

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "WE HAVE COME OF AGE": GROWING BODIES  
IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRISH NOVEL

Kelly Jayne Steenholdt McGovern, Ph.D. 2012

Directed by: Professor Brian Richardson, Department of English

Twentieth-century Irish culture — shaped by, for instance, the Catholic Church, nationalist narratives of blood sacrifice for “Mother Ireland,” and the experience of emergence from colonialism—put special pressure on the meanings attached to bodies in narratives of both individual and national maturation. This dissertation examines the human body’s role in Irish novels of development, tracing specifically how Irish authors deploy the growing body in relation to the self-cultivating subject of a *Bildungsroman* (or “coming of age” novel). This project shows that Irish social conditions provoked urgent reworkings of generic conventions, and impelled Irish authors to develop sophisticated strategies for representing growing bodies in narrative.

Through close examinations of four novels, this project identifies four facets of the role the growing body can take in fictions of development. The introduction provides an overview of the absent body, the body that grows in passing, the body growing sideways, and the unnarratable body. Individual chapters examine these respective facets as they manifest in James Joyce’s highly influential *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916),

John McGahern's *The Dark* (1965), Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's *The Dancers Dancing* (1999), and Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995). Chapter one describes how Joyce largely reserves Stephen Dedalus's body from representation so that other developmental aspects feature more prominently. Chapter two examines McGahern's representations of the real, material growing body's volatility and entanglement with forces beyond the subject's autonomous control as a strategic response to the post-Independence Irish social environment. Chapter three asserts that Ní Dhuibhne depicts a female protagonist filling out and experiencing lateral, or "sideways" modes of growth to expand the possibilities for narrating Irish female identity and to denaturalize nationalist representational strategies, while chapter four identifies the protagonist's growing body as an unsayable and indeterminate thing at the center of Enright's experimental text.

The coda considers the contemporary moment of instability and recession against claims that Ireland "came of age" in the 1990s, taking stock of the growing body in the "Celtic Tiger" literary moment and grounding this stock-taking in earlier representations of development that mobilized bodily growth to tell stories.

**“WE HAVE COME OF AGE”:  
THE GROWING BODY IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRISH NOVEL**

by

Kelly Jayne Steenholdt McGovern

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Brian Richardson, Chair

Assistant Professor Stephen A. Brighton

Professor Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux

Associate Professor James M. Smith

Assistant Professor Christina Walter

Associate Professor Caroline Eades, Dean's Representative

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## DEDICATION

For my Ben, my partner in life, change, and growth,  
and for my children, who helped my heart grow up, out, sideways and full.

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INTRODUCTION  
**“We Have Come of Age”: Growing Bodies  
in the Twentieth-Century Irish Novel**

This is a study of the dynamic role that growing human bodies play in twentieth-century Irish fiction, specifically in narratives concerned with human development from youth to maturity. The biologically growing body and literary plots of maturation correlate in numerous ways, for we broadly understand both to predicate a mature subject. While plots concerning an individual’s maturation (often referred to as “coming of age” stories or “*Bildungsromane*”) are among the most well-known literary novels, the maturing body in these literary works has received little critical attention, perhaps because we generally think bodily growth is an ordinary, straightforward, familiar, and even mundane part of stories about people growing. Compared to the soul or individual consciousness, for example, the growing body can seem a relatively simple matter. In fact, one of the protagonists examined in this study, Stephen Dedalus of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), voices this assumption when he says that the soul “has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body” (220). However, Joyce’s reputation as a major literary modernist is in fact largely founded on his use of the body in literary narrative. While the protagonist of the twentieth century’s seminal Irish novel of development may suggest that bodily development is less mysterious—and therefore less worthy of study and examination—than the processes producing the soul, bodily development complicates twentieth-century Irish maturation plots in highly meaningful ways.

Starting with Joyce, I explore how Irish authors puzzle out the body's role in maturation narratives. The body emerges in twentieth-century Irish literary texts as a particularly important locus for expressing the transformations occurring in the individual and in Irish culture at large during that century. I follow out the growing body's complex and dynamic role in twentieth-century Irish fictions of development by illuminating the rich variety of strategies twentieth-century Irish writers use for portraying the growing body in coming-of age narratives, and consider these strategies in the cultural and social context of twentieth-century Ireland. In addition to Joyce's *Portrait*, I closely examine the following novels: John McGahern's *The Dark* (1965), Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's *The Dancers Dancing* (1999), and Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995). These texts articulate subjectivity in relation to the body and variously avoid and rely on the capacity of growing female and male bodies to transmit meaning. Further, these texts contextualize the development of an individual within a national environment seeking to come to terms with its own developments, which often amplifies the meanings that can attach to the growth of a protagonist in literary plots.

Representations of a character's growing body can impart significant meanings in a literary plot, meanings that do not always come to the foreground if a subject's mind or soul orients our approach to a novel; taking the body as a primary point of reference when approaching a literary work can enhance and contradict earlier interpretations. For instance, and perhaps most commonly, representations of a character's growing body can position a character on a spectrum of development. This spectrum is familiar and predictable, partly due to the rise of discourses surrounding the idea of adolescence, a psychosocial life period which became an object of intensified study around the end of

the nineteenth century, and also due to how information about human biology has been important to public discourse in the twentieth century. Authors routinely offer details about a protagonist's age, or chart the protagonist's progress through a State-sponsored educational system organized in terms of class years.<sup>1</sup> In part because these movements have become so expected, bodily growth provides a ready shorthand for psychological growth—as the beard grows on the boy, so the boy matures in adulthood. The *Bildungsroman* can appropriate the growing body in this way, as a material item onto which authors can map and signify psychological development. *Bildungsromane* can also anticipate such expectations, and respond to them in meaningful ways.

Conventional, straightforward uses of the body in the *Bildungsroman* are not my main concern. Rather, I am interested in how twentieth-century Irish authors populate novels with bodies that run counter to such routine mapping strategies, and how they manipulate assumptions about the correlation between a growing body and a maturing subject in inventive ways. I selected authors who deploy the growing body strategically to reshape the genre's bounds, to re-write vertical, hierarchically-predicated models of growth, and to expand narrow identity formations. None of them use it entirely straightforwardly. The growing body can do a lot of meaningful work in a *Bildungsroman*—letting the growing body move plots of development toward resolution is easy, and formulaic, because biological growth follows a generally predictable pattern.

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<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, State-organized public educational systems have contributed to the shape of modern life in the West in a number of ways. For instance, by making human biology, including the reproductive changes that take place during puberty, a part of their health curricula, State-organized education systems helped to frame the twentieth century's cultural dialogues about development. In some areas, however, access to some forms of information related to human biology has been fraught; for instance, the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 banned certain forms of information related to birth control from being sold, published, distributed, or imported in the Republic of Ireland. Such State-organized educational systems participate in a bureaucratizing movement that emerged in the nineteenth century, as Castle makes clear in *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*.

Such a pattern also fetters the individual's capacity of self-determination in certain ways, by placing a check on the individual's freedom to bring shape to one's form. It interacts with the protagonist's ability to wield self-control and to shape her or his own formation. Joyce, McGahern, Ní Dhuibhne and Enright each probe the growing body's capacity to transmit meaning in literary works.

Each of the four authors I examine demonstrates concern with the substantial meaning that the body can impart in literary plot. The range of their strategies for managing bodily growth in fiction indicates the diverse and rich role the body can have in narrative, and suggests that such strategies seemingly relate closely to the dynamics of representing growth in any particular character. With each *Bildungsroman*, I have identified a key concept at the heart of the text's concern with representing the protagonist's growing body. I thus explore four facets of the role the growing body can take in fictions of development: the absent body, the body that grows in passing, the body growing sideways, and the unnarratable body. First, Joyce withholds mention of the growing body in *Portrait* to the extent that Stephen's body becomes noticeable for its absence. Joyce's *Portrait* uses the absent growing body as part of a reaction to the conventional impulse to use the body to chart a protagonist's straightforward passage toward mature form in order to depict a more disjunctive and recursive movement. The growing body can be absented from a text by being reserved from representation so that other aspects of development—such as psychological or perceptual development—will play more active roles in the text's trajectory of growth. Second, representations of the growing body can be deployed as a way to highlight disparities among different aspects of development, and the difficulty of integrating and resolving those aspects. Using

McGahern's *The Dark*, the representational facet of the growing body that I explore in the second chapter is the body that grows in passing, that changes from one state to another and which always remains open to change—or, more precisely, remains volatile and unclosed, for the absence of closure is a sharply felt loss in McGahern's work. The growth of a protagonist's lived and experienced body over time can illuminate through contrast other forms of growth such as forms of development assumed in dominant national discourse that the protagonist does not control or is blocked from experiencing. A third representational facet, the body growing sideways, can emerge when an author uses the growing body to confront these blockages. By representing the body growing in oblique ways rather than straightforwardly, Ní Dhuibhne expands the possibilities for growth by literary characters beyond conventional, vertical, hierarchical modes. Finally, using Enright's novel, I explore a fourth facet, the unsayable growing body. Enright takes a different tack by suggesting that the ways in which the body *seems* to be growing in the story world of the broadly realistic *Bildungsroman* may not in fact be true. Using techniques such as subjunctive narration, Enright dismantles the leverage a growing body can provide in plot movements by destabilizing the sorts of information a represented body can be relied upon to carry, so that the body can be represented as growing yet also be rendered irrevocably ambiguous and uncertain.

## I: THE GROWING BODY IN THE NOVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

I use interchangeably the phrases “coming of age novel” and *Bildungsroman* in my study in order to access the dilemma we face when we examine the role of organic growth in novels of development, a narrative form that proposes to grant unique access to

the flowering of inner life and which presents that flowering in relation to an outer, material sphere. The body interfaces intricately with those areas, can serve as an agent of (and/or with) the forming subject, and, simultaneously, often acts as a bearer of meaning related to these and other areas in plots. Of the two most prevalent, loosely analogous ways of referring to the novels I examine, “coming of age novel” is more closely associated with the growing body than the “*Bildungsroman*.” The phrase “coming of age” implies that development is more a matter of allowing the passage of time to bring a subject to fuller form, which readily gives way to concerns regarding the subject’s agency in formation. Because this biologically-based formation normally occurs through the standard operations of time, we often take for granted bodily growth as well as the “somatic syntax” it lends to narratives of development.<sup>2</sup> This study intercedes in our understanding of the coming-of-age novel or *Bildungsroman* to highlight features such as the material experience of bodily growth and the negotiation of its attendant cultural significations among the more familiar features of the genre.<sup>3</sup>

The term *Bildungsroman* is German in origin, a combination of *Bildung* (education/formation/production of self) and *roman* (romance or novel), but it has travelled into widespread use. Debates about the general usage of the term often describe the contexts in which ideal formation can occur and the conditions necessary for individual development into full form, as well as the way that a subject’s gender, class, nationality and ethnicity frame access to these ideal contexts and conditions. While some

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<sup>2</sup> For a similar argument to mine, see Seymour’s remarks on the dominant plot schema for human development (293-313).

<sup>3</sup> The ritual iterations of the developing, material body in Irish works of fiction have implications for the performative construction of the subject through representational practices. Butler’s theories, particularly those presented in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* inform this project, usually implicitly.

purists might argue for the restriction of the term to the German novel of the eighteenth century on the grounds that the conditions of that time and place produced a specific ideology concerning the cultivation of the actualized self in harmony with society, the broad appeal of maturation narratives has seen the term applied widely and associated with other national traditions with some frequency.<sup>4</sup> As I explore through this study, the Irish literary tradition is one of the national traditions that produced a significant number of novels of development in the twentieth century. In particular, Irish writers produced a deluge of them in the last decade of the century, as scholars including Jonathan Bolton have observed. “Many Irish writers seem to have recognized that the bildungsroman’s generic conventions were particularly helpful in defining the expectations of adulthood,” Bolton observes, “a project that acquired certain urgency in post-independence Ireland” (15). Since, concomitantly, a number of Irish writers give bodily matters a prominent role in their narratives, the interface of the growing body with the subject of a novel of development is a particularly rich field of meaning, which generates new thinking about a classic literary form in a national context.<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Jeffers, for instance, has noted a surge in concern with the body as a site linked with a “grid of power” that could be seen as “partly preestablished and partly rapidly changing” in contemporary Irish literary works (Jeffers 1).

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<sup>4</sup> Sammons argues for a restricted definition of the genre (229-46). Boes presents a useful description of its critical history (“Modernist” 230-43). Although Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s late eighteenth-century German novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*), is outside the scope of my study, Krimmer points out that this landmark *Bildungsroman* is concerned with bodily evidence related to *Bildung* (257-77). See also Cheah.

<sup>5</sup> Critics of Irish literature have identified the body as an important concern in a variety of forms. E.g. Nordin, ed. *The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry* and Sweeney, *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre*. For a study of novelistic antecedents, see Mossman, *Disability, Representation and the Body in Irish Writing: 1800-1922*.

Unlike bodily growth, a generally taken-for-granted process in novels, the growth of the subject associated with the *Bildungsroman* cannot be so taken for granted. That is, the narrative tension of a *Bildungsroman* is built around the axiom that the achievement of self-cultivating subjectivity is not guaranteed and is, therefore, worthy of extended narration. The traditional *Bildungsroman* portrays the self-cultivating subject as he (and traditionally this subject is indeed a *he*) undergoes a series of educational experiences and overcomes certain difficulties, the successful negotiation of which will result in his acculturation and achievement of a mature and harmonious relation to self, family and society.<sup>6</sup> Although the possibility of achieving a secure identity is “troubled,” to use Judith Butler’s phrase, the repetition of certain norms helps to stabilize the matrix of compulsory heterosexuality and, for that matter, compulsory ablebodiedness. The utterance of the growing body in literature helps to signify development and to place the subject in relation to social constructs of maturation. That is, the growing body offers to produce maturation as imminent—and becoming increasingly immanent to the extent that the subject’s development is identified with the body, or that authors figure the body in order to signal that the subject has undergone a change.

Bodily development is by and large an ongoing process beyond the subject’s control. Subjects come of age in time and will come to have a more mature body through

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<sup>6</sup> Howe provides a classic definition of the English *Bildungsroman*, which she translates as the novel of apprenticeship: “The adolescent hero of the typical ‘apprentice’ novel sets out on his way through the world, meets with reverses usually due to his own temperament, falls in with various guides and counselors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. This is the apprenticeship pattern in the barest possible outline.” In short, it is the “idea that living is an art which may be learned and that the young person passes through the stages of an apprenticeship in learning it, until at last he becomes a “Master” (4). In other words, this incipient master must learn to identify and accommodate himself to an environment he has determined to be appropriate to his background and innate talents. He has agency in his choice to adjust himself and thereby make himself a master.



the body's own rhythms and events, which occur generally irrespective of other developmental milestones central to the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>7</sup> Subjects often play a relatively determining role in passing those milestones, while bodily growth occurs organically, involuntarily, through the body's inherent dynamism. The body cannot be reduced to an effect of choice, and is not self-determinable. Granted, to some extent, individuals might contribute to the shape of the human body by actively intervening in its developmental course (perhaps impacting such modes of growth as musculature development through exercise or other modes of biological growth with the aid of medications or supplemental hormones). However, living bodies will continue to grow in certain ways regardless of these interventions. Life cannot but involve changes due to biological processes on various scales, from cellular respirations that last microseconds to the effects of the aging processes that occur across a lifetime. Further, bodies are subject to social definition, including those that privilege some types of bodies and underprivilege others. While these statements may at first appear banal, it is necessary to make them explicit in order to foreground assumptions in play concerning the body's role in fictions of development. The growing body has often been a transparent representational feature in works of fiction that are invested in mimetic representations of development, yet the attachment of meaning to the body and bodily milestones in Western culture entails that representations of the growing body are bound up with the expression of development in the *Bildungsroman*.

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<sup>7</sup> For a taxonomic delineation of these milestones, see Buckley, who determines the genre's "principal characteristics" by abstracting them from "the broad outlines of a typical *Bildungsroman* plot" (16). According to Buckley, a *Bildungsroman* will ignore no more than "two or three of its principal elements—childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (16-17). For groundbreaking feminist critique of this taxonomy, see Abel, Hirsch and Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*.

Organic growth is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the harmonious development of the individual in the conventional *Bildungsroman*. Bodies continually undergo development through biological processes that bring about physical changes, changes that have intense cultural significance. We can expect the experience of these changes to potentially affect the formation of the subject as much as any other experience. Such bodily growth, however, is not identified as a general feature in theories of the novel, even the form most closely associated with the experience of human development, the *Bildungsroman*. On the one hand, the growing body will bring the subject to a biological maturation, a process which may not accord with the form of self-cultivated maturation conventionally associated with the *Bildungsroman*. On the other, the representational practice of signaling meanings in addition to biological growth through representations of the growing body blurs this distinction.

## II: LITERARY COMING OF AGE IN THE IRISH CONTEXT

Many Irish authors used the coming-of-age form during the twentieth century in part because Ireland was transformed during that century, and various elements of the national plot of development remained discordant, adding force and interest to other formulations of the modern self as fragmented.<sup>8</sup> Following the Easter 1916 uprising, the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), and a civil war (1922-23), the twentieth century finally saw the achievement of a formally independent Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann), as a result of the partition of Northern Ireland from the other 26 counties. Rather than through a harmonious transformation, Irish Independence from Britain finally and

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<sup>8</sup> See Esty on representations of uneven development in modern novels.

substantially came about—but not wholly, and at significant cost. From many perspectives, a tension arose at the heart of the twentieth-century Irish experience: Irish nationalists undertook a revolution in the early years of the century and, partially, succeeded—and then few of the people who lived in the Free State experienced the post-independence period under the Catholic-nationalist order as liberatory.<sup>9</sup> And, as many authors demonstrated in the decades following, particularly those who worked within a generally realist or naturalist mode, the real shape of Irish lives did not conform to the vision of Irish life that took shape in the decades following Independence.<sup>10</sup> A number of Irish novelists used the coming-of-age form as part of an effort to resolve questions and challenges surrounding the uneven and imperfect elements of the nation’s story of “self-cultivation.”<sup>11</sup> Their works generally portrayed harmonious development as difficult to achieve in twentieth-century Irish conditions.<sup>12</sup> The painful and reverberating effects of partition joined those fractures, occlusions, and self-divisions already in place as a result of Ireland’s historical experience of British imperialism and colonization.<sup>13</sup> In common with many postcolonial nation-states, the fledgling Irish Free State that would become the

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<sup>9</sup> An entrenched, paternalistic authority wielded powerful control over Irish life both before and after Independence, as scholars including Terrence Brown have made clear (*Ireland*).

<sup>10</sup> As Richard Murphy notes, for instance, the form has an “anomalous vitality” in part because Irish writers have been concerned with critiquing the presumption of self-cultivating subjectivity associated with the form even as they work to produce it (2).

<sup>11</sup> For analysis of the affinity of the *Bildungsroman* with national *Bildung*, the organismic metaphor of the nation, and the postcolonial state, see Cheah’s work on the national *Bildungsroman*, esp. 235-47.

<sup>12</sup> Bolton aptly observed in his recent study of coming of age stories from independent Ireland that Irish novels of development often present the relationship among bodily, sexual, cognitive, social and emotional aspects of development as uneven rather than harmonious. Bolton argues that Irish authors are responding to and critiquing a complicated array of developments—including but far from limited to national developments—through a literary form that puts pressure on various elements to cohere and which often, in the twentieth century, exposed failures to do so.

<sup>13</sup> I follow Kiberd’s definitions of “Imperialism” as “a term used to describe the seizure of land from its owners and their consequent subjugation by military force and cultural programming” and “colonialism as involving “the planting of settlers in the land thus seized, for the purpose of expropriating its wealth and for the promotion of the occupiers’ trade and culture” (5). While critics like Foster have sometimes disputed Ireland’s status as postcolonial, I agree with Kiberd that considering Ireland in relation to postcoloniality helps to enrich such discussions (6).

