at twenty-two minutes past seven. They all missed it. Missis Drake was there. Her hands that cupped my head tingled for the rest of her great, long life. Granny Nash was there. She picked up the *Freeman's Journal* and discovered that she could read. And my parents? They were happy. For a tiny moment in their hard, hard lives my mammy and daddy were happy (26)

Henry the son's birth is described as nearly, but not quite miraculous.⁹⁰ His birth engenders positive change in all the people in his vicinity. The community at large visits the healthy, "Glowing Baby," and bring gifts as an offering to the miracle that is Henry (27).⁹¹ His creation myth conflates religious imagery and Celtic mythology; however, the minute that the baby is named Henry, the story breaks under the pressure of reality. Unlike his father, Henry the son cannot keep up the mythic quality that his father possesses through the majority of the novel. He cannot replace either his father or the infant that died before him. Melody, his mother, rejects him and continually contemplates the star that she has come to believe is the embodiment of the baby who died. She ignores him for her own creation myth, lets him wander the neighborhood

⁹⁰ Janis Dawson suggests that Henry's birth myth and several other details of his childhood and development connect Henry to Cuchulain, the hero of Celtic myth. However, "Doyle sets up the framework for myth only to undercut it by juxtaposing the noble and high-minded with the absurd and disgusting" (Dawson 170). Dawson also suggests that at the end of the novel, "Henry, however, shakes himself free from the myth of heroic sacrifice and the spell of Mother Ireland" (Dawson 180). Henry the son's myth cannot stand up to the novel's reality.

⁹¹ The narrative later notes that these stories and this reaction from the community is merely because he is the only strong, healthy baby in a Dublin slum at the turn of the century.

alone as an infant, leaves him hungry and unloved because he is not her fantastical creation, her own myth of Henry that he will never fulfill. This is stereotypical as well; the mother has the myth of the unattainable, perfect son, while the father has the myth that is larger-than-life. Henry can be neither.

Still, Henry wants to be like his father, wants to live the story, create himself, but he cannot. He admits that his father overshadows him even in his miraculous birth story:

Henry Smart the First, my father, was already famous. Still a bigger legend than his newly arrived son, the tap tap of his famous leg was a sound more feared than the banshee's wail...After my birth, my father was also born. A new man – again – every time he picked me and felt the life bounding through me he felt newer still
(28)

Henry the son does not have the same mythic power except in regard to his father; his presence makes his father's legend larger, gives the father the power to re-create himself, but does not give power to Henry the son. Henry the son mistakenly tries to follow in his father's footsteps, create his own legend, but he is always belated, following behind his father and his deceased, older brother; he can only relay the legend of his father, perpetuate and recreate it again and again. His narrative reinvents Henry the father, allows him to be born again, a new man, a man of myth and legend.

Henry's other chances to have a legend of his very own fall through as well. At the end of the Easter Rising, Henry claims to have been in the "famous photo" of de Valera as he surrendered, and yet, history erases him from the photograph: "I was beside the great man but [the photographer] wouldn't see me...The first time I saw the photo my

elbow was in it, but even that went in later versions. No room for Henry's elbow" (156-157). Henry is eclipsed, even in his more heroic moments, and throughout the uprising, his father's leg proves to be his greatest weapon and inspiration to the men. His father is still overshadowing him.

Later, Jack Dalton sings a folksong about Henry, claiming that he had made a name for himself during the Easter Rising:

And he sang to the lit windows of the Rotunda. *The pride of all Gaels was young Henry Smart.*

That stopped me. I nearly fell onto the street. Jack laughed at my shock. He held me up by the collar.

-You didn't know they were singing about you, did you, Henry?...You haven't been listening. It's doing the rounds, man. I heard Dev himself singing it when he was in solitary (190)

Jack uses the folksong to convince Henry to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood, but later in the novel, it turns out that the song and the story that Jack tells Henry about it are all concocted (326). Charlotte Jacklein contends that this falsification of Henry's ballad also calls into question his heroic myth: "While both characters recognize the impact of this song, it is unclear to what degree Henry, a 'classically unreliable narrator' has created his own 'heroic' existence, or written his own ballad" (140). Again, his participation in the cause goes without public notice; it is his need to have a legend of his own equal to that of his father that drives him. In reality, Henry is unsung.

Henry the father disappears after the first third of the novel. He saves Henry and his dying younger brother, Victor, from the police, but in the chaos of the escape, Henry states, “I knew I’d never see him again” (67), and he is right. The father’s absence and his inability to provide for his wife and children demonstrate the helplessness of his position. Henry the father fulfills the typical father role of the National Family Allegory through his absence. He has no power; he used to be feared, but those days are past, and Henry the father has become nothing but a legend. Yet, as is typical of this literature, even without his physical presence, the mythic presence of the father remains to control. Everything that Henry does in his father’s absence -- including carrying his artificial leg and using it as his father did, to assassinate-- is shaped by the father’s myth. His motivation is living up to the impossible fantasy that is his father.

Henry the Son as Father

Doyle’s retelling of the crucial events of the Easter Rising of 1916 is often seen as a historical revision of these events.⁹² During the Rising, Irish volunteers took over the General Post Office in Dublin, holding off the British army for several days. They were outmanned and severely under-armed, but this Rising was seen as a victory for the Irish cause much as Hezbollah is thought to be triumphant in its battle with Israel. The leaders of the Rising, including James Connolly and Padraic Pearse, made characters within the novel, were executed at Kilmainham jail after the surrender. The men who died are

⁹² The Easter Rising was the first “successful” rebellion against the British. Although it did not end British occupation, it was seen as a type of victory; it was the first time that the Irish held off the British army for any real length of time.

revered by the Irish as supreme patriots and martyrs.⁹³ Eamon De Valera, who later became the first President of the free South after the Peace Treaty, escaped execution. Although Henry is not a leader in this Rising, his participation allows the novel to examine the historic event. This also places the characters in the center of the Independence movement, which underscores the national implications of the narrative and invites an allegorical reading of Henry's family.

A turning point in the narrative takes place when Henry the son begins the transformation to becoming a father himself. Previous to this event, Henry is a freedom fighter, takes part in the Easter Rising, becomes a messenger for Michael Collins, carries out numerous assassinations for the cause, and trains other soldiers to fight with him. During this earlier time, Henry gets reacquainted and begins a sexual relationship with his former teacher, Miss O'Shea, (that their roles were set in his childhood and that she maintains his respect is indicated through the novel by her appellation, Miss O'Shea). She appears with other women during the Easter Rising, helping to feed the men and perform other stereotypically feminine tasks for the cause. While she fights for her freedom, both for herself and for the country, and while her sexuality is liberal, Miss O'Shea does not otherwise step out of the typical feminine role. She is not allowed to support the Easter Rising, but with all of the other women in this battle, she is asked by the rebellion's leadership to leave the G.P.O. before the surrender. Thus, within the telling of this major event in Irish history, conventional gender roles are maintained;

⁹³ The execution the Rising's leaders made them even more present in Irish culture. As martyrs, they were revered and used in further political rhetoric to inspire revolution. These founding-fathers, like many of the fictional fathers, are powerful even when they are dead.

Henry is the savior son, fighting for the cause and Miss O'Shea is the typical woman figure, inspiring the men to fight for her freedom. Miss O'Shea functions here as a typical Mother Ireland figure. Henry, as the young man figure, fights for her freedom, and their dynamic is stereotypical.

However, in later events, less sanctified by Irish historiography, the gender dynamic created within these scenes changes to influence ideologically the way in which Miss O'Shea and Henry's characters are portrayed. For a brief time span after their marriage, Henry and Miss O'Shea are shown as equals within the Irish Republican cause. The two rob a post office together and share the responsibilities of the getaway (278). As events move away from the more iconic moments in Irish history, Miss O'Shea begins to outdo Henry in enthusiasm, violence, and ability; her power coincides with her pregnancy and Henry's subsequent role as father.