Republic of Ireland in 1949 took on a highly conservative and moralistic ethos. Thus, the promise, instantiation, appearance, and the lived reality of national development in Ireland were discordant and, for many, life in the Republic was hostile to individual efforts of self-development. Critics have long sought explanations for what has been perceived as the “eccentric, uncooperative nature of the Irish novel when compared with the best contemporary English novels, which...saw English life steadily and saw it whole” but, given this history, it is little wonder that many Irish novels of development resist and critique coherent development, and instead emphasize fractures.<sup>14</sup> Irish novels of development often present the relationship among bodily, sexual, cognitive, social and emotional aspects of development as uneven.<sup>15</sup> Irish authors are responding to and critiquing a complicated array of developments—including but far from limited to national developments—through a literary form that puts pressure on various elements to cohere and which often, in the twentieth century, exposed failures to do so.<sup>16</sup>

Irish authors have long employed the *Bildungsroman* to participate in critiques of modern formulations of the self. Anglo-Irish Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) inverts the form so that only Dorian’s portrait becomes disfigured with age and debauchery. Other Irish reworkings of the form include those by the modernists such as Flann O’Brien, who made the *Bildungsroman* form into an abyss of stories-within-stories

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<sup>14</sup> John Foster quotes Augustine Martin (17).

<sup>15</sup> Bolton describes twentieth-century Irish *Bildungsromane* as characterized by protagonists experiencing accelerated or arrested rates of development due to the profound influence of the environment on individual development. Specifically, Bolton writes that the protagonists in Irish *Bildungsromane* “often mature too quickly, or else they reached the temporal milestones of maturity—pubescence, physical maturity, leaving school—but remain immature and inexperienced. Sexual foreplay is inept. Moral reflection interrupts coition. Marriages rarely materialize. Autoeroticism is more prevalent than coition. Discord plagues family life. Nationalist imperatives create an impasse between the men of 1916 and succeeding generations. Vocational aspirations are typically squashed, either because they are found to be inaccessible, unrealistic, or disapproved (10).

<sup>16</sup> Castle provides a study of the generic failure of the *Bildungsroman* in the twentieth century “signals a successful resistance to the institutionalization of self-cultivation (*Bildung*)” (1).

in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1938), and by Samuel Beckett, who portrays the unraveling of the protagonist in works such as *Molone Dies* (1951).<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Joyce radically emphasizes the protagonist's conscious development and employs an innovative style and perspective in his influential *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In addition to these major modernist works, modern Ireland developed a tradition of literary naturalism as well.<sup>18</sup>

Other Irish authors of *Bildungsromane* used relatively more conventional, realistic modes, including Joyce's friend and inspiration for the character Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, Oliver St John Gogarty, who sends up turn-of-the-century Dublin in *Tumbling in the Hay* (1939). Such a mode frequently proved advisable after 1929, when the Censorship of Publications Board was authorized to ban materials it deemed obscene. The board determined many coming-of-age novels to fall into that category, often in connection to scenes depicting the sexual initiations that frequently serve as key moments in a coming-of-age protagonist's development. In addition to McGahern's *The Dark*, other notable *Bildungsromane* banned during the post-independence years include Kate O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* (1941), Benedict Kiely's *There was an Ancient House* (1955), and Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* (1960). In addition to difficult publication environment the board engendered, some women writers found it difficult to publish, as suggested by Molly Keane's use of the gender-neutral penname M.J. Farrell in the early decades of her career. However, other major fictions of development written in

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<sup>17</sup> Castle mentions suggestively the place of Beckett as one extreme instance of the transcultural revision at the center of his book's argument: "in the novels of Samuel Beckett, one can still discern the rudiments of the form—a biographical narrative, problems of socialization, the influence of mentors and 'instrumental' women, the problem of vocation—even when such rudiments are pared down to their essence, then to their absence" (4).

<sup>18</sup> For an important survey of this tradition, see Cleary, who provides a genealogy of twentieth-century Irish literary naturalism, a significant aesthetic tradition in Irish fiction that he calls the "unacknowledged stepchild of modern Irish fiction" (112).

the years following Independence include Anglo-Irish author Elizabeth Bowen's *Bildungsroman* of stunted development *The Last September* (1929). Several additional *Bildungsromane* appeared in the latter half of the century, including Julia O'Faolain's *Godded and Codded* (1970), Christy Brown's *Down All the Days* (1970), and Francis Stuart's *Black List Section H* (1971), Jennifer Johnston's *The Old Jest* (1980), and several works by Molly Keane, including *Good Behavior* (1981).

A concentration of Irish coming-of-age stories, often in highly experimental modes, appeared in the last decade or so of the twentieth century, with Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore* and Ní Dhuibhne's *The Dancers Dancing* among them.<sup>19</sup> In the 1990s, Irish bookstore shelves bulged with fictions of development such as Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992), Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing* (1992), Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993), Kathleen Ferguson's *The Maid's Tale* (1994), Emma Donoghue's *Stir-Fry* (1994) and *Hood* (1995), Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* (1995), Lara Harte's *First Time* (1996), Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys* (1997), Patrick McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), Sebastian Barry's *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (1998), Marita Conlon-McKenna's *The Magdalen* (1999), Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999), and more besides. As I discuss in the conclusion, Doyle's work, with its heroically tall, handsome 14-year-old protagonist who has the "shoulders of a boy built to carry the weight of the world" and who Doyle places alongside Ireland's nationalist heroes inside the General Post Office during the 1916 Easter Rising, confidently and mockingly rewrites important chapters of the national coming-of-age story with his *Bildungsroman*. Doyle's much talked about mock-heroic character Henry,

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<sup>19</sup> Several significant coming-of-age memoirs were published around the time as well, including Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996), Nuala O'Faolain's "accidental" memoir, *Are You Somebody* (1996), and Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People* (2003).

with his mock-heroic stature, at once draws its force from and serves as a comment upon the solemn treatment that the Irish coming-of-age story received for much of the twentieth century. Following the turn of the millennium, the boom in coming-of-age novels began to slow, concomitant with the near collapse of the Irish economy, but not as drastically. Irish novels of development published in the twenty-first century include Enright's *What Are You Like?* (2000), Christine Dwyer Hickey's *Tatty* (2006), M.J. Hyland's *Carry Me Down* (2006), and Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* (2009). Several of these contemporary Irish are masterful. Overall, the plentitude of Irish novels of development produced around this period is striking, and reflects a surge in interest about telling new and experimental stories about Irish lives.

The renaissance in the Irish coming-of-age novel seen in the 1990s also coincided with a period of numerous significant and interrelated changes in Ireland—in politics, the economy, the housing market, migration and emigration patterns, social legislation, the authority of religious institutions and religious attitudes, to name a few.<sup>20</sup> Proximate to the Irish literary world's recent burst of narratives of new maturity, for instance, citizens in the Republic elected Mary Robinson to the Presidency.<sup>21</sup> The profusion and pace of change betokened to many that Ireland had (finally, perhaps belatedly) come into its own and was ready to make its way in the now-global world.<sup>22</sup> The economic invigoration

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<sup>20</sup> Much of the emerging scholarship about contemporary Irish fiction seeks to understand how such phenomena of Irish social change play out in fiction, e.g. Gerry Smyth; Peach; and Harte and Parker, eds.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the sentiment that Robinson “was the symbol of, and reflected to many audiences abroad, a new sense of Irish maturity,” see Dougherty. Other events and phenomena taken as indications of “a fundamental shift in Irish society” include the 1995 Irish Divorce Referendum, as Wills foregrounds (33-57) and the significant undermining of the authority of the Irish Roman Catholic church, as Ailbhe Smyth highlights (24-43). Smyth sounds the dramatic repercussions of these changes by calling the November 1994 extradition of a pedophilic priest to Northern Ireland a “watershed in the political life of the state” (24).

<sup>22</sup> For personal accounts of these changes, see Hourihane and Randolph.

which occurred in the 1990s and which came to be called the “Celtic Tiger” economy as it roared through the turn of the millennium was taken to mean that Ireland had done and was doing something right; when announcing that Ireland had topped the “globalization index,” *Foreign Policy* declared Ireland a “winner.”<sup>23</sup> It appeared that after a distended period of national adolescence, Ireland had finally come into full maturation or a significantly fuller approximation of maturation than in previous decades, and owed that long-anticipated change to features not fully within its control. As R.F. Foster puts it, “After centuries of victimhood and misfortune, by the early twenty-first century the Irish had got lucky: not only in lifestyle and earning power, but in sport, music-making, international literary acclaim and even (thanks to global warming) the weather.”<sup>24</sup> Social and financial pistons beyond the control of the individual fired with unanticipated torque. In some ways, a national coming-of-age seemed to have happened to Ireland almost by chance; in part due to the educational and economic infrastructure that had been laid during the intervening decades, global money long held by longer-established States began to suddenly appear in Irish pockets. Significant aspects of the rhetoric treat coming-of-age circumstances as if they are *Bildung*, or self-cultivated developments. This rhetorical alchemy resonates with the growing body’s ability to move a plot of development so usefully forward, sometimes regardless of the protagonist’s success with self-determination and apparent mastery of the field.

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<sup>23</sup> “Globalization’s Last Hurrah?: The Global Top 20” (44). After positioning as the sixth most globalized country in 2001, the magazine’s popular index first placed Ireland atop the list in 2002 and then again in 2003 and 2004. Ireland was positioned second in 2005, fourth in 2006 and then fifth in 2007. See A.T. Kearney’s *Foreign Policy* globalization index series, “Measuring Globalization” (56-65); “Measuring Globalization: Who’s Up, Who’s Down?” (60-72); “Measuring Globalization: Economic Reversals, Forward Momentum” (54-69); “Measuring Globalization: The Global Top 20” (52-60); “The Globalization Index” (74-81); and “The Globalization Index” (68-76).

<sup>24</sup> R. F. Foster (5).



Many stories of national development and individual development are reciprocal.<sup>25</sup> This is certainly the case in the Irish context. By the twentieth century, Irish cultural nationalism was highly literary—famously, Irish poets went out alongside other nationalists to be shot by the English, and to be subsequently immortalized by another, Nobel Prize-winning poet.<sup>26</sup> Their nationalist literary works participated in establishing a specific set of gender-inflected conventions, tropes and patterns in which the male Irish martyr sacrificed his blood for the symbolically female Ireland.<sup>27</sup> One of the reasons that Irish writers have deployed the body with great care has to do with the Irish nationalist story, an old saga which sometimes seemed to turn on questions of the citizen's ability to control and organize themselves, and whether the Irish people had the will to go out and fight to take control of the national form and become a self-governing nation. These often dramatized stories generally rely on the female body to symbolize the nation, via an iconic figure known alternately as “Mother Ireland,” the *Shan Bhean Bhocht*, the Poor Old Woman, the aisling figure, Kathleen Ní Houlihan and *Éire*. The figure has roots in Irish mythology, and has been transformed across the centuries, particularly after the indigenous Irish aristocracy lost their authority over Ireland to the English.<sup>28</sup> In these stories, the female icon expresses the state of Irish sovereignty. Thus,

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<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin argued that the novel of development was an attempt to construct an “image of *man growing* in *national-historical time*” (“The *Bildungsroman*” 25). See also Esty.

<sup>26</sup> W.B. Yeats’ “Easter 1916” references poets such as Thomas MacDonagh and Patrick Pearse alongside John MacBride and James Connolly (*ll* 75-6), and his “Man and Echo” questions, “Did that play of mine send out/Certain men the English shot?” (*ll* 11-2).

<sup>27</sup> See Harris (3). Valente argues that the “sexual inflection of socio-economic dominance was unusually explicit in the case of Ireland” during British Imperialism (“Myth of Sovereignty 189-210). Boland mounts a significant critique of this phenomena continuing into the post-independence period (72-92).

<sup>28</sup> The historic figure, Gráinne Ní Mháille, may also inform the allegory. Ní Mháille was involved in the battle of Kinsale during which indigenous Irish aristocracy lost authority over Ireland to the English; her unruly, female body is often given blame for the transition to English rule. Following the battle and the “Flight of the Earls,” the married Ní Mháille became the consort of an English military leader. Myths about Ní Mháille vary; some suggest that she was kidnapped, others suggest that she sought the English military leader or went to him willingly, in order to separate from her husband, the O’Neil. For a more

especially for female Irish *Bildungsromane*, the image of woman-as-Ireland tends to converge with and complicate other concerns related to the protagonist's authority to self govern.

These allegories of the nation promote the notion that changes to the highly symbolic female body and the fortunes of her sons and lovers (i.e., male Irish citizens) are closely related. The 1916 Proclamation in fact partially based its authority on this Mother Ireland figure by claiming that Ireland “summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom” through the actions of her children. It is worth noting that the 1916 Proclamation of the *Poblacht na hÉireann* (Republic of Ireland) evokes principles that are familiar from the *Bildungsroman* genre, such as the notion of self-determination, when it declares “the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and infeasible.” Irish nationalism's reliance on women to serve as symbol of the nation has helped to produce a formidable set of social constrictions and expectations for Irish women, who are asked to be the bearers of national morality, as feminists like Eavan Boland have pointed out. Struggles over iconography indicate some of the reasons why the growing female body has sometimes been remanded outside of Irish literature, and some of the challenges authors of female Irish *Bildungsromane* confront. As C.L. Innes puts it, “[l]ocked into confrontation with Britain and contestation over the motherland, Irish literature and Irish history have created males as national subjects, women as the site of contestation. Liberators, Uncrowned Kings and would-be Messiahs abound in the rolls of honour, but women tend to be ignored except as muses or mates” (3). At several points in subsequent

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detailed history of the Ireland as woman allegory, see Máirín Nic Eoin (273-6). See also Cullingford and Ingman.

chapters, especially in chapter three, I provide more robust discussion of the Mother Ireland figure and her role in Irish discourse.

In light of these cultural and narrative contexts, I began this project as a study of how representations of bodies in 1990s Irish novels interacted with a narrative attachment of “coming of age” discourse to Ireland in the 1990s. In an open, zeitgeist-encapsulating letter to Mary Robinson upon the occasion of her inauguration, cultural critic Richard Kearney proclaims on behalf of the Irish people that “the story we are telling ourselves and others in electing you as President is that we are not just natives of an ancient land but citizens of a new society. We have come of age. We have performed a rite of passage from past to future” (309). Kearney suggests that Irish voters performed this right by voting the liberal, female candidate to power, but his phrasing also indicates that this maturation was a matter of reassuring themselves of time’s passage. The same question of whether coming-of-age occurs through self-actualization or auto-actualization that the growing body in the *Bildungsroman* can raise thus inheres in his statement. Kearney’s application of the developmental syntax to 1990s Ireland seemed to release certain narrative tensions that had arisen during Ireland’s long colonization and after Independence, tensions that were often highlighted in fiction published during the interim by representations of the growing body. I would suggest that much of Irish discourse in the 1990s registers a palpable sense of anticipated relief and release from these tensions and practices; the time of tension had lingered long enough to become an implicit threat to cultural ideals that were undermined by the extension of a national adolescence for a period of indeterminate length. Nevermind the Celtic Tiger’s dependence on foreign

capital and global financial markets and media culture, Ireland was claiming a new maturity.

### III: OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

I embarked upon this project because I wondered whether the Ireland-come-of-age discourse that some elements of Irish culture were subscribing to in their thinking about development in the 1990s squared with the way Irish texts often used the body as a component of stories. I came to see that the suggestion that something new was happening with the body in Irish novels, and with Irish 1990s culture in general, was somewhat of an illusion. Because these changes revealed close connections to earlier events and discourses, expanding my project from a study of novels in the last decade of the century to a study of Irish *Bildungsromane* published across the twentieth century enabled me to gain purchase on the role of the growing body in Irish fictions of development. It was necessary to consider the role of the growing body in Joyce's influential *Bildungsroman*, and in others through the Celtic Tiger period.

I found that concerns that unified the set of texts I selected were closely tied to the Catholic cultural context that became predominant in the Irish Republic. Thus, for the purposes of this study, I did not select Northern Irish novels of development such as Brian Moore's *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (1965), Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* (1989), Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996) or Anna Burns' *No Bones* (2001). Nor did I select works by Anglo-Irish authors. The growing body features prominently in Keane's late work in particular, but is closely tied to the concerns of the Anglo-Irish culture in decline during the twentieth century. For instance, as I argue elsewhere, Keane employs two main types of female bodies in her works—the thin woman who empties herself out, and the fat woman who can transmogrify her appetites—to indicate how two responses available to Anglo-Ireland operated as the

upper class declined during the twentieth century (McGovern 125-36). In her novels of development, Keane allows only the female characters that reshape their sexual appetites into epicurean appetites to survive. Thus, I recognize that literary works in other Irish cultural contexts also imbue the female body with socio-political significance, and see benefit in pursuing such examinations in the future.

When I examined the role of the growing body in Joyce's fiction of development, I discovered that this modernist author was concerned with certain grammars of bodily representation, and sought to resist employing them as he endeavored to capture the "curve of an emotion" in his adolescent portrait by representing the growing body as absent. My purpose in undertaking this mapping of the developing body's role in *Portrait* is to begin to populate the complicated and contested field of gendered bodily representation in twentieth century literary narrative prior to Independence. One of my aims in beginning my study with an examination of the role of Stephen's adolescent body in development is to further understand the forces ordering and conditioning the signification of development in the Irish *Bildungsroman* in the early years of the century before they are brought more explicitly to the surface by postcolonial discourses and Joyce's own "epic of the body," *Ulysses*, only to be restrained or banned by the censorship board. I found that bodily features rarely, if ever, cross the threshold of narration in *Portrait* but the body is often thematized more visibly and represented more richly and often allegorically in other texts as the century wears on.

I selected John McGahern's banned *Bildungsroman*, *The Dark* (1965), to examine the role of the growing body in a mid-century coming-of-age novel in part because McGahern's novel overtly portrays the growing body, including its very fluids, thus

indicating with his story about individual growth in mid-century rural Ireland how biological, historical, social, and cultural forces together impact and shape the embodied subject. McGahern expresses the protagonist's concerns with policing his body and bodily boundaries, which remain open and permeable, leaving him feeling unprotected and compromised.<sup>29</sup> The youth's unclosed body never passes through a state of bodily change to arrive at the stasis of adulthood that helps to propel the *Bildungsroman* toward conclusion. McGahern represents straightforward bodily development as in conflict with the protagonist's progress in other areas (including vocation, autonomy, and self-control), underscoring how Ireland's constraining social environment defines and precludes the individual subject's maturation. Among other post-independence Irish *Bildungsromane*, *The Dark* portrays a conservative, post-independence social formation at its zenith, and was concerned with exploring how the protagonist's body conveyed meaning. In illuminating how attitudes toward the body in the post-independence Republic of Ireland put pressure on certain conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, *The Dark* exhibits how modern narratives of development can reinforce the belief of individual self-determination and how certain Irish cultural narratives presume this self-control extends even to the body. Chapter two thus explains how the religious and familial environment of midcentury Ireland prevented the individual from establishing the control he expected and was educated to assume over his own body.