The strongest example of this shift in gender roles occurs during an I.R.A. mission when Henry and Miss O'Shea must flee from the police. Miss O'Shea gets shot in the arm several times: "I felt the bullet in Miss O'Shea's arm; it shook mine. We kept running. She didn't slow down. She didn't even moan. The blood slid down between our hands...I felt another bullet. They were killing her slowly" (294). Miss O'Shea's reaction is heroic:

They weren't going to kill her. I'd carry her there, and the rest of the way. I'd plenty of run in me. Still holding her hand, I ran ahead. I turned to lift her as she caught up with me and, as I swerved to catch her and lifted my arm to hoist her to my shoulder, the bullet slid in and I was falling hard and I couldn't see anything,

didn't know anything, and when I was able to see again and think, when I looked and saw the ground jumping below me, she was carrying me (295)

This scene marks the beginning of Henry's diminishing power and control. The pregnant and wounded Miss O'Shea must carry him to safety, which is generally emasculating. More than that, as a newly created father figure, it demonstrates Henry's helplessness to save her, showing a change in his role. From this point on in the novel, his political and personal world begin to unravel, and he finds himself a father who used to have power, just like his own father.

Simultaneously, this scene is the beginning of Miss O'Shea's independent career within the cause. She becomes both an actual mother and a Mother Ireland figure; on the surface, she subverts the National Family Allegory model. As Jos Lanter states:

When they are both hit by bullets in the course of an action, she is the one who carries him to safety and nurses him back to health; she wears trousers and cooks for Henry, makes love to him, ambushes troop lorries, robs banks, all this while pregnant with their child, and refuses to give up when Ivan, the local warlord, who is on the make and in cahoots with the enemy, puts pressure on Henry to stop her because she is 'spoiling it for the boys' (249)

Doyle's narrative plays with the Mother Ireland stereotype. Miss O'Shea becomes known as "Our Lady of the Machine Gun," a parodic conflation of the Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary stock figures in the Irish novel. Admittedly, Roddy Doyle has created an atypical Mother Ireland, one who fights for her own freedom and saves herself; however, to do so, she must take on a male persona in clothing and behavior.

Her breaking away from the stereotype corresponds with her pregnancy, as she literally gestates her daughter, “Saorise,” whose name is Irish for Freedom. I believe Doyle is successful in the subversion to such a great degree that his ideological need to neutralize Miss O’Shea in the final pages of the novel is a response to feeling out of cultural bounds. A sexual, capable, and also violent, organized and methodical, freedom-fighting woman cannot be sustained within the Irish novel because this figure jars too much with the new nation’s ideology. Doyle’s novel ends with Miss O’Shea, having already given birth to Freedom, ironically imprisoned by the government in Kilmainham. She is able to give birth to the potential for Irish Freedom, but is unable to enjoy it or to sustain its life. There is no place in the newly independent nation for a woman so atypical in her gender identity. Her imprisonment is a conservative maneuver on Doyle’s part that does not negate her subversion of the stereotype, but nonetheless produces neutralizing consequences for a woman who breaks out of the National Family Allegory. Her neutralization reinstates the stereotypical order, as others must now fight for her in her helpless state. In order to fight for Freedom, she must give up her own, literally and figuratively.⁹⁴

Yet, Miss O’Shea’s independence and accomplishments make Henry’s seem small in comparison. She, like Henry’s father and Dolly Oblong, has a legend of her own, while Henry does not. The juxtaposition of their characters allows for Henry’s loss of control

⁹⁴ Doyle’s Miss O’Shea, for the majority of the novel, is definitely a step toward creating a Mother Ireland that is in direct opposition to the stereotypical depiction. I believe the conservative nod may be to placate an audience that expects a certain kind of representation of the Mother figure, and who may be too shocked to have her left as a completely subversive figure. It is possible that Doyle is acknowledging this through the daughter, Freedom, as she would be the next Mother Ireland, possibly free from the role and the social and political imprisonment of the women of the time period of the novel. I do think that Doyle is creating the social groundwork for a new Mother Ireland identity, one that is a completely subversive figure.

and power to seem natural. He cannot control his gun-toting momma figure. From the moment that she saves his life, which coincides with his becoming a father, he does not succeed in any cause related activity, and eventually becomes an enemy of the very cause that he helped to train soldiers for. When Henry is arrested by the police and ends up in Kilmainham, Miss O'Shea negotiates his release by bribing one of the guards (341-342). Again, she saves him from possible death.