An emphasis on using overt representations of female bodies to speak to changing social formations led me to select Ní Dhuibhne's work from among the many *Bildungsromane* that have appeared in contemporary Ireland. I show that this Irish

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<sup>29</sup> With his sexually frustrated and damaged male characters, we might say that McGahern critiques some of the "magical feelings of omnipotence and permanence" that Ashis Nandy suggests resulted from the "hypermasculinity" that the colonial context fostered (35).

female *Bildungsroman* depicts a female protagonist growing sideways—filling out and experiencing lateral, or “sideways” modes of growth when traditional, hierarchically-conceived modes of growth (the vertical paradigm) are not accessible or are damaging. Ní Dhuibhne appeals to such oblique development to expand the possibilities for narrating Irish female identity and to denaturalize nationalist representational strategies. This novel creates a space for Irish girlhood, a subject position that, because it occurs prior to reproductivity, has typically been occluded in Irish narratives of development. Ní Dhuibhne’s work takes on the correlation of the female body and the plot of development in order to use it as leverage in widening narrow formations of Irish identity.

Since the role of the body is significantly inflected by sex and gender, it is important for this study to examine both male and female fictions of development. If this study had remained an examination of Irish *Bildungsromane* from the 1990s, in addition to including Ní Dhuibhne’s and Enright’s novels, I would have included works by authors such as Roddy Doyle, Frank McCourt, Sebastian Barry, or, most likely, Patrick McCabe, whose *Breakfast on Pluto* represents the coming-of-age of the gender-queer and politically ambiguous character Patrick “Kitten” Braden. I selected Enright’s *Bildungsroman* partially because it offered a sense of the frenetic energy that works by some of these authors also exhibit.

As I examined *Wig* more closely in order to uncover the central role of the growing body in that work, I discovered that *Wig*’s ironic energy might in fact be a deliberately superficial distraction from how the protagonist’s unsayable body may be growing throughout the narrative. I came to see that *Wig* was opposed to the correlation



of the female body and the plot of development, and that it even undermines the relation of the body to the plot that other texts in this study depend upon. *Wig* suggests that greater scrutiny of the growing body in other coming-of-age works could likewise result in significant reconfigurations of critical approaches to literary works like the reading that I provide in chapter four. In addition to having this potential, close attention to the role of the growing body engenders readings that demonstrate that representations of the body in twentieth-century Irish novels provide a rich and promising field for further studies of emerging narrative issues because representations of bodily growth in fiction substantially shape developmental plots.

CHAPTER ONE  
**“Beards and Inches”:** Adolescent Growth and the Absent Body in  
 James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

*Our world, again, recognizes [the past’s] acquaintance chiefly by the characters of beard and inches and is, for the most part, estranged from those of its members who seek through some art, by some process of the mind as yet untabulated, to liberate from the personalised lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts. But for such as these a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion. (Joyce, “A Portrait of the Artist” 60)<sup>1</sup>*

James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is a cornerstone of the Irish *Bildungsroman* tradition and a major example of the novel of development in the twentieth century. In light of the representations of growing bodies that feature in a number of subsequent Irish novels of development, including the texts discussed in later chapters, the way that this influential text manipulates embodiment is particularly instructive.<sup>2</sup> *Portrait* is a *Künstlerroman*, a novel which specifically depicts the formation of an artist, and which constitutes a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education, emergence, or identity in process. Drawing force from new understandings of the psyche and subject/object relations that took hold in the first years of the twentieth century, Joyce contributed significantly to the renewal of the German genre with

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, this essay collected in *The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is cited within the text as “A Portrait.”

<sup>2</sup> As many scholars of the Irish novel have acknowledged—perhaps most recently among them Bolton—*Portrait* is one of the twentieth century Irish literary tradition’s “ur-texts.” In his study of coming-of-age novels published in Independent Ireland, Bolton found that *Portrait*, as well as Joyce’s short story collection *Dubliners* (1914) resonate through later Irish coming-of-age novels “in ways that seem to confirm their status as master narratives for coming-of-age novels in the Irish Free State” (18).

nineteenth-century roots by radically emphasizing the Irish protagonist's consciousness and psychological development.<sup>3</sup> His novel helped to transform the nineteenth century's emphasis on coherence and harmony for the modern era, a period in which many writers now thought that subjective temporality and disjunction were a more appropriate way to represent the complexity of modern life. Like works by other Anglophone modernists such as Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad, Joyce's work has been described as thwarting the "realist proportions of biographical time" that had been crucial to the *Bildungsroman* (Esty 2). Joyce's novel asserts a developmental dynamic, for instance, that departs from the generally consistent, teleological journeys conventionally associated with the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, and imparts tense and contradictory circuitous and disjunctive rhythms into the plot of development.<sup>4</sup> This departure contributed to the absenting of the growing body from Joyce's *Portrait* so that expressive actions other than the fact of a character's bodily growth—what in Joyce referred to as "beards and inches" in an essay/sketch of a *Bildungsroman* that shares the same title as his novel but which preceded Joyce's published *Bildungsroman* by several years—would articulate changes in the main character of the coming-of-age novel. That is, in renovating the *Bildungsroman* in the first years of the twentieth century, Joyce acknowledges and

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<sup>3</sup> Thornton writes that the *Bildungsroman* had long "provided a means for exploring and combating the superficial empiricist/rationalist ideas about the psyche and about a presumed subject/object split" and, in the modern era, found, in the work of figures like Freud, Frazer, William James and Henri Bergson "a grounding, an impetus, even a vocabulary and a stock of metaphors, to the writers' continuing wish to explore and describe the inner world" (68, 66.) Castle uses *Portrait* as the basis for his argument that the modernist *Bildungsroman* renewed the classic genre.

<sup>4</sup> Boes calls this the "individuating rhythm of Modernity," and describes it as a "structural compromise" that manifests in *Portrait*. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre and employing a Bakhtinian methodology, Boes suggests that *Portrait*'s dynamic of disjunctive epiphanies and conjunctive leitmotifs amounts to "a structural compromise between cyclical and progressive elements, between a temporal sequence that moves relentlessly forward and one in which individual stresses are repeated and thereby create compositional units (musical bars, or, in Joyce's case, sections and chapters)" ("Individuating Rhythm" 770).

ultimately mitigates the role that explicit bodily development can play in the novel of emergence.

Stephen Dedalus may be the most famous adolescent of the twentieth century but his developing body is most conspicuous for its absence from Joyce's *Bildungsroman*. This absencing occurs, in part, as a narrative effect produced by *Portrait*'s way of crafting perception. Through *Portrait*'s sensitively rendered, focalized free indirect discourse, which blurs the distinction between an internal (first person) and external (third person) perspective on Stephen, the novel privileges the processing of bodily sensation into thought. The free indirect discourse generally folds the protagonist's body into the gap that opens between the authorial voice and the focalizing character's perceptions. This privileging results in a general suppression of the protagonist Stephen's developing body from representation. *Portrait* therefore approaches Stephen's body in such a way that it recedes from the field of perception represented in Joyce's text.

Since bodily growth tends to conform to predictable patterns, *Portrait* largely minimizes the paces and rhythms of bodily growth from the plot, even as it simultaneously emphasizes physical sensations and psychosexual dynamics. Because the utterance of bodily growth in literary plot tends to lend a straightforward trajectory to a plot of development, a trajectory Joyce resisted for his modernist *Bildungsroman*, Joyce subordinated and suppressed utterances of the protagonist's growing body from *Portrait* in favor of rendering the protagonist's consciousness-in-process. Further, as my reading of *Portrait* uncovers, this subordination of the growing body combines with the novel's focalized free indirect perspective—a perspective which is key to *Portrait*'s inventive techniques for representing psychological processes—to render the protagonist's growing

body phenomenologically absent from the text. This modernist *Bildungsroman*'s innovative narrative strategy helps to usher the protagonist toward a relatively disembodied position. Since *Portrait* is a text that casts a long shadow across twentieth-century novels of development, and seems to acknowledge and even exploit a differential in the effect of representing the bodies of gendered characters, I also consider what it means for *Portrait* to absent the growing body from the male *Bildungsroman*. *Portrait* generally portrays this adolescent male's body as an absent body, a position that, not coincidentally, accrues (gendered) authority to its protagonist.

Phenomenologically speaking, *Portrait*'s narrative perspective encodes Stephen's body to a cognitive plane of experience. The text pursues Stephen's sensations in service of representing his conscious perceptions, a process that "disappears" Stephen's "dys-appeared" body. Leder's work illuminates how Stephen's growing body tends to "disappear," or recede from mention in order to thematize Stephen's perceptions, and "dys-appear," or surfaces as a thematic focus when it is in a negative state; my use of these terms and the term "absent body" specifically refers to his exploration of how bodily phenomena tend to recede from direct experience published in *The Absent Body*. Joyce refused to map development onto the changing bodily characteristics that we might expect a young man to be self-conscious of, particularly since we have become habituated to the discourse of adolescence that was taking shape around the time Joyce was composing his *Bildungsroman*. He does this not because he is uninterested in these processes, but to maintain control over the valences of development that Stephen's represented body indicates within the world of the text.

In *Portrait*, the absence of the explicitly growing body arises from Joyce's effort to represent the formation and emergence of the conscious self without reliance on "beards and inches." Recalling that Joyce referred to this work in its germinal stages as an "adolescent portrait," I find further explanation for the growing body's absence from *Portrait* in the then-nascent discourse of adolescence and consider how the relation of the adolescent body to the subject of the *Bildungsroman* is particularly charged. The absencing of Stephen's body interacts with the discourse of adolescence that was taking shape at the time and which continues to dominate contemporary ideas about youths positioned between childhood and adulthood.<sup>5</sup> The discourse of adolescence provides context for an account of the conflicts within Joyce's early work about the body's conventional role in literary representation, signification, and development. Joyce's novel, with its sensitive rendering of Stephen's artistic development, paints a detailed and wide-ranging picture of the social landscape Stephen both inhabits and critiques while tending to resist the depiction of the traditional *topoi* of portraiture, Stephen's physical aspect. To renovate the *Bildungsroman* in the first years of the twentieth century, Joyce acknowledges but ultimately mitigates the role the adolescent body can play in the novel of emergence.

I mention the bodily features of "beards and inches" in particular because Joyce mentions them specifically in his germinal 1904 essay, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" but does not employ them in relation to the protagonist of the novel he ultimately published with that same title. A close look at *Portrait's* composition history demonstrates that we can see Joyce thinking through the representational relation of the

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<sup>5</sup> Baxter describes the twentieth-century origins of the notion of adolescence; Mao describes the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "the Age (or the dawn of the Age) of the Child Studied" (30).

body to the subject in order to work out how to represent development as a psychological phenomenon. Reading with an eye for what Stephen's beard—or lack thereof—does in a *Bildungsroman* is an activity Joyce seems to have considered from an early point of *Portrait's* compositional history. Thus, the second section of this chapter traces how the idea of the protagonist's bodily growth emerges in his 1904 essay and then again in his unfinished *Bildungsroman*, *Stephen Hero*. The ideas begun in these early works, written before *Portrait*, are articulated more fully in *Portrait*, a novel which declares that the *Bildungsheld's* father “had a hairy face” on the first page but which never makes the growth of Stephen's facial hair visible. My reading maps the growing body's increasingly absent role in Joyce's early work. I argue that Joyce keeps Stephen's bodily growth away from the narrative foreground in order to give performative force to other aspects of Stephen's development such as his increasingly developed perception.

Joyce even references this dynamic later, gesturing back to *Portrait* with the shaving scene at the opening of *Ulysses* (1922), after the published *Bildungsroman* has iterated Stephen's development and after the substantial narration of Stephen's adolescence is behind him. While many bodies and bodily materials represented in *Ulysses* have been the subject of a great many studies, the body in *Portrait* has been the subject of comparatively few.<sup>6</sup> Joyce's gesture underscores how *Portrait* avoids referencing bodily growth while representing Stephen's emergence. The end of this chapter notes how Joyce backlights the phenomenological absenting of the body represented in *Portrait* in his next novel, *Ulysses* because, although *Portrait* may be the

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<sup>6</sup> For overviews of the many approaches to the bodily in *Ulysses*, see the essays Richard Brown collected in *Joyce, “Penelope” and the Body*; and Devlin and Reizbaum collected in *Ulysses En-Gendered Perspectives: Eighteen New Essays on the Episodes*. Froula treats both *Portrait* and *Ulysses* in her seminal work *Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce*.

most well known English-language *Bildungsroman* of the twentieth century, Joyce also wrote what Maud Ellman aptly called the twentieth century's "epic of the body" (54). *Ulysses* is famously regarded as the best English-language novel of a century sometimes known as the "Century of the Body."<sup>7</sup> In some ways the reader "sees" Stephen's body more readily in *Ulysses*. However, since exploring how twentieth-century Irish *Bildungsromane* involve representations of bodily growth in marking and/or performing development is the aim at hand, *Portrait* rather than *Ulysses* draws the majority of my focus. G. Stanley Hall, often called the "Father of Adolescence," may have published his watershed study, *Adolescence*, during the year of *Ulysses*' setting (a coincidence Joyce may have been well aware of), and may speculate in that tome that "the fullest portrayal of adolescence" in Greek literature is that of Telemachus, a figure strongly associated with Stephen in *Ulysses*, but I must emphasize that it is *Portrait* rather than *Ulysses* that portrays Stephen's adolescent years more closely (Hall 421).<sup>8</sup> So far as Stephen is concerned, those bodily upheavals we associate with the life stage of adolescence occur in *Portrait*. Additionally, while substantial psychological growth may occur in a brief period of time, substantial bodily growth is unlikely to occur within the limited number of hours treated in *Ulysses*. The bulk of Stephen's bodily growth would have taken place previous to his earning the teaching position he occupies on June 16, 1904.<sup>9</sup> Thus, while

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<sup>7</sup> The editorial board of the Modern Library put *Ulysses* atop its "100 Best Novels" of the twentieth century list. See also Ewing.

<sup>8</sup> The publication of *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* signaled that a discourse that had been nascent for decades was becoming solidified. Hall's text is widely referenced as the formal foundation of the discourse; Douglas Mao, for instance, uses it as an anchor point in *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature 1860-1960*.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss the potential for development to occur retrospectively, recursively, and as an awakening elsewhere in this dissertation, particularly in chapter four. Further, I recognize McBride's argument that it is possible the timeline of *Ulysses* "may extend far beyond a day... since the critical event of the novel could be the novel's composition" (38).



I bring Joyce's epic of the body to bear in this discussion of how Joyce enrolled Stephen's body in his portrayal of Stephen's development, I do so only briefly. Through the inter-textual relationship, Joyce seems to charge us to approach the growing body obliquely in the context of the *Bildungsroman*. His overall influence, however, along with other factors, may have pushed subsequent authors of *Bildungsromane* to represent growing bodies more centrally.

Examining the role of the adolescent body in this narrative contributes to our understanding of how the *Bildungsroman* genre was ruptured in the twentieth century. The absence of Stephen's body from *Portrait* seems to have affected Joyce scholarship as well. My reading of *Portrait* thus expands and enriches work Webb has begun on the young man's developing body in *Portrait*; Webb has also noted that Stephen's characteristic bodily weakness and his unease with his body play important roles in the shape of his development. Webb concludes that for Stephen, physical experiences are linked with social humiliation such that his body "compels him eventually to embrace a space outside" the social systems that surround him (89). I agree, but would go further to emphasize how Joyce sets up this movement and effects Stephen's physical experiences within the text overall by elaborating how the protagonist's body tends to recede from *Portrait*'s perceptive field. This recession plays a crucial role in producing the text's main consciousness.

In fact, *Portrait* is well known for being a text in which the body is "the seat of consciousness"—perhaps because of the intense focus on the sensory perceptions that produce and register on that consciousness (Punday 59). Daniel Punday, in his seminal narratological study of embodiment in literary works, *Narrative Bodies: Toward a*

*Corporeal Narratology*, cites *Portrait* in particular as exemplary in this respect. In proposing that the interplay of body and narrative should receive further and more organized consideration, Punday refers briefly to Joyce's work as an example of a text in which the body plays a foundational role in establishing the character. Punday notes how Stephen's childhood body, "leaves impressions on his mind that will shape his later ways of thinking, so that the water images from childhood of wetting the bed or of being pushed into a ditch later produce an antipathy toward bathing" (59). I conduct a more lengthy investigation of the ideas Punday outlines. This approach illuminates how Joyce's narrative puts focus on self-cultivated consciousness and gathers (gendered) authority to its protagonist through his relative disembodiment. Paradoxically, however, Stephen's experience with his growing body is integral to the protagonist's development.

#### I: THE RISE OF ADOLESCENCE AND THE NARRATABLE BODY IN JOYCE'S *BILDUNGSROMAN*

Theorists of the *Bildungsroman* have long agreed that Joyce's *Portrait* presents a significant, twentieth-century development in literary representations of youth. According to Jerome Buckley, whose reading of the *Bildungsroman* has played an important role in discussions of the genre for several decades, "Joyce sums up, even as he transforms, the traditions of the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*" (226).<sup>10</sup> Franco Moretti, less optimistically, suggests *Portrait* illustrates the "late *Bildungsroman* as a whole: every tree has its dead branches, and this, alas, was one of them" (245). More recently, Gregory Castle has understood *Portrait* "in terms of its peculiar failure to conform to the strict generic demands of the *Bildungsroman* form," a failure he claims

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<sup>10</sup> For a landmark feminist response to Buckley, see Abel, Hirsch and Langland.

“signals a successful resistance to the institutionalization of self-cultivation (*Bildung*)” had occurred in the Anglophone *Bildungsroman* by the time Joyce was writing (1). As Jed Esty’s work suggests, modernist authors of *Bildungsromane* radically revised the developmental plot to demonstrate subject formation as disrupted, deferred, and made jagged in the modern industrial, imperial context (Esty 2). Ambivalent about the emergence of the *Bildungsheld* into the modern world, Joyce turns focus toward the psychological emergence occurring within the *Bildungsheld*. From his earliest writings, specifically his 1904 essay “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,” Joyce indicates special concern with the “as yet untabulated” internal, cognitive and emotional, psychological and psychosexual “processes of mind” which accomplish a modern subject’s emergence (“A Portrait” 60). Joyce eventually achieves this highly self-conscious turn in his novel by the same title, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Accounting for the participation of the *Bildungsheld*’s body in his emergence complements our understanding of this novel.

An inquiry into the role of the body in a *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age novel, almost immediately runs into a tradition that assumes the body and mind to be separate entities, with the mind hierarchically positioned over the body. As Genie Babb points out, dualism persists in many fields, including narrative theory, which is disposed to narrative models that “end up ignoring characters’ bodies or relegating them to the ornamental space of description, which is in turn neglected because of its supposed spatiality and lack of congruence with narrative as a temporal, linguistic activity” (Babb 197). In a dualist schema, as feminists have pointed out, the conscious mind is emphasized as significant, and the body as superficial, an alignment which corresponds

directly with discursive practices that have helped to produce cultural formations of male dominance. In accordance with this understanding of the body as subordinate to the mind, an understanding that *Portrait* confirms in certain ways, the body's role in novels of development tends to play a subordinate role in our thinking about the developing consciousness. We assume that bodies offer superficial significations of development, which lends us to also assume that development proceeds as a matter of "natural facts." Not unrelatedly, many of the operations that representations of human, biological development perform in literary plots have gone unexamined; relying on what Nicole Seymour calls "the logic of inevitability" that allows "human development to function *as a classical narrative*" we assume these operations to be so obvious and natural we easily overlook them.<sup>11</sup> As emerging scholarship on the body's place in narrative has begun to demonstrate, however, the body plays a central role both in the shaping and also the study of narrative.<sup>12</sup> Close inspection of these representations supports Punday's claim that bodies operate in ways significant to the overall text, that they are highly relevant to works of fiction. For example, a "body is constantly given meaning and used as a part of textual representation," Punday observes, often precisely because it has an "ability to stand in for what ought to be outside of representation" (viii). Often—but not always—texts use bodies to serve as screens that obliquely reflect other tenors of a subject's formation. Since our understanding of development itself is crucial to our interpretations of novels of development, an interpretation that does not consider how the body does or

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<sup>11</sup> Drawing on Seymour Chatman's work on classical narrative forms in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Nicole Seymour investigates the application of these forms to human bodies (311 fn 7, 294).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Babb; Seymour; Shapira; Punday.

does not participate in the text and attend to how development is or is not registered in relation to the body strikes me as an impoverished one.