Henry readily admits that he cannot control Miss O'Shea. Unlike his father, Henry does not have a personal myth to sustain his power. In fact, it is his own paternity that allows him to see that his father's mythic persona was a fiction. As Laners notes, "...mythmaking is a double-edged sword, and self-creation can easily turn into self-delusion. Henry's father may have been a self-creator, but his son also comes to see him as a self-deceiver" (Laners 251). Henry's search for truth about his father keeps him from concocting a lasting mythic persona for himself. He can see his father's powerlessness and this constitutes the reason that he can readily admit his own powerlessness in relation to his Mother Ireland. For example, after Miss O'Shea helps him escape prison, he acknowledges his need for her care:

[Henry] slept and ran. Nursed by his short-haired wife who fed him griddle cake soaked in warm milk, his bones knitted, his bruises faded. Nursed by his beautiful, older wife when she wasn't off ambushing troop lorries and robbing banks, he was becoming, once again, a fine figure of a man. Nursed by his beautiful, pregnant wife when she wasn't off winning the war and defying the local warlord's edict that an Irish-woman's place was in the home, when she

wasn't under the local warlord. Henry Smart recovered as he ran. He ran, even though his war was over and he'd take no further part in the killing (348)

Henry is described as a baby through the term "nursed," which pertains both to convalescence and to infancy. The food that he is given is soft and bland, infant's fare; his need for his wife is not that of an adult partner but of a child for his Mother. Her power continues to build in the passage as well, while Henry's diminishes. She is even contradicting that "an Irish-woman's place was in the home," which refers to the new constitution of Ireland, which the I.R.A. is trying to uphold, even though this idea turns it back on promises made to women in the Republican movement before independence. While Henry has decided once and for all to quit the cause and quit the violence, he idolizes her for her efforts. He sees her power and admits because he has lost conviction, separated himself from the predominant beliefs of his peers, he has lost the power he once had. It is only by participating in the prevailing ideology the characters in this novel can act powerfully.

This paradox is evident also, in several conversations with Ivan, Miss O'Shea's cousin, a gangster who has also designated himself I.R.A. "commander" of his country. He comes to Henry when he cannot himself control Miss O'Shea:

[Ivan asks him,] Have you any control over your wife at all?

- No, I said proudly.

- I'm inclined to believe you, he said.

This same concept continues in a later conversation between the two:

- I'll talk to her, [Henry] said – that's all I can do. She's her own woman.

- She's your wife.

- I'm her husband (354)

Henry acknowledges that the roles have shifted. She is the soldier now, and he is the one who can only give inspiration. Usually, the father figure tries to control the family, especially the woman, even after he acknowledges that his power has faded, but Henry, in his truth seeking and deconstruction of other's myths and legends, can be apathetic with his present role.

He escapes the father's need to be larger-than-life, to be mythic, until the sins of his father are visited on him. He can escape his own need to control, but he cannot escape *becoming* his own father, fulfilling a legacy of murder and violence, an inevitable part of taking on the role of the father, which he has been unknowingly participating in from the beginning. As he becomes more and more disillusioned with the war effort, he begins to understand that what he has been doing is serving the business interests of men in power, as his father did. Henry begins to see himself as an assassin for hire, not a soldier for freedom:

Everything I'd done, every bullet and assassination, all the blood and brains, prison, the torture, the last four years and everything in them, everything had been done for Ivan and the other Ivans, the boys whose time had come. That was Irish freedom, since Connolly had been shot – and if the British hadn't shot him one of the Ivans would have; Connolly would have been safely dead long before now, one of the martyrs, dangerous alive, more useful washed and dead. It was too late...I'd killed more men than I could account for and I'd trained other men to do

the same. I'd been given the names of men on pieces of paper and I'd sought them out and killed them. Just like my father, except he'd been paid for it (354-355)

Henry thought that he was killing to create a new, free world, but the world that he is seeing post-revolution is one that he sees as a brutal form of mob-like capitalism. If Henry had died during the war, then he could be like Connolly, he could serve a purpose in his martyrdom, but instead, he is relegated to the "Old Man" figure, disenchanted with the result of all the bloodshed and having no way to rectify the past. Henry reexamines his own life and sees that he *has* created a myth for himself subconsciously, even if those around him have not been able to see it.

This parallel with his father becomes clear when Henry's search for the truth leads him to Alfie Gandon. It is through his conversation with Gandon that he realizes that he has been duped and that many of the assassinations that he committed in the name of the cause of freedom were in reality simply orders from the mobster. Henry beats Gandon into telling the truth about his behavior for the past years, and Gandon's response to try to bribe and flatter him into submission, Gandon begins by offering him work:

- I need a bodyguard, Henry. The job's yours.⁹⁵

- No, thanks.

- Why not? You've been working for me for years. Just like your father.

I hit him harder, cleaner.

- All those spies. And you were all so eager to rid me of them.

⁹⁵ Doyle adopts Joyce's punctuation style as an indication of his Irish literary heritage.

I hit him.

- Detective Sergeant Smith. You must remember him... You risked your life dispatching that greedy tyke. And I never had the opportunity to thank you. Or pay you, for that matter. Let me please.

I hit him again (377)

Henry's myth of himself is that he is not his father and that his violence is justified. His created self is torn apart by the knowledge that he has been used and that he has not escaped the cycle of greedy violence. His revenge for his father ends up destroying the self that he had created.

Yet, Doyle's narrative thus creates the potential for him to break out of his forced, violent Father role. Now that he understands that he has *become* his father, he can demystify his past and seek another, more authentic identity. Although not fulfilled within the novel, which never entirely resists the National Family Allegory, the last pages of the novel allow hope for Henry to become a self apart from his father's legacy. While Mother Ireland, Miss O'Shea, is still in jail, and Freedom, his daughter, is still growing, Henry has the potential to find his own place in the world, outside of the allegory:

I had a wife I loved in jail and a daughter called Freedom I'd held only once. I didn't know where I was going. I didn't know if I'd get there. But I was still alive. I was twenty. I was Henry Smart (382)

Henry has the opportunity to redefine himself, the potential to start a new life not as his father's son. Henry has held "Freedom" once, a new generation that may be able to do

what his narrative cannot do, break out of the conservative modes of identity roles based on Family positions and the violence passed down from father to son.

Roddy Doyle's novel demonstrates the ideological power of the National Family Allegory in that it is a narrative attempting to subvert conservative roles and a mythologized version of Irish history, and yet, the text consistently returns to these same traditional roles. It cannot escape them entirely. Lanter critiques the novel for this conservatism: "*A Star Called Henry* succeeds completely neither as a satire, nor as a revisionist history, nor as a liberating re-invention of the past" (257)

The novel does, however, accomplish an examination of the ways in which the patriarchal myths of paternity (Father Britain, Father Church, Founding Father) still have power over the personal and the historical and in creating the identities of the next generation, even if they are not directly present during the current time. Allowing the reader to see history as myth, to see that the myths of the Father are fictions, and to see that violence is passed down but does not have to be, Doyle creates the potential for critique of the Allegory itself. As a whole, this novel does not destroy or reconstruct the allegory, and I agree with Lanter that he does not revise history or re-invent the past so much as allow us to see through it, acknowledge the ideological motivations of myth making.

Much like the mother figures examined in Chapters II and IV, father figures can influence their children's development and identity even in their absence. In fact, present fathers have no real power, except to harm their children. Absent fathers often have more power over their offspring because their myths are unimpeded. Yet, the damage that

fathers do in the name of discipline and control or through neglect lingers on and passes on to future generations.

On a national level, Father figures stand for patriarchal control, both political and religious. The conflation of colonial father, religious father and founding-father makes it impossible to pinpoint one direct cause for these repeated representations. In many ways, the Father is all the controlling influences combined, the superego of culture. As an allegory, the Father demonstrates that whether or not these traditional influences are still present in culture, they still have power. In the name of the father, Irish literature shows a culture in stasis, stuck in the conservative representations of the past. Part of the reason for this is the lingering of the creation myth. Like the narrative's treatment of the myth of the Father, Irish identity representations suffer from the constrictions of influences that no longer exist in reality.

However, there does seem to be potential for subversion of these roles. From the earliest novel to the latest discussed here, there seems to be a trend for more and more non-traditional roles to the point that the last novel only seems to cater on the surface to the conservative National Family Allegory representations. Although none of these have escaped the ideological power of the Allegory in relation to the Father figures, it would certainly seem likely that the trend for subversion will continue and that out of this potential, a new masculine role will develop in the future.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

“Don't look for a happy ending. It's not an American story. It's an Irish one.”