Given that we now come to Joyce's work knowing it was radical for its time because of his emphasis on the body and his willingness (especially in *Ulysses*) to explore how the body expresses meaning in a literary work, it is surprising to recognize how little we see of Stephen's body in *Portrait*. We almost never glimpse it nor some of the more typical, visible signs of puberty such as the emergence of facial hair or a corollary mention of a clean-shaven jaw. It may be the case that *Portrait* simply finds certain minutiae of Stephen's bodily processes to be entirely lacking in interest. For *Portrait*, as opposed to, say, some texts by Samuel Beckett, processes such as the continual beating of the heart and the inflow and outflow of air in the chest cavity and the like may simply fall below what Gerald Prince calls a particular novel's "accepted minimum level of functional relevance."<sup>13</sup> Robyn Warhol's characterization of "the unnarratable" may offer some explanation of this phenomenon. Simplifying Prince's definition, Warhol uses the term to mean "that which cannot be narrated because it is too tedious or too obvious to say; that which is taboo, in terms of social convention, literary convention, or both; and that which purportedly cannot be put into words because it exceeds or transcends the expressive capacities of language" ("Narrating the Unnarratable"). In other words, the individualized threshold of narratability is part of what makes a text unique, and *Portrait* may simply view these elements as tedious or

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<sup>13</sup> In other words, the "threshold of unnarratability" varies by text. Gerald Prince characterizes, for instance, Beckett's work as exemplary among the fiction that "drives some of its force from representing what is widely considered unrepresentable and from making narratively interesting what is commonly viewed as entirely lacking in interest... in certain contexts, tying one's shoelaces may be strange, uncommon, dangerous, or amusing and therefore worth reporting" in his discussion of "The Disnarrated" (29-30).

obvious. It is worth mentioning that Warhol provides this definition in order to go on to assert that in Victorian fiction, the unnarratable frequently relates to questions of the body. Especially in *Ulysses*, Joyce may have been responding to that older convention of *not* narrating bodily phenomena. At the same time, however, the not-vivid representation of the growing body in *Portrait* owes to Joyce's innovative narrative perspective, which produces an articulation of the character body different from the conventional third-person perspective (I use Leder's work to describe the relationship between this perspective and the body in the next section). The absencing effect produced by the narrative's perspective, however, does not fully account for the slight mention of Stephen's developing body in *Portrait*. Stephen's developing body is too conspicuous in its absence. When we consider how Stephen's body haunts the threshold of unnarratability and narratability, we can surmise that such development is of great interest to *Portrait*'s narrative strategy and is actually being held in careful reserve.

When we read in chapter four of *Portrait* that Stephen's voice "was then breaking," establishing that Stephen is experiencing standard pubescent changes, we may be inclined to view this detail as an illustration of the one of the categories of unnarratability that Warhol describes (Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 127).<sup>14</sup> This realist detail becomes narratable, moving from the category of too obvious or superficial to need mention into meriting mention, as a result of Stephen enrolling the agonizing sound in his spiritual program of self-mortification for the sexual debauchery he has indulged in since the prostitute's kiss at the end of chapter two. Stephen seeks to bring each of his senses "under a rigorous discipline" (*P* 127). It becomes functionally relevant because it illuminates information that is *not* made explicit. The mention of

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<sup>14</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *P*.

Stephen's changing voice occurs in an extended listing of exercises that constitute his program of "constant mortification" (*P* 126). The deluge of exercises offers an oblique reflection of the sensuous variety of sexual experiences Stephen has had and now atones for, but which have not been detailed. The delineation of the program of mortification, then, gestures toward the scope and magnitude of tabooed bodily experiences by mirroring them.<sup>15</sup>

The detail of Stephen's breaking voice, which conveys information that his vocal cords are growing, appears in an amalgam of efforts at disciplining each of his senses catalogued in the passage: "To mortify his hearing he exerted no control over his voice which was then breaking, neither sang nor whistled and made no attempt to flee from noises which caused him painful nervous irritation" (*P* 127). Positioned among this catalog of small efforts, this small acknowledgement that Stephen is experiencing puberty is almost—but not quite—buried from view.<sup>16</sup> Aware that it is establishing that Stephen's voice is changing, the text strategically attempts to suppress the implications of this detail. Since the *Bildungsroman* promises to deliver a developing subject across the threshold of maturation, and puberty provides a teleological track across that threshold, representations of the adolescent protagonist's body will yield evidence that will carry the protagonist across a threshold even in texts that seek to portray development in other, less linear ways. In other words, because representations of the developing body lend a temporal order to plot, they have a capacity to imply straightforward progress and

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<sup>15</sup> Warhol notes that "the bodily details of sexuality and (especially extramarital) sexual experience fall within the realm of the unnarratable" and speculates that these experiences are "[p]robably even more taboo than the body itself in Victorian literary and social discourse" ("narrating the unnarratable"). Such experiences are nonetheless conveyed in coded forms such as oblique references.

<sup>16</sup> When we learn that vivid descriptions of the protagonist's visage were expunged during Joyce's drafting process, we might even suspect that this detail was indeed overlooked. I examine Joyce's compositional process in Section II.

perform some sort of development. Seeking to avoid straightforward teleologies, *Portrait* attempts to compensate for the body's excessive narrative capacity by reserving Stephen's bodily aspect from narration. The adolescent body in *Portrait*, then, is unnarratable because its narration lends a developmental teleology to the narrative of Stephen's emergence, a teleology that transgresses the dynamic developmental trajectory the novel seeks to portray.

When the usual unnarratability of Stephen's pubescent body is (minimally) overruled by its potential usefulness in his spiritual exercise, what *Portrait* secures is the disorganization of Stephen's adolescence. A dualist impulse might lead us to consider whether the mention of his changing voice serves as a support of the narrative of his *Bildung*, moving the focus away from his bodily development and toward his "higher" levels of development. However, what it suggests in context is another indication that Stephen's development has become disorganized and is not occurring evenly in time. Stephen atones for the many "sins of impurity" he committed and confessed in chapter three through his program of mortification. These spiritual exercises are in support of his project to reform his spiritual life. He is striving "by constant mortification to undo the sinful past" by bringing each of his senses "under a rigorous discipline" (*P* 126, 127). What results from this effort to discipline his senses by denying himself of the pleasures he may perceive through them is, however, his discovery that "at the end of his course of intricate piety and selfrestraint he was so easily at the mercy of childish and unworthy imperfections" such as anger and irritation when he overhears sneezes (*P* 127). That is, when he attempts to stint himself of lived experiences, he stunts and even reverses his emotional development. This return to childishness contrasts with the sins just confessed



to the priest, who made it clear that, at sixteen, Stephen's catalog of sexual experiences far outpaces his age (P 122). Apparently surprised by Stephen's answer to his question, "How old are you, my child?," the priest takes a long moment to compose his thoughts before telling Stephen, "You are very young, my child" (P 121, 122). His precocious sexual initiation and sensual experiences are calibrated with his age as well as his and others tendency to think him a child. His development is exposed as disorganized. The mention of his changing voice brings another dimension of adolescence to this mix, the pubertal dimension. Thus, we see the multiple dimensions of his adolescence juxtaposed. He visits prostitutes innumerable times before his voice changes; he feels childish at age sixteen.

This disorganization of aspects of Stephen's development would be of concern, as it is to his priest, to the educational reformers who helped to produce the discourse of adolescence in the early in the twentieth century, especially following the publication of Hall's tome. Even in its title, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, Hall's foundational text indicates the discourse's wide purview. Nancy Lesko observes that psychologists and social and educational reformers aided and shaped the rise of the construction of youth as adolescent because they helped to define an adolescence that "demanded a slow, steady movement toward maturity" and avoided precocity, delay, and regression (Lesko 111). Around the late 1800s and early 1900s, the apprenticeship model of youth, a model central to understandings of the *Bildungsroman*, was giving way to the biologized model now familiar in psychological, medical and legislative discourses

(Lesko 7).<sup>17</sup> Adolescence, as a concept, meshes with the expansion of educational programming in the nineteenth century. As Erik Erikson observes, “As technological advances put more and more time between early school life and the young person’s final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescence becomes an even more marked and conscious period and, as it has always been in some cultures in some periods, almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood” (Erickson 128 qtd. in Neubauer 7). Castle has described how increasingly state-organized educational systems “transformed the desire to cultivate oneself, to nurture one’s inner culture, into the desire for social success and for a social pedagogy that teaches young men and women the ‘one way of the world’” (Castle 53). To effect this organization, Lesko demonstrates, these institutions organized adolescent subjects according to prescribed stages of biological and psychosexual development and by age as well as by sexual experience. More generally, they organized adolescents according to familiarity with discourses organizing sexuality (i.e., by “innocence”). Adolescence, Lesko explains, is most often understood either biologically or socio-historically, with the former assuming that “young people between the ages of 12 and 19 have naturally occurring, largely biologically generated characteristics, behaviors, and needs” and the latter view emphasizing “how specific contexts of adolescent development, especially economic and educational opportunities, construct youth in distinct ways” (Lesko 7). The idea of adolescence at the turn of the century brought the above issues into proximity, and literary representations of adolescent bodies produced around that time are likely to resonate with these issues.

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<sup>17</sup> Lesko notes, “Adolescence was created and democratized (at least in Britain and the United States) when child labor laws, industrialization, and union organizing gutted apprenticeships, which had been the conventional way for youth to move from dependency to independence” (Lesko 7). For discussion of the *Bildungsroman* as a novel of apprenticeship, see Thomas L. Jeffers.

Joyce's innovative inclusion of what he called the "features of infancy," another life stage strongly associated with material experiences, ensures that *Portrait's* temporal reach encompasses the period of Stephen's pubescence by extending from childhood through his young manhood.

Adolescence is understood to be a social, psychological and somatic period between childhood and adulthood. However, practitioners of adolescence have differed on the role of this last aspect in the production of the subject. For Patricia Meyer Spacks, the link between the pubescent body and adolescence is causal: puberty inaugurates adolescence, she writes: "the beginning of adolescence coincides with the beginning of puberty, but we have no clear way of locating its end" (6). Others seek to divorce the pubertal body from adolescence. Seymour observes that the "architects of adolescence such as Hall insist that even such changes as increased height point nowhere else than toward reproductive adulthood" (301-2). Theorists interested in adolescence as an idea and social construction recognize that such changes offer to point in a variety of directions. Lesko has established that our expectations for the pubescent body are interwoven with the construction of the adolescent. Literary approaches to Stephen's adolescence, however, have generally been limited to the protagonist's emotions and consciousness, and the role of bodily elements has sometimes been skirted.

Many have found *Portrait* to resonate with the discourse of adolescence. Indeed, it should be noted that scholars frequently refer to *Portrait's* protagonist as adolescent, seemingly more than most *Bildungshelden*. In her landmark study of adolescence, Spacks in fact uses Stephen as a prime example of the adolescent protagonists in twentieth-century fiction who assumed a "new aspect: more aggressive, more

complicated in feeling, more significant” than their nineteenth-century predecessors (Spacks 236).<sup>18</sup> For many critics, the label “adolescent” serves as a shorthand way to characterize Stephen as overly emotional, and is used as an analog of “*Sturm-und-Drang*” (storm and urge, or storm and stress), a literary term more associated with emotionality. Nonetheless, that emotionality generates some of its force from the association of adolescence and pubescence effected by the field of adolescent studies. In that field, bodily elements are more a crucial aspect of adolescence than they are generally recognized to be in the literary field, which has sometimes elided the bodily, even though Stephen’s adolescent body plays a role in the *Portrait*’s dynamic. Writing at a time when notions of adolescence were solidifying in discourse, and portraying an adolescent protagonist during the life phase during which he would normally begin to grow his beard and experience a rapid increase in inches, Joyce invited the organic dynamic of the body into his project. Yet, he generally avoided narrativizing it. In *Portrait*, Joyce depicts a modern, adolescent *Bildungsheld*, Stephen, moving through an increasingly organized and policed life stage. It may well be that he wanted to minimize the impact of that policing on his narrative.

Recent work, especially in corporeal narratology, has highlighted that representations of the body convey complex meanings in narrative. The body, particularly the adolescent body, also generates a realistic temporal schema. We expect that bodily changes occur predictably in straightforward, biological time and have seen, across the twentieth century, the entrenchment of that expectation. Indeed, since the time

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Gilligan calls the “concept of the separate self and of moral principles uncompromised by the constraints of reality” both an “adolescent ideal” and “the elaborately wrought philosophy of a Stephen Daedalus whose flight we know to be in jeopardy” (98). Cahalan references Gilligan on Stephen as adolescent (105).

Joyce was writing, the discourse of adolescence has solidified and become naturalized, compounding the difficulty of addressing the somatic, developmentalist schema still further if we attend to the developing body's contribution to plot dynamics (Seymour 294). "Early ideas about adolescence and its place in the larger picture of human development have persisted as 'natural facts' throughout the century," Seymour argues, and "have done so because they have been articulated through basic understandings of narrative dynamics," in effect childhood-adolescence-adulthood, or beginning-middle-end (296). She writes, "while it is impossible to stop a pubescent female [or male] body from undergoing certain somatic processes [...] it is possible to refuse to employ those transformations as the building blocks of a coherent narrative" (301). Joyce shows us this possibility by avoiding those same transformations in his narrative. Apparently understanding how meanings are magnetically attracted to the body, but also that the body instills a straightforward, mimetic temporal schema into a text, Joyce becomes invested in portraying the developing self in a way that disappears the adolescent body from his fiction of development.

The emergence of the discourse of adolescence perhaps helps to occasion the unnarration and absencing of Stephen's pubescent body in this *Bildungsroman*. The discourse, particularly when it came to negotiating the body's determinative role, conflicted in certain ways with the principles of the genre. One of the twentieth century's founding assumptions about adolescents is that they are deeply and obviously affected by the hormones that attend the biological processes generally thought to be an important characteristic of this life stage.<sup>19</sup> Hints that a *Bildungsheld*'s development is hormonally

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<sup>19</sup> This is one of the "Confident Characterizations of Adolescence" Lesko critiques (2-5). Since the term "hormone" was introduced in 1905, this thinking was emerging around the same time Hall's *Adolescence*

determined quickly channel into central debates about the supposedly self-determining, unified subject that emerges in a *Bildungsroman*. In his typography of the *Bildungsroman*, Mikhail Bakhtin suggested that to be truly a novel of emergence, a *Bildungsroman* would depict the human emergence of the *Bildungsheld* in correspondence with the emergence of a world epoch; the transition from one epoch to another “is accomplished in him and through him” (Bakhtin, “The *Bildungsroman*” 23). Bakhtin, using his reading of the novel most generally accepted to be the archetypal *Bildungsroman*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, to support his claim, asserts that in the ideal *Bildungsroman*, one finds a “dynamic unity in the hero’s image” as opposed to a “static unity” seen in earlier narrative forms (21). Bakhtin’s emphasis on the “exceptional significance of *visibility* for Goethe” indicates that in the *Bildungsroman* that “provides an image of man in the process of becoming,” the *Bildungsheld*’s image has been taken to be an essential sign of his current state (Bakhtin, “The *Bildungsroman*” 21, original emphasis). In other words, the hero’s body and its changes operate in a visible field as direct evidence of his emergence. Joyce’s work, by contrast, suggests that a dynamic portrayal of the modern process of becoming could not rely on a protagonist’s physical and emotional aspects to be so unified. The emergence of Joyce’s protagonist was not to be determined by his hormones, which do not neatly mirror the cultural narrative of psycho-sexual development.

This absenting of Stephen’s body suppresses the performative role of the male *Bildungsheld*’s body in the narrative. Thus, Joyce’s critique of the notion of a dynamic unity of the *Bildungsheld*’s mental and physical aspects most profoundly affects the

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was published and as Joyce, an author interested in medical knowledge, was writing. Ernest Henry Starling may have introduced the term “hormone;” he suggested hormones were specific chemical messengers (Eaton1466). For an examination of medical discourse in Joyce’s work, see Plock.

representation of the *Bildungsheld*'s body even though he renovates the *Bildungsroman*, a genre which supposedly charts the transition of a protagonist from childhood to adulthood, at a time when bodily development is being recognized to be a significant element of development. Especially following Christine Froula, we recognize that Joyce's novel shows how the modernist *Bildungsroman* can offer an immanent critique of culture, particularly of its gender formations. In *Portrait*, the resistance to depicting the *Bildungsheld*'s development emerging in unity with his image participates in this critique. However, the critique offered in *Portrait* reiterates and reinscribes dualist views of the mind/body rendered most apparent in the novel's portrayal of gendered bodily materiality. While the protagonist's adolescent body in Joyce's novel plays a significant role in the expression of contested and contradictory movements, we might say that Stephen does not fly past the nets of his culture in part because he ultimately views embodiment as a net cast upon his consciousness. The attempt to evade representations of bodily development ultimately indicates entanglement with this view. It also has implications for the novel's gender politics.

Indeed, in *Portrait*, we will see how a progressive liberation from the body is a privileged concept reserved for the male protagonist and for male development. If the absencing of Stephen's body suppresses the performative role of the male *Bildungsheld*'s body in the narrative, the restriction of the free indirect narrative to his cognitive perception results, at times, in emphasis on others' bodies. For instance, the text portrays Emma Cleary as propelled into womanhood by the involuntary biological processes Stephen perceives she has undergone. Joyce explicitly links her body to her development in a way that he resists doing in his depiction of Stephen's development. The very

mechanical, temporal progression made visible by representations of “beards and inches” that Joyce resists in depictions of his protagonist thus plays a defining role in the representation of female development in this *Bildungsroman*. Thus, Joyce approaches and illuminates, but does not, in Butler’s words, “wor[k] the weakness in the norm” he exposes because he reinscribes those gendered norms (237).

## II: ADOLESCENT PORTRAITS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CURVES

Joyce’s practice of deploying the protagonist’s body within developmental narratives evolved over time. In his early writing, Joyce offered some indication that he distrusted the implied correlation of physical and cognitive/emotional development in adolescent discourse, though we can see that breaking this correlation proved to be a challenge he would undertake unevenly. Joyce addresses this correlation in his 1904 essay, “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,” but then struggles with it in his first attempt at a full-length *Bildungsroman*, *Stephen Hero*, a work Joyce ultimately abandoned, perhaps in part because Joyce realized it enforces this correlation. By the time Joyce published his novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce had landed on a different approach to the role of the protagonist’s body, one that Leder’s observations have great power to illuminate. The absent body does something especially significant within a genre as gendered as the *Bildungsroman*, a highly reiterative structure characterized by an interest in conveying citational practices in recognizable form and which is closely associated with the normative patterns of subject development in society.

In “A Portrait,” Joyce recognizes literary representations of the body to have what amounts to a performative capacity—mentioning a fact in a work of fiction establishes its



existence, and an array of associated information. However, Joyce found drawing on this capacity an inferior method for representing development. In the first paragraph of his 1904 sketch, “A Portrait,” Joyce offers a statement about contemporary representational conventions for denoting development that gives some indication of his stance regarding the role of the body in literary portraiture. Joyce defends his innovative inclusion of childhood in narrative, claiming,

The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only. Our world, again, recognizes its acquaintance chiefly by the characters of beard and inches and is, for the most part, estranged from those of its members who seek through some art, by some process of the mind as yet untabulated, to liberate from the personalised lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts. But for such as these a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion.” (“A Portrait” 60)

According to Joyce, representations of development which rely on “the characters of beard and inches” to portray a phase of life are inadequate. Instead, “some art... some process of the mind as yet untabulated” that can capture the “curve of an emotion” should be sought, as this artistic process can liberate an “individuating rhythm”—the narrative import of a character, or “personalized lum[p] of matter.” This statement displays an

impulse to favor intellectual consciousness over the physical aspects of a developing “entity” and a dissatisfaction with then-familiar ways of reproducing development on the grounds that lumpen matter imprisons—in iron—aspects of that entity. While recognizing emergence as a continual and dynamic process, “a fluid succession of presents,” this statement accentuates internalized processes over corporeal processes and also subtly emphasizes time-consciousness over spatial consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Lumpen matter is aligned with its “iron memorial aspect” but the “entity” of a portrait is associated with fluidity and a succession of phases. The developmental processes of the subject’s mind and image are nowhere unified in this formula. In other words, there can be a mismatch between interiority and façade. In fact, their perfect alignment was suspect.

In his essay, Joyce suggests that organic bodily growth, especially pubescent growth, has a forward thrust in narrative. Such growth can be taken by institutionalized powers as confirmation that development had occurred, confirmation that is crucial to the production of subjects in relation to those institutions. In other words, such growth can stand in for the mental, cognitive, critical development he valued.<sup>21</sup> For the modernist Joyce, aspects of the protagonist such as his sex, gender and sexual identity were not necessarily unified and were, in fact, disunified by modern cultural imperatives and discourses. The unfolding of biological processes, from Joyce’s perspective, could merely identify that certain material events and biological processes had occurred, processes that are not necessarily linked with the development of the protagonist’s

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<sup>20</sup> For a feminist analysis of the tendency to prioritize time-consciousness, see Rodemeyer.

<sup>21</sup> Charts cataloging patterns of change brought about by pubertal processes are common features of twentieth-century textbooks about and for adolescents. For discussion of the governance of adolescence, see Lesko, especially “Panoptical Time Charted on Developing Bodies” (117-119).

consciousness. The current state of the bodily façade is mere “identificative paper” and not the portrait of “the curve of an emotion.”

Beards and inches would be two of the most visibly obvious, external bodily characteristics ready at hand to authors seeking to achieve development in their *Bildungsromane*—in other words, to signal that the stamping out of the *Bildungsheld* had proceeded in time. Elaine Scarry has examined how readily bodies can be used as stand-ins for and lend an aura of certainty to cultural rituals. She observes that the body has the potential to be instrumental, or “construct-substantiating” in the struggle to articulate, especially “at particular moments [such as the crisis of modernism] when there is within a society a crisis of belief—that is, when some central idea or ideology or cultural construct has ceased to elicit a population’s belief either because it is manifestly fictitious or because it has for some reason been divested of ordinary forms of substantiation” (Scarry 140, 14). Representations of bodies can stand in for certainty “until there is time for the world participants to provide more legitimate means of transubstantiation” (Scarry 14). In short, the maturing body can lend provisional authority to narratives of subject maturation. However, the point Joyce makes in his early essay is that the body should not necessarily have the capacity to verify *Bildung*. He questions the “analogical verification” organic bodily growth might secure and as well as the “analogical substantiation” it might suggest.<sup>22</sup> The first of these grammars, which implies a unification of body/sex, gender and consciousness, regards statements about bodily phenomena in descriptions of development—bodily or conscious—as constative. The logic of analogical verification in this scenario is: the presence of a sign such as a beard

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<sup>22</sup> Here, I am developing Scarry’s terms, teasing out the difference between them (Scarry 14).

that confirms a certain state of conscious development has been achieved.<sup>23</sup> The second and more pragmatic grammar, analogical substantiation, accepts bodily signs as additional indications that invisible transubstantiations have occurred within the subject. In arguing for “the curve of an emotion,” for a more complex representation of human emergence than a record of beard and inches, Joyce put the body’s capacity to symbolize *Bildung* in doubt.

Joyce’s position against employing this logic in a *Bildungsroman* stems from his underlying mistrust of the ideal of harmony and coherence. Joyce seems to recognize the biologically developing body’s tendency to stand in for the accomplishment of *Bildung*. From Joyce’s perspective, ongoing bodily phenomena should not have an overt instrumental role in representing the accomplishment of *Bildung* and, in fact, when used to verify development in a literary text, indicated that development of consciousness had in fact *not* taken place and that the ego that should have emerged had, instead, been successively engulfed. For Joyce, those authors who resort to conveying the accomplishment of *Bildung* in this manner indicate with it their inferior understanding of *Bildung*. Conceiving of the body as evidence of developmental progress threatens to overdetermine development and its pacing. Furthermore, where the body operates as such a sign within narrative, other modes of narrated development, such as psychosexual development, are undermined and obfuscated. Joyce seems even to imply that representations of organic growth in time had come to serve as substitute signals for developments that would not otherwise be actualized in a text. For Joyce, the

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<sup>23</sup> I evaluate the underlying assumption that the body can offer such ontological stability in my discussion of Anne Enright’s work.

assumptions about visible bodily development attached to treatments of *Bildung* like Bakhtin makes in his reading of Goethe did not hold.

For Joyce, who was highly interested in ideas such as those being introduced by psychoanalysts in the first years of the twentieth century, the *Bildungsroman* should not be a matter of identifying how this stamping out process proceeded. It should, instead, paint the “curve of an emotion.” With this opposition, Joyce seems to commend those *Bildungsromane* that would portray subject formation as a torsion of an identity that is not self-identical across time. For Joyce, the trajectory of emotion, of inner feeling, of psychosexual experience, cannot be pinioned to any strict rational development and ought not be expected to adhere to a straightforward, visual semiotic. Psychosexual consciousness, Joyce sensed, develops fluidly and recursively rather than rigidly and visibly. In *Portrait*, we can see Joyce working out this dynamic with such aspects as the novel’s disjunctive and conjunctive dynamic, the many reversions and flashbacks interrupting a linear fabula grounded in biological time. Tobias Boes makes a forceful case that such development would in fact reflect the Irish experience of modernity most aptly.<sup>24</sup> If “‘man’s individual emergence’ in the novel of development ‘is inseparably linked to historical emergence,’” Boes, quoting Bakhtin, contends, “this emergence takes the form of a dialogue between linear and cyclical temporalities” in Joyce’s *Bildungsroman* (“Individuating Rhythm” 768). The growth of Stephen’s adolescent body, unlike his emotional life, corresponds only to the linear, temporally straightforward vector. It is simply inadequate to the task of representing the protagonist’s emergence as a subject.

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<sup>24</sup> Boes links these dynamic tension to the Irish context within which Joyce wrote and, certainly, this link captures something of “the specific historical constellation” of the Irish Modernism (“Individuating Rhythm” 769).

In proceeding to author a *Bildungsroman*, Joyce thus puts himself in the position of representing development while seeking to avoid the grammars of bodily substantiation and verification. At the same time, Joyce demonstrates interest in exploring the theme of adolescence within his *Bildungsroman* but also in mitigating the aspects of biological determinism that adolescence can raise for his male protagonist. His solution to this problem is to trade on the use of sensory embodiment but, progressively, to leave the body behind as if it is a part of the domain of youth. Though this effort is in the spirit of his cultural critique, the style he adopts in *Portrait* effects what may well be the unintended consequence of reinscribing a subordination of materiality.

Accomplishing his vision proved difficult. After writing his essay, “A Portrait,” Joyce partially drafted the manuscript *Stephen Hero*. Joyce later called *Stephen Hero* a “schoolboy’s production” and most scholars have generally agreed with his assessment that it not on par with the sophisticated work he would later produce (Spenser 7). His early efforts were unsatisfying to publishers as well as to Joyce, perhaps most deeply so because they did not reflect the position gestured toward in his early treatise. Later, the second chapter of *Portrait* would show Stephen penning A.M.D.G. at the top of his paper when he attempts to compose a poem, revealing that, as a schoolboy, he tended to be habituated to existing writing practices.<sup>25</sup> The passage may be more autobiographical than some; in writing *Stephen Hero*, Joyce used strategies not always well suited to his purposes, and does not achieve the more radical portrayals we can see emerging in *Portrait*. This manuscript version of Stephen’s development does not offer the same level of narrative finesse evidenced in the novel, nor does it employ the protagonist’s body as

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<sup>25</sup> I refer to Stephen’s habituated penning of A.M.D.G. at the top of his paper when attempting to compose a poem, which reveals how thoroughly his brain has been washed by his Jesuit education.

subtly. It does, however, provide useful contrast to *Portrait*, and helps to identify those aspects of *Bildung* that Joyce was already considering in 1904, but which may have proven too difficult to implement in Joyce's first effort at the *Bildungsroman*.

In contrast to *Portrait*, *Stephen Hero* provides a rather detailed description of Stephen's appearance. The first paragraph describes how Stephen's "[stiff] coarse brownish hair was combed high off his forehead but there was little order in its arrangement" and how "the face was regular in feature and its pose was almost softened into... beauty by a small feminine mouth (Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 17)."<sup>26</sup> His eyes were "not prominent: they were small light blue eyes with checked advances" (*SH* 17). The face of Stephen rendered visibly in *Stephen Hero* "was to a certain extent the face of a debauchee" (*SH* 17). This matter-of-fact, constative description of Stephen's body makes him significant to readers as an object apparent from without. The narrative position is not from within but in a discernible, external relationship to Stephen; this perspective allows the reader to gaze upon Stephen's body as an object. The narration focuses on Stephen, but not generally in the same way as the focalized, free indirect discourse of *Portrait*, which limits itself to its protagonist's embodied perspective.<sup>27</sup> In this instance in *Stephen Hero*, the text uses conventional description to verify *Bildung*. We can liken this instance to Stephen tracing A.M.D.G. at the top of the page when he sits down to compose his "To E—C—" poem in *Portrait*, a moment in which Joyce

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<sup>26</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *SH*.

<sup>27</sup> Buckley explains, "If Stephen's family and friends and E---C---often seem elusive shadows, it is only that they are presented from Stephen's point of view, and Stephen is so self-absorbed, so intent on his difference from others, that he refuses to honor the reality of those who move in the outside world and make claims upon his affections. All that happens in the novel exists in Stephen's immediate response to it, and much takes place only in his trains of mental association" (235).

exposes how easily young artists can take up habits of form that counter their creative efforts.

While *Stephen Hero* uses facial description to show Stephen's current state of development, the formal reworkings accomplished in *Portrait* maintain focus on the curve of Stephen's emotion. The narrative of *Portrait* enmeshes itself with the consciousness of the protagonist and appropriates the language of its characters; the technique creates an effect that places the reader in relation to Stephen in a way that renders the reader unable to view Stephen's body as an object.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the innovative third person limited, focalized perspective Joyce employs in *Portrait* impacts the way the protagonist's body conveys truth claims. The narrative represents the protagonist's internal perception in such a way that his body does not convey external evidence of his development that is not also touched with his internalized experience. The narrative technique "disappears" Stephen's body, in Leder's sense of the term. *Portrait* approaches Stephen's body and its processes as aspects of his lived experience. The shift from the protagonist's body as a potential signal of development toward the body as a medium of perception marks a significant development in Joyce's reworking of the *Bildungsroman*.

*Portrait*'s narrative demonstrates that Joyce was well aware that the body is no ordinary medium. It is, as phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty demonstrates and Leder summarizes, "that very medium whereby our world comes into being" (Merleau-Ponty 217, qtd. in Leder 5). Leder explores how the body, in different ways pertaining to its different surface and visceral systems, recedes from perception or direct experience in order that we might perceive the world onto which it opens (4). This recession promotes

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<sup>28</sup> Kenner describes this technique as the "Uncle Charles Principle," naming it after a scene in *Portrait* in which Uncle Charles famously "repair[s] to his outhouse," a phrase which, Kenner argues, detects the "gravitational field" of the man's "notions of semantic elegance" (Kenner 16, 17).



the mode of the body's "disappearance," with emphasis on the *dis-* as a negation, as not-appearing, rather than as vanishing (26-27). The "disappeared" body is the complacent body that is not given attention and which facilitates the direction of our attention toward elsewhere. Vanishing is aligned with the "dys-appearing body," the mode in which the now absent, comfortably disappeared body demands presence through its absence, because that conventional state has now been felt to have vanished. The dys-appeared body "demands a direct and focal thematization" precisely because it is in a *dys-*, as in 'bad,' 'hard,' or 'ill,' state (84). In other words, we tend to be better able to focus out onto the world when we are at our most comfortable in it and are unaware of our bodies, when the body disappears as a neutral background of experience, and to turn our attention to our bodies when they occupy our attention due to pain, disease, or unaccustomed change. The presence-absence correlation of the dys-appearing and the disappearing body constitutes what may well be Leder's most important contribution, for it helps to explain the persistent ideal of disembodied rationality and subordination of the body—in short, the "mind over matter" paradigm—even after the Cartesian paradigm has been widely discredited. Cartesianism, put simply, resonates with some of our experiences as lived bodies. Though *Portrait's* narrative perspective positions the protagonist's mental and physical processes in indissociable relation, the novel maintains a certain troubled sympathy for the hierarchies, especially gendered hierarchies, enforced by the dualist view. The "disappeared" body never acquires presence except through the negative state implied by dys-appearance; the body is never really "appeared" or present in the text in a positive sense.

### III: THE ABSENT BODY IN *PORTRAIT*

The body in Joyce's *Bildungsroman* does not appear straightforwardly, in a productive, active manner. Instead, as the novel progresses, the body is increasingly disappeared, for the narrative follows how Stephen learns to accustom himself to the world, a process which includes the body's recession from his perceptive field so that he can focus his attention out onto the world instead. By chapter four, Stephen even makes the dys-appearance of his body at its most pubescent into a process for cultivating the self, as we see when he attempts to mortify his hearing by exerting no control over his voice, "which was then breaking" (*P* 127). He also experiences another bodily phenomenon associated with male pubescence, the wet dream. Apparently too taboo for direct representation, Joyce unnarrates Stephen's wet dream and masturbation, representing them obliquely in the discourse of the text. When he awakens from a dream in his bed with his "soul" "all dewy wet," the masturbation that ensues is concealed by dreamy language (*P* 182). Here, the narrative refuses to explicitly mention the details of Stephen's sexual experience, though the sensual and climactic free indirect style nonetheless suggests what is occurring. Stephen's body remains just below the narrative surface, unnarrated. In contrast to Stephen's dys-appeared body that more typically surfaces as a thematic focus when it is in a negative state, Joyce thematizes Stephen's body in this scene as a source of pleasure. The overall effect in context, however, elides the difference between these states because Stephen's body does not surface in either instance in a positive state. At the same time, its near-surfacing suggests an increasing finesse with the disappeared body, and also an increased recognition that Stephen's body continually only *seems* more disappeared than it actually *is*. In other words, the body

becomes less securely disappeared to the extent that the protagonist comes to sense its absence.

Aside from these unnarrated moments, then, *Portrait* typically presents Stephen's body when it is in a *dys-* state; when Stephen's body surfaces overtly in the text, it typically does so uncomfortably or in relation to negative experiences or sensation. In order to avoid such a state, the protagonist's body tends to recede from notice ("disappear") in *Portrait* as the narrative progresses, increasingly so, and it tends to resurface as an object less regularly. In other words, the disappearance of Stephen's body is one of the central narrative dynamics driving *Portrait*; Joyce addresses Stephen's growing body in each chapter. *Portrait* foregrounds Stephen's sensate body mostly in the early portions of the novel, when Stephen is occupied with his growing understanding of how to process the sensations he perceives and, in general, learning how to make sense of his world and his location within it. For example, he begins to recognize cause and consequences when he notices that "first it is warm then it gets cold" when he wets his bed and then that his soiling the bed will cause his mother to "put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell" (*P* 5). We see how his understanding of bodily event and effect grows more complex as the novel progresses. The narrative style grows more elaborate, sophisticated, and even over-wrought alongside the protagonist who focalizes it. By the conclusion, this young artist has raised this processing to what he considers an art form—yet still finds bodily actions confound his formulation of impersonality. In the fifth chapter, Stephen articulates an elaborate aesthetic theory, which, as his collocutor Lynch points out, gestures toward refining even his fingernails out of existence (*P* 181). Thus, Lynch explicitly forces Stephen to confront the (dys-appeared) growing body. Stephen's

theory that the “artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails,” carries with it an aspiration to transcendent disembodiment so overblown that it belies the anxieties it seeks to assuage (*P* 181). As much as his developmental narrative thematizes bodily disappearance, this *Bildungsheld* senses that his body is not absent. The organic, fingernail-growing body is not something he can escape so easily, try as he might. While it may be suppressed, Stephen’s organic body—and the free indirect, focalized narrative— inhibits full access to that mindset where it would comfortably disappear altogether, much as *Portrait* might strive for that mindset. The same narrative technique that re-centers itself alongside Stephen in order to deny the body’s capacity to transmit signals about his processes of mind also ensures that his body will continually participate in perception and affect the curve of his emotions. In effect, the technique ensures that Stephen’s body will affect the narrative.

Since the appearance of the body is never a comfortable moment for Stephen, feeling a remove from his body is one way for Stephen to be more comfortable in his own skin. In *Portrait*, his skin would be uncomfortable and its dys- state would likely tend to intrude on his consciousness; he is, for example, infected with lice, and distracted by it. In a scene that will later be recalled in the first episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen processes the sensation of the louse crawling over his neck (*P* 196). Subsequently, the thought of the “life of his body, illclad, illfed, louseeaten, made him close his eyelids in a sudden spasm of despair: and in darkness he saw the brittle bright bodies of lice falling from the air and turning often as they fell” (*P* 197). Stephen repurposes the lice to be a

motive for art, and is inspired to compare them to shooting stars and fallen angels.<sup>29</sup> In this instance, the louse temporarily brings to Stephen's mind arcane Jesuit scholarship about lice until bodily sensation distracts him further: "But the tickling of the skin of his neck made his mind raw and red" (*P* 197). In turn, this sensation falls away when Stephen realizes that he had misquoted Nash's line "Brightness falls from the air," during the composition of the villanelle earlier in this scene, which means for Stephen "All the images it had awakened were false. His mind bred vermin" (*P* 197). In this passage, the actual vermin, the louse, manifests a verminous idea as Stephen processes the bodily sensation.<sup>30</sup> The louse, which dys-appears Stephen's body, vanishes into the conscious processing of his own artistic work.

The sense that the body seeks to be made comfortable is apparent in *Portrait* and is related to the dogsbody of *Ulysses*. The body Stephen sees in Buck Mulligan's shaving mirror in *Ulysses* is specifically a "dogsbody to rid of vermin" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 1.137).<sup>31</sup> The formulation approaches Stephen's body as a loyal animal that, with Stephen, asks Stephen who chose its face, but also that "asks [him] t[o]" free it from the infestation it carries. While "vermin" might be, as Margaret McBride reminds us, Latin for "worms" and can be read in light of Stephen's "fear of death at the hands of time," it is his mother's now-decomposing body that is most closely associated with worms in this

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<sup>29</sup> Norris has made a similar observation; she also recognizes a link between these passages from *Ulysses* and *Portrait*, and points out that "when Stephen has seen this dogsbody before, in *Portrait*...he transformed it by an act of intellectual and aesthetic magic into a sublime thing, turning his lice, and his squalid body, into a fallen angel and falling stars" (68). As Norris quotes, Stephen decides, "Yes; and it was not darkness that fell from the air. It was brightness—*Brightness falls from the air*" (*P* 197). For Norris, the issue at stake is "the larger issue of the relationship between the inside and outside of art: that is, that aesthetic form at its most formalistic, in modernism, becomes visible here as historicized, and as determined by art's exterior, by non-aesthetic contingencies of historical crisis, by social and intellectual change, by class and prestige" (70).