- *The Devil's Own*

As an American, approaching Irish literature and film I find that I must often change my mindset. Generally, we, Americans like to see the hero in action, the firefighter who saves the person from the World Trade center, the soldier who plants the flag at Iwo Jima, the cowboy riding across the west to fulfill manifest destiny. We like the happy ending. In my research, I have found that Irish culture worships the martyr, particularly martyrs from the past. While America has had several hundred years to deal with its Independence, for Ireland, it is a recent memory, relived in nostalgic terms over and over again in literature and film. Irish culture struggles for an identity of its own. It is a culture that recognizes its victimization and attempts to deal with the trauma of centuries of violent and bloody warfare. This trauma is never far from its consciousness and appears through repetition and nostalgia.

Another aspect of Irish culture, differing so much from American culture, is the confluences of symbols. The Irish have a rich mythology of their own, which lingers and evolves into present figures of literature and film. These have often conflated with religious and political symbols and icons, so much so that often it is nearly impossible to separate out the root of the intertwining.

I remember sitting in a Dublin pub in the summer of 1997, having a conversation with a Dubliner; he said to me, “Well, you know that you're Catholic or Protestant even if you're atheist.” The idea that religion and politics could be so conflated was foreign to

me. But in Ireland, the religious *is* political; this has to be remembered when approaching a study of Irish culture. The same Mother figure that arose in Irish mythology, evolved in colonization, and changed due to religious influence. She is all of these at the same time, and yet none of these can be pinpointed as *the* source or explanation for any particular woman figure within literature and film. Irish culture has integrated and interpenetrating symbolic structure. Thus, each of the roles in the National Family Allegory is the result of mythology, politics and religion, and these influences generally cannot be separated out as individual entities.

The Cathleen figure haunts Irish culture; she walks through the pages of contemporary novels and appears on-screen in different forms and guises. Her savior/martyr sons and mythic controlling father figures revolve around the idea of Cathleen, the idea of nation. Since the personal is seen as political, any family-based narrative has the potential for political statement concerning the struggle for National identity. The National Family Allegory repeats through these cultural depictions, an echo of the national traumas of the past, a relic of colonization, but also as an internalized identity.

So what has changed in Irish cultures since independence in 1922? One of the ways in which contemporary novels attempt to subvert the repeated representations is through absence. When a mother, father, or son is missing from a text, then the meanings and national implications behind their roles can be examined and the need of characters to recreate substitutes demonstrates the cultural need for each of these roles. Need for a mother often indicates a struggle for personal and national identity. Need for a father

demonstrates a fear of revolution, of lack of control, of change. Need for a son may be from fear of emigration of the young, leaving a country of the old, or for martyrs to carry on the cause of freedom. Through isolation of the missing roles, a text can demonstrate these needs and point out the cultural influence of that particular role. Through the repetitions of the National Family Allegory, the texts invite analysis of these same roles. It is a struggle to understand how they define identity and at the same time to understand the compulsion to repeat.

All three roles are also “victim” roles. Mother Ireland cannot fight for herself. Sons are supposed to die for the Nation. Fathers have lost all of their power, living only in their glory days. Victimization has become a defining feature for Irish culture, partially due to a national fascination with martyrdom, but also as a remnant of colonial identity. All of these factors combine into a particularly Irish story, creating and recreating the Family in the traditions of myth, religion and politics.

Irish Catholic White Masculinity

This dissertation must end where it began: with the quixotic figure of the white, Irish Catholic man. Masculinity studies has generally focused on representations of marginalized males in alliance with feminism, queer theory, and the investigation of race. Discussing the white heterosexual male is difficult at best due to their placement in culture as the norm, as the ones who define all other identities by comparison, as the ones with power and control. Although white, the Irish Catholic male is difficult to classify in racial terms. Technically, they should be part of the white male norm, but colonization is generally seen as a marginalizing and feminizing influence, negating normative white

masculinity roles. The continued depiction as the victim and martyr, whether young or old male figure, seems to indicate a need for Irish culture to see its masculinity on the margin. The post-Independence redefining of masculinity, often discussed as the “remasculinization of Ireland,” however, would place the Irish Catholic male as the one in power of the Free South. Yet, there seems to be a lingering of the colonized male representation, whether they are represented as the martyrs or even more problematically as the very same colonial controlling force that created the victimization of men in the colonial period. Simultaneously Irish Catholic males can be represented as both colonizer and colonized, as controlling force and feminized victim. This makes analysis complex in the post-Independent texts. The answer is that the white, Irish Catholic male role conforms in different situations to both the marginalized role and the normative role.