<sup>30</sup> For a related and more detailed consideration of the "fusion of embodiment and immateriality that is Stephen's quintessential mode of processing the enigmatic power of the erotic," see Valente and Backus (540).

<sup>31</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *U*.

episode (McBride 40). The vermin more associated with Stephen's living body are lice, a variety of vermin which resonates with the idea of seeing the self as others do, for Joyce seems to reference Robert Burns' poem "To a Louse; on Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church" in this scene (Devlin 882).<sup>32</sup> This resonance is further reinforced when Stephen remembers that his mother helped rid her children of lice and "[h]er shapely fingernails [were] reddened by the blood of squashed lice from the children's shirts" (*U* 1:268-9). His thinking about this type of vermin is related to his younger days; the lice constitute one of the "memories beset[ting] his brooding brain" of his mother and her detritus of toys and mirth (*U* 1:265). Situated just after the warm, sweet image of a "cored apple filled with brown sugar, roasting for her at the hob on a dark autumn evening," his memory of her removal of her children's lice is infused with a sense of comfort and security (*U* 1:267-8). The negative connotation of vermin is here balanced by the sensual experience and perhaps even canceled out by the pleasure a boy might take in having his lice picked by a female hand. The lice passage participates in an interlude of nostalgia until it is followed and dispelled in the next paragraph with a memory that Stephen had dreamed about his dead mother, with "her wasted body within its loose graveclothes" coming to him (*U* 1:270-1).<sup>33</sup> The passage looks forward to Stephen's own aging corpse but looks back on Stephen's young body as a comfortable, if menial, petitioner and causal agent. Stephen's "dogsbody" may have attachments with drudgework but is present here in *Ulysses* as a more comfortable subject than it may first appear in *Ulysses* and than it ever appears in *Portrait*.

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<sup>32</sup> Devlin notes that Leopold Bloom, too, will be preoccupied with this question in *Ulysses*.

<sup>33</sup> Brivic suggests that the passage alludes to Rimbaud's "The Lice Pickers," with his mother's shapely fingernails suggesting the "sovereign nails" of Rimbaud's sisters (88).

Joyce's dynamic conjunctive and disjunctive modern rhythm promises to reveal any disjunction to also be conjunctive (a promise which *Ulysses* fulfills when we see Stephen returned to Dublin). The pulsing of this rhythm through *Portrait* can help to explain why the narrative leaves its relation to the adolescent body unresolved. The narrative remains entangled with Stephen and his subjectivity remains intertwined with the body that anchors his perspective. Webb believes Stephen's physicality to be a subversive agent in *Portrait* and uncovers a shift from body to form to be an important movement in *Portrait*. I agree. I, too, recognize "conscious detachment from his body" (92), "self-division" (92), a "rejection of physicality," (94) an association of "physical contact with social transgression" (95) and an effort in Stephen's aesthetic theory "to refine the physical itself out of existence" (100). Webb argues that Stephen's body drives the narrative in *Portrait* because it "forces him past the various systems in which he seeks to be contained, compelling him finally to choose to fly past their nets into a voluntary exile" (Webb 87). It pushes him to disengage from the physical, but he does not achieve distance and detachment. He will be living in Dublin again by June 16<sup>th</sup>, for instance. I would emphasize that Stephen's choice to resist containment, to employ a metaphor of transcendence such as flying past nets, and to find exile to be his better option indicate that, even if he "flies by the nets of patriarchal and religious systems, or is pushed past them, by a body they can neither accommodate nor annihilate" (Webb 102), he has not gotten past all systems, particularly the hierarchal binary system which materializes sexual difference in correspondence with gender. This confirmation that he will fail to get past them, not offered till *Ulysses* was published, is nonetheless anticipated in *Portrait's* narrative dynamic.

I agree with Webb that Stephen's body interferes in several instances, including the playing field, the pandy bat, and the "FOETUS" scenes and their aftermaths, and contributes to "Stephen's objection to the extent to which physical sensation has come to dominate mental experience" which, "paradoxically produces that very effect" (88). For example, the disgust Stephen feels for his "bodily weakness and futile enthusiasms... his own mad and filthy orgies" is called forth when seeing the word "FOETUS" cut into the school desk in Cork produces the "faint sickness" that "climbed to his brain" (*P* 76). In this instance, the visual image of a word produces an effect on Stephen's body, evoking his bodily response by letters and not by touch. However, the dynamic is more complex than Webb indicates. On one level, we can see that to call attention to the adolescent body in a literary text at this time is, in a sense, to dys-appear the body. Bringing the body more fully to representation than has been the convention attracts attention to the body that had been comfortably disappeared. However, Leder would explain Stephen's reaction—which Cartesianist elevations of the mind frame as something to be climbed up to—as an illustration of a phenomenon of dis-appearance in which dysfunction and body awareness can potentially engender one another (85). Conversely with dys-appearance, "thematizing the body can itself bring about dysfunction" (85). We can see this occurring in this moment of the text as well. Stephen's affective disturbance leads to a feedback loop of bodily symptoms, and vice versa, such as when a nervous public speaker becomes self-aware of being looked at begins to notice physical indications of nervousness.<sup>34</sup> Webb notices that Stephen's body "repeatedly undermines his childish attempts to comprehend and participate in the systems that surround him" (89); this

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<sup>34</sup> Leder describes this scenario (85).



undermining occurs because bodily dys-appearance itself underscores the incoherence of a disembodied ideal so readily toppled by the appearance of the body in discourse.

Although the cultural order and the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* create an expectation that the *Bildungsheld's* mental processes and growing body will develop apace as the protagonist emerges, I would emphasize how the moments of bodily unease that Stephen experiences undermine this expectation. Such unity does not correspond with reality or, perhaps, simply with the *Bildungsheld* of this *Bildungsroman*. If there is an all-around golden boy at Clongowes Wood College, the better candidate is not Stephen but Jack Lawton. The two jostle for first place in elements: “some weeks Jack Lawton got the card for first and some weeks [Stephen] got the card for first” (P 9). As opposed to Stephen, however, Jack Lawton seems to exhibit physical agility on par with his mental agility. It is Jack Lawton’s yellow boots that eject the ball from the scrum on the playing field as Stephen runs fearfully and uselessly on, trying to stay out of sight (P 7). When reproving him for not being able to complete the declension of the Latin word *mare*, Father Arnall explicitly recognizes Jack Lawton as “the leader of the class” (P 39). With achievements both inside and outside the classroom, Jack Lawton serves as a comparatively more unified rival to Stephen, bringing the *Bildungsheld's* disunity to the surface in the first chapter. Jack Lawton’s presence in the text provides some contrast to the disharmony of mind and body operating in *Portrait*.

In the childhood scenes, we can see how Stephen’s mental agilities far outpace his physical ones, even as they are united in their sensitivity. These early scenes thematize his sensitivity to create the overall impression that Stephen is physically weak compared to his peers. On the playing field, for example, he encounters his body, feeling it “small

and weak amid the throng of the players and his eyes weak and watery,” and also uncomfortably cold (*P* 6). We can see the bidirectional dynamic of dys-appearance operating in his observation.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the players thronging around the ball who are not so self-conscious of their bodies, Stephen is focused on his body, and occupied with it. His sensitive attention to his bodily perceptions might contribute to his refined mental cogitations, but they also distract him, and undermine his efforts on the playing field. Throughout this chapter, *Portrait* depicts Stephen as physically uncomfortable, sometimes generally and at other times quite painfully so. Understandably, Stephen wishes to alleviate these sensations. Their alleviation occurs through such things as sleep, recuperation from illness, daydreams, and the rector’s acquittal—all moments when his body recedes from his thematic experience.

Two modes of perception, the visual and the auditory, become prominent as Stephen learns to finely process his perceptions. Both operate in ways that tend to emphasize his conscious processing of what he perceives and deemphasize the body that facilitates his perception. Phenomenologists term this feeling of displacement the “ecstatic body,” the body which “projects outside itself into the world” to where sensorimotor powers such as vision and hearing are focused (Leder 69). The rich detail about Stephen’s visual and auditory sensations, the interplay of these modes within Stephen’s consciousness, and the complex echoes of image and sound that Joyce interweaves throughout this chapter further enhance the disembodying effect of the narrative’s focus. Furthermore, Stephen sometimes learns these lessons when his body

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<sup>35</sup> Leder outlines a principle of dys-appearance as potentially “bidirectional, dysfunction and body awareness engendering on another” which occurs, for example, when social anxiety leads to physical manifestations such as sweating palms and racing heart rate, affective disturbances which “not only giv[e] rise to bodily self-consciousness but may originally have been the result of it” (Leder 85).

has dys-appeared because of intense pain. Compared to the general discomforts of the illness Stephen experienced earlier (as a result of being shouldered into the square ditch), being panded is a more acute physical sensation. The abject processes and their repercussions for Stephen's subject formation associated with the ditch water and subsequent illness, then, find sharper delineation.<sup>36</sup> In the context of the pain, Stephen experiences more definitive splitting of body from self than when he experienced abjection, with its ambiguous positioning of self and body. His thematic relationship with his body is intensified when it is in a *dys-* state, pain, further motivating Stephen to mentally supersede his body.

Stephen's attuning to the interplay of his perceptions and consciousness becomes especially apparent in the pandying scene. The prefect of studies beats him because Stephen's much-needed glasses have broken; the prefect suggests that Stephen broke his glasses as part of a scheme to avoid his schoolwork. As he administers the pandybat accordingly, the prefect announces to Stephen, "I see schemer in your face." The free indirect, focalized narrative, however, attests to Stephen's honest need for his lenses, for without them the "lines of the letters were like fine invisible threads" to Stephen and cause headache (*P* 41). In this scene, Stephen receives a lesson that physical impressions can also be difficult to read—and that misreading of visual cues can cause pains worse than headaches. Even after he is called to the front of the classroom for his punishment, he misreads the physical impressions given off by the prefect of studies. "He felt the touch of the prefect's fingers as they had steadied his hand and at first he had thought he was going to shake hands with him because the fingers were soft and firm" as the prefect

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<sup>36</sup> For discussion of Stephen's fall into the square ditch in relation to abjection, see Valente, "Dred Desire"; or Thomas.

steadied Stephen's hand to be panded (*P* 42). Until this moment, Stephen has only experienced such a "soft and firm" touch in the context of a handshake. Finding it difficult to reconcile his previous experiences with his current state, Stephen struggles to make sense of the pain the prefect inflicts.

Pain, as it is portrayed in this scene, also helps to individuate the protagonist. Because it is unsharable, pain makes the outside person, in particular, aware of the radical separation of one embodied subject and another. Until the pandying scene, Stephen had not fully internalized his individual position among his classmates. He found the student collective to be "strange" and remained somewhat bewildered by the fact that they "all had fathers and mothers and different clothes and voices" (*P* 10). At this stage, the spectrum of differentiations among schoolboys is beyond his grasp. During the pandybat scene, though, Stephen grasps the split between his experience and his fellow student's experience of pain. We can see this awareness taking hold in Stephen. At the start of the scene, Stephen witnesses Flemming being hit with the pandy bat six times on each hand. Stephen's impulse is to question whether Flemming feels pain; "Stephen knew how hard his hands were because Fleming was always rubbing rosin into them. But perhaps he was in great pain for the noise of the pandybat was terrible" (*P* 41). In that questioning, Stephen encounters the impossibility of confirming his fellow student's experience of pain. Flemming can give evidence of pain—his face contorts with it. But this evidence is reduced to the visual plane, and Stephen cannot feel it. Stephen can only evaluate the visual evidence on Flemming's face alongside the audible evidence of the sound of the bat on Flemming's skin. Stephen can imagine the experience of Flemming's pain but his experience of Flemming's pain cannot be of the same order as Flemming's. Their

positions are utterly irreconcilable and attest to the firm delimitation of Stephen from his fellow. Their different experiences of Flemming's pain makes a split between Stephen's consciousness and others' consciousnesses apparent to Stephen.<sup>37</sup> When it is his turn to be pandied, Stephen cannot deny his pain and his community cannot confirm it any more than Stephen can confirm or deny Flemming's pain.

The pandying scene illustrates how pain effects what Leder terms an "intentional disruption" and a "spatiotemporal constriction"; his "painful body emerges as an alien presence that exerts ... a telic demand" upon him (Leder 73). The narrative dilates from relaying what is occurring in the classroom to a close focus on describing Stephen's sensation of a "hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire" (*P* 42). When he is pandied, a splitting of Stephen's consciousness from his body becomes discernible. His own beaten hands, which he presses to his sides, become almost foreign to Stephen. "To think of them beaten and swollen with pain all in a moment made him feel so sorry for them as if they were not his own but someone else's that he felt sorry for" (*P* 42-3). A component of this is a simple, protective reflex on Stephen's part; mentally distancing himself from the sensation of being pandied once on each hand does something to

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<sup>37</sup> Scarry describes how the sign of pain "achieves its aversiveness in part by bringing about, even within the radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons" because pain is not available to the sensory confirmation of anyone except the person in pain (4). Scarry observes that event is immanent only for a person in pain. "For the person whose pain it is, it is 'effortlessly' grasped (that is, even with the most heroic effort it cannot not be grasped); while for the person outside the sufferer's body, what is 'effortless' is not grasping it (it is easy to remain wholly unaware of its existence; even with effort, one may remain in doubt about its existence or may retain the astonishing freedom of denying its existence; and, finally, if with the best effort of sustained attention one successfully apprehends it, the aversiveness of the 'it' one apprehends will only be a shadowy fraction of the actual 'it'). So, for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt.' Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed" (4).

cushion Stephen from his own pain. He learns to distract himself from his pain with his cerebrations, thereby partially satisfying the bodily demand to free himself from pain.

This state of affairs raises again the issues that inspire Joyce's endeavor to substantiate development in the *Bildungsroman* through Stephen's growing ability to articulate what he perceives rather than by relying on the depiction of beads and inches to denote development. The struggle of the subject to recover and return to articulation from pain raises the issue of the subject's initial encounter with language in developmental narrative. The experience of pain and the experience of early childhood are analogous in that language is inaccessible in both states. "Physical pain does not simply resist language," Scarry tells us, "but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Importantly, Scarry also delineates how "physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story, and the story that it tells is about the inseparability" of "*first*, the difficulty of expressing physical pain; *second*, the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty; and *third*, the nature of both material and verbal expressability, or, more simply, the nature of human creation" (3). The narrative's focus on Stephen's pain and perception of that pain positions the reader on the side of Stephen's experience of a body thematized by dys-appearance while it puts the visual and audible evidence of Fleming's pain in question. The narrative sidelines Fleming's pain, potentially conveyed by his facial aspect, centering instead on the protagonist's emotional experience.

This instance betokens how *Portrait* approaches the body as an unstable referent and evidence gathering mechanism, a theme that plays out in relation to Stephen's

sensitive eyes and poor eyesight. Stephen has experientially corroborated evidence to associate his body, particularly his vision, with weakness and pain as well as reason to avoid presenting it to the punishing detection of the authorities. For Stephen, visible objects can be perceived to be fuzzy and unreliable. His physical weakness contributes to reluctance on his part to privilege the visible field while also making him sensitive to how that field can be manipulated. If he works very hard to discover a method, “by closing his right eye tight and staring out of the left eye... he could make out the full curves of the capital,” he can achieve greater, yet not full, clarity (*P* 38). However, Stephen knows how easily he can camouflage his feeble efforts on the playing field. So long as he can keep “out of sight of his prefect, out of the reach of the rude feet, feigning to run now and then” he is free to pursue the train of his thoughts (*P* 6). At this stage, Stephen tends to work around rather than in the visual mode, preferring to devote the greater part of his attention to the processing of statements and individual words: he “lent an avid ear” to elders’ conversations about “Irish politics, of Munster” and family legends, for example, for by “thinking of things you could understand them” (*P* 52). Stephen demonstrates that he is attuned to words and the subtle declensions of their sounds such as the repetitive “pick, pack, pock, puck” of the cricket bats which explicitly remind him of dripping water at the chapter’s close but also, more implicitly, of the sound made by another sort of bat when it is hit against a schoolboy’s hand. In Webb’s words, “[i]ntellection for Stephen is demonstrably a process of making physical experience cohere with language” (95). “Words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he had learnt them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about them” (*P* 52). Thus, as opposed to Goethe, for whom

Bakhtin argues “the *word* coincided with the clearest visibility,” so much so that he inscribed key words onto his illustrations, here in *Portrait* the meaning of a word is increasingly revealed through repeatedly analyzing replayed memories (“The *Bildungsroman*” 27). For example, Stephen’s flashbacks to Christmas aid his understanding of what “was called politics” (*P* 13) and Stephen can replay conversations and play with remembered words such as “politics” in his head, distilling greater knowledge from his internal processing of his personal environment. *Portrait* therefore emphasizes the mental strengths of his cogitations and, on several levels, aligns his body with denigration.

Particularly in the first chapter of *Portrait*, Stephen becomes aware that his corporeality exposes him to negative experiences. It becomes apparent that the pandybat confers shame as well as pain onto Stephen. Being pandied threatens that part of Stephen who thought of himself as a good, even exceptional student. He is, after all “the leader of the Yorkists!” and always the first or second student of the class. Eve Sedgwick has described the affect, shame, as “a kind of free radical that (in different people and also in different cultures) attaches to and permanently intensifies or alters the meaning of—of almost anything: a zone of the body, a sensory system, a prohibited or indeed a permitted behavior, another affect such as anger or arousal, a named identity, a script for interpreting other people’s behavior toward oneself” (12). It is little wonder that this “free radical” attaches to his body, a body that feels pain and which belies his pain before the audience of his schoolfellows, his teacher, and the prefect. Sedgwick and others have highlighted how shame requires the (real or imagined) presence of witnesses, thereby demonstrating to the subject the subject’s inadequate performance within a social order.



The pandybat is a signal that a student has failed to please or even meet the standards of the school authorities. Stephen's corporeal limitations have exposed him to its sting. Furthermore, his cry exposes his limitations publically. Stephen's culture stipulates that a schoolboy, like all males, should suppress his cries.<sup>38</sup> Stephen is able to hold back his tears and his cry after the first strike of the pandybat, but he is unable to do so in the wake of the second, which is described as "a loud crashing sound and a fierce maddening tingling burning pain made his hand shrink together with the palms and fingers in a livid quivering mass" (*P* 42). Because the strike is of a short duration, his shame, like the sound of the crack, registers on his consciousness almost immediately and he almost immediately starts to evaluate what has just occurred. Shame registers first in the descriptive clause he interjects in the factual string of the narration: "The scalding water burst forth from his eyes and, burning with shame and agony and fear, he drew back his shaking arm in terror and burst out into a whine of pain" (*P* 42). The sounds, both of the beating and of the whine, are significant because they emphasize proximity. The knowledge that his classmates are close enough to hear him being pandied and can hear the "whine of pain" that bursts out of Stephen contributes to his shame. He cannot avert the sound of "the scalding cry come from his throat" from their ears like he can avert his face to hide the "scalding tears falling out of his eyes and down his flaming cheeks" from their view (*P* 42). While he can compensate for his failure to suppress his tears by hiding his face, he cannot pull the sound waves back out of the air. He cannot keep them from his schoolmates' ears. His pain is exposed yet he is acutely aware that he cannot control

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<sup>38</sup> Scarry admits the "existence of culturally stipulated responses to pain" but emphasizes that "such cultural differences, taken collectively, would themselves constitute only a very narrow margin of variation and would thus in the end work to expose and confirm the universal sameness of the central problem," the "utter rigidity of pain itself" (5). I concur with Scarry's conclusions and would clarify that I am considering how these culturally constructed stipulations help to shape and define a cultural environment.

how it is received. His shame contributes further impetus to shield his corporeality from exposure.