The tie between the two, I believe, can be found in male masochism. The younger Irish male does not need to win the battle or overthrow the colonial power, but instead revels in the martyr role, the need to sacrifice himself for his Nation, his Mother. There is pleasure in the victim status. He knows that martyrs are revered, and dying for the cause would place him in a position of cultural primacy. For the old man/Father figure, the one who has power at least at some point in his life, although he is the norm, he is always represented as if his power is in the past. The depictions of the Fathers as weak, handicapped, dying or otherwise powerless, relegate him to the victim status as well. The old man finds his pleasure in his sacrifice of the power that he *had*, reveling in the sacrifice of his own position of power and control, reliving the past as a way to induce

more trauma, remind himself of what he has given up, and the nostalgia serves as a way to point out his own sacrificial state.

Irish masculinity is also defined by generational states. There no clear demarcation between the young man/son and old man/father roles. When children are not involved within the story or film, the son usually continues to be a young man until he loses his power through physical weakness. Part of the reason for the generational roles may be the rootedness of Irish culture in nostalgia for the past. Irish culture may function in a dichotomy of past versus present, and the masculinity roles may follow this split. Either something is past and therefore part of the old identity, traditional and conservative identity or present and therefore rebelling against the status quo.

Admittedly, I have limited the scope of my analysis to analyzing the representations created by male authors and directors. Therefore, there is a possibility that both future works and works created by women authors and directors may have different patterns of representation.

Areas for Further Research

Critical analysis of contemporary Irish literature is currently focused on the role of women in Irish culture. Certainly, more work needs to focus on masculinity within Irish literature and film. As stated earlier, one area for this is to examine works by female authors and directors; these works may subvert the National Family Allegory or have different representations of men all together. This is not to say that the evolving role of women characters is not as important to literary studies, but much less analysis has been done on male gender and its impact on Irish culture.

Another area that I have not been able to cover within the scope of this dissertation is the role of the Protestant Anglo-Irish within the representations of masculinity. A majority of the contemporary Irish literature seems focused on the plight of the Irish Catholic, but novels, particularly those concerned with Northern Ireland, do often include Protestant depictions. While much has been written on the influence of the British on masculinity, I have found very little research on the Anglo-Irish representations and influence.

Additionally, due to the 1998 Peace Treaty (and I would speculate pressure from the United States against anything resembling terrorist activity), Irish political violence has greatly diminished. The terrorist role has ceased to dominate Irish depictions, and much of Irish film revolves around a more peaceful representation of family life. It will be interesting to see what will happen to Irish literature and film during a time of relative peace when depictions of violence and national trauma are seen as purely historical in the face of current prosperity and its attendant social optimism. I am beginning to see more recent historical novels and film, more revisionist histories, and more struggle to create an Irish identity free of historical violence or trauma. I cannot speculate on whether or not the nostalgic tendencies or the victim roles will disappear, but I do think that the Irish story and identity will likely change after a long period of peace and prosperity. I do not know whether the Irish story will ever have a happy ending, but this is certainly a place for study in the future.

Summation

The pattern of the National Family Allegory shows the strong ideological power of the creation myth. This dissertation is necessarily limited in its scope, but the trend for repetition of conservative family roles continues through Irish literature and film depictions, demonstrating a cultural need for these traditional roles. Mother Ireland, savior sons, and failing fathers indicate a struggle for a post-Independence personal and national identity. Irish authors and directors most likely do not realize that they are recreating these roles due to the creative and fantastic ways in which the substitutes are created for those roles left absent. I believe that these roles will continue to evolve and conflate with the forces of control and power within Irish culture, and although they may not repeat in the same way as demonstrated here, they will most likely repeat themselves in some fashion.

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