A deliberate denial of the corporeal body's ability to convey truth about the *Bildungsheld* surfaces in the aftermath of the pandybat scene. Stephen's fuzzy associations with the visible seem to contribute to his short-lived worry about whether "there was something in his face which made him look like a schemer and he wished he had a little mirror to see" before he resolutely pushes the question of physical determinations aside: "But there could not be; and it was unjust and cruel and unfair" (P 44). Stephen refuses to believe that evidence of a scheming nature could appear on his face, viewable by the prefect of studies and by others, because he does not believe himself to be a schemer. The assertion that the prefect cruelly misread Stephen preempts the question about Stephen's exterior verisimilitude. This renders Stephen's appearance ambiguous because the text undermines the objectifying view of other character. By discounting the prefect's statement as cruel, the narrative leaves room for Stephen's body to remain ambiguous in its shape.<sup>39</sup> His body thus takes shape in the text indirectly and implicitly. Through this technique, the text maintains its interest in the subtleties of the inner, invisible workings of a character's current state rather than in those that can be recognized through a casual glance from some distance.

In *Portrait*, the state of the protagonist's body is not an acceptable signal of his "true" subjectivity. Thus, when Stephen looks at his face in the mirror on his mother's

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<sup>39</sup> This textual function may illuminate the way free indirect discourse operates in gendered terms. Warhol's discussion of Austen's use of free indirect discourse suggests that *Persuasion* may be an illuminating female counterpart to *Portrait*'s textual construction of the gendered body. Warhol asserts that the heroine's body takes shape "in the objectifying view of other characters," registering, as *Portrait* does through the prefect, the focalizing character's appearance by reporting what other characters say about it ("The Look, the Body" 23). An important difference is that in *Persuasion*, the focalizing character never looks at her own body whereas in *Portrait*, Stephen does take a look at himself, in his mother's dressing mirror.

dressing table and sees an image of psychoanalytic significance that overshadows his reflected image, an image that is not described quantitatively or qualitatively, the narrative is positioning his internal view as more significant than his external.<sup>40</sup> Where Stephen's development is concerned, Joyce attempts to avoid placing the body at the scene of articulation to preserve narrative force for the processes of his mind instead.

Although the text seems magnetically attracted to the operations of Stephen's mind, Stephen does not long entertain the idea that his processes of mind are actually disembodied nor that his body's performative capacity can be ignored. If his adolescent body is not to be taken as direct evidence of the state of his processes of mind, this is not to say that the protagonist's body does not affect those processes. They might not be unified, but they are connected because his bodily experiences and states enable his keen perceptions. He learns to recognize that there is a "chemical action which would be set up in [his] soul by a false homage to a symbol behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration" (*P* 205). In other words, Stephen may be willing to kneel with his Uncle Charles in the chapel in chapter two even though "he did not share his piety" but by the last chapter he has come to recognize a mind-body connection and acknowledges it in the refusal-to-kneel component of his *non serviam* (*P* 51). Froula characterizes this refusal as part of Stephen's attempt to gain an outside perspective on the institution of the Catholic Church by seeking to divest himself of the unconscious belief that submission to external gestures might instill (17). The refusal also attempts to inhibit what Froula calls the "chemical action" (and what Butler might call a ritual

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<sup>40</sup> For a survey of various ways in which some Joycean scholars have read psychoanalytic significance into this passage, see Rado (32).

performance or citational practice) that could occur if his physical aspect set up an alignment of conscious and unconscious belief in Stephen's soul.

#### IV: MALE AND FEMALE ADOLESCENT BODIES IN *PORTRAIT*

If Joyce could not deny the potential of the protagonist's growing body to signify development, it seems he is determined to at least downplay it. However, the self-conscious portrayal imperfectly banishes the elided body from participating in those self-conscious processes of mind; Stephen's growing body underpins the narrative no matter how the narrative seeks its recession. This creates a tension. While Joyce may have regarded Stephen's physical body as an unacceptable signal of this *Bildungsheld's* state of development and attempted to reject a unity of the *Bildungsheld's* physical and mental aspects, Stephen's body nonetheless retains the potential to affect Stephen's processes of mind. If *Portrait* portrays the protagonist's body as phenomenologically absent, a portrayal that supports the narrative's interest in placing emphasis on the protagonist's perception of the world, the narrative's focus on Stephen nonetheless magnifies his mental processes so much that it uncovers the body's latent role in making his sensitive perceptions possible, enforcing the correlation of physical and mental aspects. Even when it "disappears," Stephen's body remains integral to the consciousness developed in the novel. In other words, *Portrait* may thematize Stephen's body as absent to an extent, but it also ties that body irrevocably to the consciousness it develops—the focalized free indirect narrative relies too heavily on Stephen to operate as an interface with 1902 Dublin for his body to be fully absent from the text. The *Bildungsheld's* body thus maintains an integral role within the narrative, a role that *Portrait* does not make obvious

but nonetheless relies upon to establish the focalized free indirect perspective. The narrative tension is acted out in the dynamic between the relatively disembodied Stephen and other characters.

One result of the protagonist's body's recession from view (though not from the narrative's dynamic) is an unequal emphasis on the bodies of other characters out in the world that Stephen focalizes. Using Leder's terms, we might say that the bodies of others become objects to be perceived and approached by the ecstatic body, the body experienced as the self projected out into the world. *Portrait's* narrative mechanism—the use of focalized, free indirect discourse—promotes the disembodiedness of the protagonist and the embodiedness of the secondary characters, many of whom are also in the process of growing up. Their growth implies Stephen's own continues apace, while also providing contrast to heighten Stephen's interior development to their exterior growth. All the while, however, the narrative discourse secures a more authoritative position for Stephen, the focalizer, than for the other characters, which Stephen perceives as objects, which in turn aligns Stephen with a disembodied textual position.<sup>41</sup> The restriction of the narrative to the protagonist's perceptive field tends to result in the emphasis of others' bodies because they are distributed across the space of that field. The authority of consciousness is thus further gathered to the protagonist and is withheld from secondary characters.<sup>42</sup> The disparity is most evident in the way that *Portrait*

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<sup>41</sup> Punday suggests that this sort of visual model seeks “to separate characters into distinct objects that we analyze from a distance” (77).

<sup>42</sup> Punday's observations about how narrative authority can be established are also relevant to my point here. Punday suggests that the technique of “differential embodiment,” where peripheral characters are heavily embodied in contrast to principal characters, is “a narrative strategy for creating authority for the representations presented to the reader,” a strategy which is “necessitated by the conditions of print culture and the anxieties about the ‘objectivity’ of the written account that comes with it” (156).

accomplishes the bodily development of Stephen's love interest, E[mma] C[leary], as opposed to Stephen.<sup>43</sup>

This strategy dovetails with the *Bildungsroman*'s didactic interests, which have been recognized as a key concern in even the earliest definitions of the genre.<sup>44</sup> Portrayal of the body as absent leaves open a space that potentially allows the reader to identify more closely with the perspective of the *Bildungsheld* and learn how to see the world as he sees it. In fact, when the protagonist's bodily material is downplayed or even suppressed from narration, the reader might experience less cognitive dissonance from and, thus, greater identification with, the *Bildungsheld* who is supposedly an exemplar of his milieu. Since, historically, the *Bildungsroman* tradition has had a pattern of positioning female characters in instrumental roles that support the male protagonist's *Bildung*, Joyce's choice to use the absent body bolsters and confirms this basic aspect of the genre as it has been classically practiced.<sup>45</sup> Emma's inclusion is a generic demand, and *Portrait* encapsulates her development in a way that speaks to Emma's secondary role in the narrative and in a way that confirms her role as more a product of Stephen's desires than as a subject.<sup>46</sup> The narrative's focalized dynamics aid this production, interacting in

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<sup>43</sup> In the scenes I examine this figure is referred to as EC and simply "she" but this female figure is generally recognized to be contiguous with the character referred to as Emma Cleary elsewhere. I prefer to employ her name rather than the initials to emphasize her humanity over her instrumentality.

<sup>44</sup> According to Morgenstern, who introduced the term *Bildungsroman* in 1819, "We may call a novel a *Bildungsroman* first and foremost on account of its content, because it represents the development of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion, but also, second, because this depiction promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel" (654).

<sup>45</sup> Buckley captures this pattern succinctly with his observation that a *Bildungsheld*'s education usually includes "at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting" (17), a myth of opportunity which has been exposed to be generally untenable for the *Bildungsheld*'s female peers. Fraiman argues that, in contradistinction to male *Bildungshelden*, middle-class female *Bildungshelden* have "a clearer sense that formation is foisted upon them, that they are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them" (6). See also Castle, esp. his chapter "*Bildung* for Women: Joyce and Woolf."

<sup>46</sup> See Henke.

a way that tethers the generic female character to her biological development, which then occurs in a straightforward way that *Portrait* resists for the main, male character.

*Portrait* accomplishes Emma's adolescent development in the scene in *Portrait* where Stephen is masturbating and producing his (in)famous villanelle. The narrative brings about the bulk of Emma's development in service of positioning her as Stephen's fantasy sexual partner; the focalized narrative re-positions the girl into a woman in order that Stephen might proceed to enter into a sort of spiritual marriage with her as an equal. Innocence is the denominator of the equation. To position Emma this way, Stephen equates what he sees as his sinful sexual nature with her own state, which must, ergo, also be sinful. Previously innocent, her soul begins "to live as his soul had when he had first sinned" when it (conveniently) dawns on Stephen that she has experienced menarche: "he remembered her frail pallor and her eyes, humbled and saddened by the dark shame of womanhood" (*P* 187). This statement has long been thought to refer to menstruation. For example, Charles Rossman notes that "[p]hysiologically she is now an adult woman, a fact that Stephen is aware of and willing to capitalize on. Now he can further implicate her in his sexuality since she cannot lay claim to the same degree of innocence that was hers before puberty. This knowledge excites him into the onanism that results in the final stanza" of the villanelle (Rossman, qtd. in Benstock 36-7). The degree of innocence that Rossman suggests that the growing EC can lay claim to is, it must be noted, of a different order than the innocence that the masturbating Stephen can no longer lay claim to. Stephen had not understood his innocence "till he had come to the knowledge of it through sin" (*P* 187). Emma, according to Stephen, had not understood

her innocence until she became reproductive.<sup>47</sup> Her biological development is taken as constative evidence of her emergence into adulthood; menstruation is also taken as an analogous substantiation of the supposed sinfulness that has been attributed to the female body at least since Eve purportedly gave Adam the apple. Because we have no other reliable evidence available with which to judge whether she has committed any sins, since only this form of her development filters through Stephen, there is little choice but to accept these verifications of her development. Stephen's primacy in the narrative ensures that his evidence is held against her.

That the passage describing Emma's development begins by stating, "He began to feel that he had wronged her," suggests that Stephen is to some degree aware, even in the midst of the masturbatory scene, that his treatment of Emma in service of his own desires is morally problematic (*P* 187). Having just imagined that she would share his verses at her family's breakfast table and before an audience that includes her uncle the priest (an evaluative environment he believes would not give his verses their due treatment) he corrects himself, deciding that she would not show his verses around after all. Stephen would rather believe that she would not wrong him and his literary efforts this way and, in fact, that he wronged her in thinking she might. However, Stephen proceeds to treat her development in this vein, exposing Emma to unfair evaluation. Lacking evidence that she has had an experience that would have given her knowledge of her innocence or lack thereof, Stephen produces a tautology and exploits a misogynistic stereotype to achieve the "loss" of her innocence in the story he tells himself. Unsure whether she has

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<sup>47</sup> While his sexual activities involve far more intention than a nocturnal emission Benstock points out that it "suits Stephen's purpose to equate his state of sinful sexuality with hers, implying that Emma's involuntary menstruation parallels his involuntary nocturnal emission. And once he has convinced himself of their shared guilt, he can proceed with the voluntary masturbation required for the coda stanza" of the villanelle he is in the process of composing (Benstock 37)



sinned, he suggests she had “an innocence which she too had not understood while she was innocent or before the strange humiliation of her nature had first come upon her” (*P* 187). He takes her pallor and eyes as evidence, bringing greater weight down on the bodily event than the ephemeral, experiential event of her coming to understanding. He uses involuntary, physiological processes—menarche, a female variation on the theme of “beards”—to substantiate her development. This accents the performative role of his love interest’s body in accomplishing her development within the narrative, and does so in such a way that the development of her consciousness becomes irrelevant, overshadowed by her skin tone, eyes, and the reproductive status that Stephen decides he can read on her face. In other words, Stephen collapses Emma’s development onto her bodily state in a way that Joyce resists for his protagonist, and Stephen earlier claimed “was unjust and cruel and unfair” (*P* 44). Stephen effects Emma’s development through a representational grammar that Joyce rejects for accomplishing Stephen’s.

Thus Joyce’s refusal to link “beards and inches” to the development of Stephen’s emotional curve does not apply to Emma’s, which serves to produce an additional aspect of maturity for Stephen. Further, cultural associations with these processes attach shame to Emma. In this textual world, involuntary voluntary biological processes propel the female character into adulthood, but are dismissed from the portrayal of the male protagonist’s development. The mechanical, temporal progression made visible by the developing adolescent body plays a defining role in the representation of female development in this *Bildungsroman*; conversely, a progressive liberation from the body becomes a privileged concept reserved to the male protagonist. Further, and somewhat more generally, *Portrait* also reserves this liberation to Stephen’s male peers, who

perform a pedagogical function and who are, unlike Emma, given voice within *Portrait*. Thus, although Stephen, for instance, sees that Cranly has a “pale face” and “large dark eyes” that makes him “handsome,” and a body that “was strong and hard”—i.e., that his body, like the bodies of his cohort, has grown toward adult male form—Cranly’s bodily growth does not define him as primarily as it defines Emma (*P* 206). Since *Portrait* enmeshes itself with Stephen’s consciousness but also appropriates the language of the characters he encounters, the characters heard to speak in the text, including Cranly, anchor some of the narrative perspective. This narrative perspective, though centered on Stephen, is to an extent dispersed by the free indirect discourse that appropriates the language of its characters. *Portrait*’s “beards and inches” treatment of Emma does not fully extend to the male adolescents it represents together with Stephen.

Resisting the body’s ability to serve as a signal of development may support the novel’s efforts to portray the curve of this protagonist’s emotions, but it also upholds the tendency for the male *Bildungsheld*’s body to be portrayed as absent and the female body to be portrayed as an instrument, according to the protagonist’s needs. Froula has demonstrated that Joyce’s work seeks to uncover the underpinning laws of his culture, describing how Joyce refuses to submit to what she calls the “law of gender” (12). Froula suggests that Stephen mis-performs the cultural rituals of gender formation by illuminating psychoanalytic processes that are normally shielded from visibility, revealing their coherence as illusory. Perhaps in order to keep his critique immanent to the system, however, he repeats the gender norms that iterate sexual difference, stopping at the threshold of a potential challenge to the normative order. Stephen’s sense that he wrongs Emma in this scene indicates nascent recognition of these shortcomings and

suggests that the norms of embodiment that are upheld are among the most entrenched and difficult to re-activate through “deviant” repetitions. I would agree with Froula that Joyce uses “‘perverse’ and ‘symptomatic’ violations of the law to cut through cultural barriers of repression to the unconscious beliefs that support social fictions of difference and gender,” but I would emphasize that Joyce’s work, to the extent that it portrays the *Bildungsheld*’s body as absent, does align itself with a Cartesian privileging of mind over body (Froula 13).

Joyce’s novel may display how the modernist *Bildungsroman* can offer an internal critique of culture, particularly of its gender formations, but the double standard of the body’s role in development that emerges in this scene undercuts the critique *Portrait* offers. Emma is subject to observations that Stephen is not, and she is the object of those observations in a way that Stephen also is not. *Portrait* reiterates and reinscribes compulsory yet problematic, dualist views of the mind/body most apparent in the novel’s portrayal of gendered, bodily materiality. The tendency to present characters in less privileged positions than the *Bildungsheld*’s in ways which emphasize their visible qualities and downplay their consciousness becomes an effect of *Portrait*’s portrayal of the *Bildungsheld*’s body as an absent body.

#### V: STEPHEN’S DOGSBODY AND JOYCE’S EPIC OF THE BODY

After *Portrait*, Joyce’s subsequent work does not portray Stephen’s body as similarly absent, for in *Ulysses*, Joyce experiments with representing numerous aspects of the body. In fact, it suggests an intentional contrast across texts. From its first pages, *Ulysses* seems to reference the body in *Portrait* in order to set Stephen’s adolescent body

aside. With knowing looks back to *Portrait*, Joyce effectively indicates that he has already largely worked through his important thinking on Stephen's body when he crafted his adolescent portrait. Bodies have an (in)famously high profile in Joyce's epic. "Organs," for example, constitute one category of the schema Joyce dictated to Stuart Gilbert to aid in understanding the text's organization. Of note, however, Joyce assigns no organ to any of the first three episodes of *Ulysses*, the ones most closely associated with Stephen; in the Linati schema, Joyce explains this with the note, "Telemachus does not yet bear a body" (Ellman 186-8). Stephen's body is, in effect, absent from the schema. This is not to say that Stephen's body is absent from *Ulysses*, but rather to highlight a general Joycean concern with how meaning is and is not attached to Stephen's body in particular. As embodied as *Ulysses* is in its thrust, the novel suggests it is not especially interested in Stephen's bodily development and instead points back toward the body portrayed in *Portrait*.

The contrast between the representations of Stephen's body in the first pages of *Ulysses* and in *Portrait* itself provokes questions related to visibility, perception, and bodily comfort. These issues are of prime import in the earlier text but by *Ulysses*, as Kimberly Devlin puts it, Joyce is interested in "attempts to transcend the limits of self-perception by seeing the self through the eye of the other" (882). *Ulysses* continues the story of Stephen, who has recently returned to Ireland and who finds himself keeping company with Buck Mulligan, listening to him preach mockingly about "body and soul and blood and ouns" while he shaves his facial hair (*U* 1: 21). The first page of *Ulysses*, then, establishes Stephen, who glimpses himself in the shaving mirror, as a developed character who has fully entered the young man's milieu. Having cultivated a self, he is

now less concerned with how he sees himself than with how he appears from other perspectives.

As a part of that movement, Stephen's body is made visible in *Ulysses* in a way that it was not made visible in *Portrait*. Having written the protagonist's adolescent body out of a text that we might call the *Bildungsroman* of the absent body, and never being one to repeat himself, Joyce knowingly turns around to write the epic of the body as his next novel. *Ulysses* contains many intertextual references, and one of the first bears on Stephen's reflected image. Before Mulligan likens Stephen's reflection in that mirror to "the rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in a mirror," an exchange that moves the text's attention toward wider aesthetic trends, with its reference to Shakespeare via Oscar Wilde, the text makes note of the reflection that Stephen actually sees: "Hair on head. As he and others see me" (*U* 1:143, 1: 136).<sup>48</sup> It is significant that Joyce mentions hair, for he conspicuously does not mention Stephen's hair, facial or otherwise, in *Portrait*, even when the character looks in the mirror. Here in *Ulysses*, Stephen recognizes his hairy visage and acknowledges that others recognize him because of it. Self-consciously, Stephen wonders, "Who chose this face for me?" (*U* 1:136). He answers his own question by according agency for this choice to his own "dogbody," a term for a person who does grunt work (*U* 1:136-7). Stephen accords his "dogbody" some agency in determining how he is represented, and vice versa, which raises some question about how he views his relation with his body. While not quite integrating the "it" of the personified body with the "me" self, Stephen recognizes an interrelationship between the two: "It asks me too," the same question about who chose its face (*U* 1:137). A link arises

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<sup>48</sup> In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde declares, "the nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The Nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass" (3).

between Stephen and his body in the causal dilemma of that determination, a dilemma that the text lets stand. As if content to attribute determinations about this face to some point of the continuum between Stephen and his dogsbody, *Ulysses* moves on, but only after pointing back to how Stephen perceived his body in *Portrait*. When we turn to the perception of that body in Joyce's *Bildungsroman* however, we discover there is little of it to see.

For Joyce, the body is a dynamic matrix of contact points between Stephen and the discursive world he encounters, a world shaped in significant ways by the psychopolitics of Stephen's time and place. I have emphasized such elements of that world as the gendered anxieties through my reading of the body in *Portrait*. Reading with an eye toward what Stephen's growing, adolescent body does for the narrative might also bring out the tensions between the would-be self-determining *Bildungsheld* and his embodied experience in a particular time and place, Ireland in the first years of the twentieth century, when it remained a part of the British empire. Postcolonial theory has shown us that the reverberations of a culture's experience with colonialism deeply affect a variety of experiences and those experiences include "coming of age."<sup>49</sup> That important *Bildung* aspiration, self-determinism, is indeed particularly complicated for a metro-colonial subject such as Stephen.<sup>50</sup> As Joseph Valente describes them, the "double/divisive, spliced yet still split, hybrid yet dehiscent" movements of a metro-colonial subject charted in a *Bildungsroman* as a movement from dependency toward independence are suffused with anxieties, prominent among them the gendered anxieties I have accounted for here (Valente, "Between Resistance" 330). I emphasize the cultural

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<sup>49</sup> For a related demonstration of how, "within the discourse of imperialism, conceptions of adolescence and hybridity (and responses to them) develop interdependently," see Randall (7).

<sup>50</sup> I follow Valente in this description of Stephen as a "metro-colonial" subject ("Between Resistance").

context more directly in subsequent chapters, in part because later novels reference not only Joyce's work, including his later works, but also because they reference events and experiences inaccessible to Joyce at the time *Portrait* was published. With the occurrence of the Easter Rising during the year of *Portrait*'s publication, important and substantial political events and transformations occurred in Ireland, ultimately resulting in an independent Irish nation.<sup>51</sup> While colonial and metro-colonial frames of reference suit *Portrait*, the majority of twentieth-century Irish discourses about what it means to "come of age" are impacted by the experiences of revolution, civil strife, and the partition that created an Irish state in the south. They also register Joyce's influence, including the later works in which the body was more visibly present, less self-consciously absent.

*Portrait* indicates how the growing body can operate in literary works, and illuminates how in twentieth century Irish literary works, particularly novels of formation, growing bodies are complex to represent, particularly in relation to gender. Although the adolescent body is sometimes assumed to be a simple, straightforward textual element of the *Bildungsroman*, for Joyce it is an underlying concern to resolve. The assumption Joyce is testing has affinities to the same discourse that tends to reserve the *Bildungsroman* to an ideal "universal" subject long revealed to be the avatar of a privileged domain of white western masculinity. Joyce's efforts to recuperate representations of development from the "beards and inches" model resulted in what is perhaps the most famous and revolutionary developmental narrative of that century, but that recuperation has its limitations. Joyce's novel is exemplary in its portrayal of the intimacy of conscious experience, which scholars suggest characterizes Modernist

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<sup>51</sup> *Portrait* began appearing serially in 1914 and was published in book form in 1916, the same year as the Easter Rebellion that precipitated the revolution that eventually resulted in the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 following the partition of Northern Ireland in 1919.

developmental narratives.<sup>52</sup> What Joyce advocates in his early essay can be seen as the more fluid, individuated and internalized form of conscious self-development we see enacted in his novel. While the novel's focus on his conscious, aesthetic development leaves little room for Stephen's depiction of physical development. These organic biological processes and (culturally influenced) imperatives perform significant operations, if not always explicitly. As much as *Portrait* may seem to foreground the painting of the "curve" of Stephen's conscious development and background his material aspect, the adolescent's corporeality participates in the protagonist's propulsion toward successive phases of life nonetheless.

The issues I have distilled from this discussion—assumptions about the dis/unity of mind and body in development, gendered double standards, etc.—will percolate through subsequent twentieth-century Irish *Bildungsromane*. Later authors, perhaps emboldened by the bodily details that permeate *Ulysses*, will make bodily growth an overt theme. Thus, I acknowledge Jonathan Bolton's claims that "Joyce diagnosed so perceptively the maladies of Ireland on the cusp of independence that he anticipated these narrative patterns, scenes of conflict, and the frustrations of youth in later Irish fiction" and that "Joyce's recovery of the [*Bildungsroman*] form within the context of Irish life virtually scripted the trajectory of Irish maturation" (18). And I join Bolton in recognizing that, unlike in eighteenth-century Germany, where the *Bildungsroman* saw its birth, in Ireland "the revolution did occur, but the liberation it promised was slow to be realized, which is why the protagonists in Irish *Bildungsromane* often mature too quickly,

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Mao has described the field of literature as playing an especially important role in our understanding of development because it is concerned with "the representation of intimate experience, or rather with the intimate representation of experience" (6). This portrayal supports Castle's suggestion that a trend of "reinstating the values of aesthetic education and individual freedom within the processes of self-development" characterized the modernist *Bildungsroman* in particular (1).



or else they reached the temporal milestones of maturity—pubescence, physical maturity, leaving school—but remain immature and inexperienced” (10). In subsequent chapters, I engage with the issues related to the national experience of Independence and its effects on the emergence of individual Irish subjects in post-Joycean, post-independence novels. There, I examine the constellation of overt and systemic bodily representations, gendered representations of a national population often thought of as an organic community, and the postcolonial Irish experience more thoroughly.

CHAPTER TWO  
**“Nobody’s Life was More Than a Direction”: Bodies  
 Growing in Passing in John McGahern’s *The Dark***

In John McGahern’s post-independence coming-of-age novel, *The Dark* (1965), the protagonist’s father, Mahoney, pauses to survey the farm work he and his son have just completed, and also the body of his son, “Young Mahoney” (so called because McGahern gives neither character a first name). Mahoney takes Young Mahoney’s new-found physical strength as a sign of the youth’s development, telling him, “[t]here’s not many would keep pace with the two of us. You’ve come into your own since the exam” (McGahern, *The Dark* 148).<sup>1</sup> Since his secondary school career ended, the son has spent his waking hours working alongside his father in the family’s fields. The summer work has sculpted his once-soft arms. Calluses have formed on his hands. At summer’s height, Young Mahoney’s previously felt fatigue and muscle aches have given way to a sense of peace and satisfaction that is rare in *The Dark*. The father takes his son’s resulting brute strength as evidence that his son has developed into manhood; the son’s hard body offers the evidence, and the scene as a whole betokens a transformation. Young Mahoney can now perform as a man: “He was a man. He was among men. He was able to take a man’s place” (*TD* 149). He looks like a man; his bodily growth indicates as much, and the elder’s statement that the youth has “come into [his] own” confirms as much. However, at this point in *The Dark* (approximately two-thirds of the way through) and in the context of the volatile individual consciousness portrayed in this

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *TD*.

*Bildungsroman*, the protagonist's physical bodily growth to adult form provides little lasting sense of completion to this developmental narrative.

The fieldwork scene indicates that Young Mahoney's development will not result in a harmonious resolution and unity of aspects. It highlights, for instance, that the youth's bodily growth does not correspond with his conscious development. Further, the scene does not impart a sense of closure so much as a sense of ongoing, continuing development, a waxing and waning cycle that produces constant seasonal change but is itself little altered over the years. Hence, McGahern mentions in one chapter that "much of the worst in the house" shifts towards Young Mahoney's siblings because he was "a growing man," and then follows with a family member's assertion that their "hopeless life with no sign of change" would "be always as this": a house of dependents governed by a volatile authority prone to "fits of brute assertion" (*TD* 35, 34). The sense of endless change also resonates with the unsettled mix of "terror" and "happiness" that Young Mahoney finally feels in recognizing that "it didn't matter, you could begin again and again all your life, nobody's life was more than a direction," a course of movement with no arrival point or journey's end aside from the inescapable fact of brute biological finitude (*TD* 188). The body in *The Dark* is a body that grows in passing, that changes from one state to another and which always remains open to change—or, more precisely, remains unclosed, for the absence of closure is a sharply felt loss. This passing growth impels the protagonist to continually "face the turmoil of your own passing" from one biological state to another without becoming a closed, completed unit (*TD* 188).

Ultimately in this post-independence Irish *Bildungsroman*, the organic body—like the

overall narrative of Young Mahoney's development—will find an ending or conclusion, but resists closure and resolution.<sup>2</sup>

McGahern employs a number of the familiar elements of the *Bildungsroman*, including the protagonist's successful progress through an educational system, and the protagonist's bodily development. It suggests via Mahoney's statement about his son's growing body that an increase in bodily strength is necessary for ushering Young Mahoney into "his own." At the same time, McGahern's emphasis on teleological bodily development overtly contrasts the growing body with Young Mahoney's emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development—something that sets this novel in direct contrast to Joyce's *Portrait*. For instance, the fieldworking scene suggests that while father and son can now keep pace with one another physically, the son's physical and conscious development have not kept pace during this summer interlude. If the protagonist's conscious development and his physical development trade off, it is to the latter that his father gives more weight. From Mahoney's vantage as the head of an austere, large, single-parent household in rural Ireland, the development of the eldest son to a level where he can keep pace with his father is an event worthy of remark. For his part, the son has come to feel "the delight of power and ease in every muscle now, he'd grown fit and hard, he'd worked into the unawareness of a man's day" since the exam (148). However, for Young Mahoney, as for the narrative, the meaning of this brute development is not so simple as the elder Mahoney's statement might suggest because the passage also portrays the protagonist's brute development as inconsistent with the development of his individual consciousness—the work leaves him too tired to be

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Rabinowitz describes a kind of closure in "open" texts, which are configured so that "plot remains unresolved and incomplete even at the end" as part of a thematic critique of social and literary conventions that demand completion (307, 308).

objective. *The Dark* does not bring these aspects of development into harmony. Instead, development stagnates.<sup>3</sup> Further, the “unawareness” Young Mahoney works himself into in the fields with his father each summer day stands in jagged contrast with the mental exercises that recently occupied him as he prepared for and undertook the secondary school leaving exam. Conflicted, this novel weighs these forms of exercise against each other as it explores the experience and significance of coming of age in rural Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. Not only is Young Mahoney’s world in rural Ireland a far cry from Stephen’s in Dublin, Young Mahoney does not have the privilege of artistic development open to Stephen.<sup>4</sup>

*The Dark* uses bodily growth to organize its plot of development, while also simultaneously exposing the limits and unevenness of such growth. McGahern recognizes his *Bildungsheld* to be a corporeal being and (unlike Joyce) emphasizes this aspect by representing not only the protagonist’s brute bodily development but also that body’s material weaknesses and abject tendencies. From the first chapter, McGahern’s textual strategy of emphasizing the protagonist’s bodily openings or permeable boundaries, by, for instance mentioning fluids such as urine and semen that leak from his orifices, sets up an expectation that Young Mahoney will develop into a more closed and proper form by the end of the text. Similarly, by positioning the protagonist as an

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<sup>3</sup> Terence Brown calls Ireland in the decades following Independence, “stable to the point of stagnation,” and “dominated by an overwhelming social and cultural conservatism” produced by a “social order largely composed of persons disinclined to contemplate any change other than the political change which independence represented” (*Ireland* 5, 9, 8). Brown describes how the “homogeneous Irish society of the twenty-six-county state was predominantly rural in complexion and that Irish rural life was marked by a profound continuity with the social patterns and attitudes of the latter half of the nineteenth century” (*Ireland* 9).

<sup>4</sup> Terence Brown describes the period between Joyce and McGahern as one of censorship that left most authors “inhibited by the prevailing puritanical ethos or cut off from their natural audience by legal interdiction” and retreating “from the Joycean inclusiveness of insight (where self and society were reckoned to be intimately related) to an often sentimental concentration on the privacies of selfhood” (“Redeeming” 225).

adolescent, the novel sets up an expectation that he will achieve a more stable final form in the future, for in twentieth-century western culture, the discourse of adolescence conditions an expectation that the subject will emerge from a period of bodily upheaval into a relatively stable position of enlightened maturity.<sup>5</sup> In foregrounding the protagonist's efforts to gain and maintain control over his body and its orifices, the text positions the protagonist's abject and unstable adolescent body as something to be overcome or left behind as the protagonist matures. We thus expect this coming-of-age novel to trace how, through a series of metamorphic processes, the youth passes through a state of bodily change (adolescence) and arrives at static adulthood. Such assumptions are understood to be untenable in McGahern's novel, however, because Young Mahoney's body may change (and, in fact, does change) but his anticipated mastery of his sexed body escapes him. The sexual molestation he endures from his father and the sexually repressive social codes he internalizes from his faith and society impact is sexual initiation and further compromise his ability to regulate his bodily drives and assume authority over his sexed body. His body changes in passing, but does not pass through youth to arrive at another, less volatile, more governable state. Giving close attention to the growing body in this text allows us to see that McGahern's embodied protagonist is not finally capable of holding a stable form.

Young Mahoney's incapacity to control his body results from his position within a family unit and society that claim authority over his body. McGahern grounds the failure attached to this expectation of control in familial, religious, economic and national discourses. Because of Young Mahoney's position within this matrix, which brings out his bodily volatility through the attention it pays to his need to assume control over his

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<sup>5</sup> For analysis of these "confident characterizations" of adolescence, see Lesko.

body, the sense of developmental completion he seeks remains beyond his reach.

Because of the way that sexual violence continually reinserts Young Mahoney into a control paradigm where his own body is not dominant at a bodily level, Young Mahoney does not complete the sort of formation that modernists associated with the classic *Bildungsroman*.<sup>6</sup> In *The Dark*, the body's volatility can be regarded as a prime dynamic of the plot; its resistance to control (particularly in the form of sexual drives) conflicts with the social expectation felt by the protagonist that he will cultivate control over his unstable body.

Like in other post-independence Irish works, youth in *The Dark* does not resolve itself into a finished, harmonious, adult form; in McGahern's work, "nobody's life was more than a direction," a permanent vector or state of transition that nonetheless must end— if only because that life is subject to inevitable biological reality, and because a book must come to an end.<sup>7</sup> His body grows and he changes—but those changes only masquerade as *Bildung*. Thus, *The Dark's* exploration of bodily growth in passing presents a version of what Esty calls the "unseasonable youth" of the modernist *Bildungsroman*. For McGahern and for other modernist authors, self-cultivation no longer offers the settled adulthood offered previously in the conclusion to a *Bildungsroman*. As Esty demonstrates, modernist authors resisted deploying narratives of progressive maturation in their texts by employing the figure of "stunted youth" (Esty 3). Modernist works by authors such as Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Joyce,

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<sup>6</sup> Notably, the privileged expectation of bodily stability is largely reserved to males. The likelihood of experiencing the body as a stable feature of lived experience is available, Iris Marion Young observes, to "a minority of persons, . . . namely adult men who are not yet old, experience their health as a state in which there is no regular or noticeable change in body condition" (57).

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of many Irish texts that "reenacted the structure of the [*Bildungsroman*] only to defy its conventional resolutions," see Bolton (9-10).

Esty argues, distended, warped, dilated, inverted, and generally thwarted the realist proportions and temporal frames of the *Bildungsroman*, rendering youth as endless and the promised stability of adulthood moot (Esty 1-2). That is, compared to precedents, the conclusions of modernist *Bildungsromane* were purposefully “arbitrary.”<sup>8</sup> Classical *Bildung*, as Franco Moretti argues, required youth to come to a stable end that merged the protagonist with a new world, such that the youth “passes into maturity, and comes there to a stop” (26). By *not* bringing youth to a stop, the modernist *Bildungsroman* cuts “the process of aging from between the twin plot points of youth/exposition and death/closure, removing the connective tissue definitive of historicism itself” (Esty 202). Excising a stable sense of formation from the genre allowed modernist authors of *Bildungsromane* space in which to explore the developmental discourses that underpinned conventional understandings of self, nation, and empire (Esty 3). After a sustained struggle to resolve various and uneven elements that impress upon Young Mahoney’s formation, McGahern ultimately leaves the youth condemned to the freedom of an open-ended form, which is not freedom *per se* in McGahern’s Ireland. As he does so, since he enrolls the body so overtly in his text, he undermines the capacity of the bodily aging process to bring about stable plot closure. It is little wonder that McGahern also produced several other novels—*The Barracks* (1963); *The Leavetaking* (1975); *Amongst Women* (1990)—that take up a similar rural family environment of dead mothers, frustrated fathers, numerous children, and male protagonists struggling to discern their vocation and assert themselves

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<sup>8</sup> Esty argues that modernist fiction coordinates “endless youth with arbitrary closure to produce an ironic form. In this way, they can encode a simultaneous rejection of and subjection to existential, bottom-line temporality—the global time of Hegel’s world history in one sense (modernization), and the organismic inevitabilities of life span in the biographical novel on the other (maturity, death)” (201).



against authorities. For McGahern, texts come to an end but the narrative of family drama remains unclosed.

The struggle and openness that produce the prominent narrative instability in *The Dark* has sparked debates between literary critics about whether it constitutes a *Bildungsroman* at all (a debate which is common to the form).<sup>9</sup> While some critics categorize *The Dark* as a *Bildungsroman*, other critics find the label ill fitting for this text.<sup>10</sup> For example, in *Outstaring Nature's Eye*, Denis Sampson describes *The Dark* as “less a *Bildungsroman* or a portrait of the artist as a young man (although it has elements of both) than an existential study of a consciousness in an indeterminate state” (Sampson 63). Indeed, the narrative shape this protagonist ultimately takes is an ambiguous one—for instance, the protagonist of this modern *Bildungsroman* does not say “I,” that key signal of identity. Stanley van der Ziel argues that *The Dark* “explores the possibility of not *needing to say* ‘I’ in order to establish a sense of self: about finding a sense of self and place without clinging to pronouns as a last resort” (van der Ziel 116, original emphasis).<sup>11</sup> While van der Ziel calls *The Dark* an existentialist novel about the “recognition of limitations, about facing life-in-mediocrity as well as life-in-triumph,” I hesitate to label the novel a triumph, particularly in light of the ambiguous conclusion (van der Ziel 116). *The Dark* portrays the grim reality of Young Mahoney’s limited

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<sup>9</sup> See Redfield.

<sup>10</sup> Cahalan calls *The Dark* an “autobiographical *Bildungsroman*” and goes so far as to categorize it within the *Erziehungsroman* (novel of education) subgenre (111, 112); Cleary calls *The Dark* “a bewildered, blighted *Bildungsroman* in which the generic impulse to development is stymied by a sense that while the enclosure of the family maims and brutalizes, the world beyond its confines is a Sahara of indifference and alienation” (160).

<sup>11</sup> Van der Zeil concludes that, by “accepting his own limitations and rejecting the validity of the traditional goal of his old aspiration young [sic] Mahoney is liberated from the [Stephen] Dedalesque need for endless achievement” and even the need to achieve a first person voice, the I; thus, “those pronouns that were the only thing left to Beckett’s Unnamable can ultimately be discarded by McGahern’s narrator, for whom there is life beyond pronouns,” which, to Van der Zeil is “McGahern’s triumph rather than his failure” (116, original emphasis).

freedom, but, in a novel of emergence, the mediocrity it reveals indicates failure for both the individual and for the national age he embodies. Moreover, Young Mahoney's bodily experience indicates a lack of physical boundaries between individuals that impedes the weaker party's authority over even his physical autonomy (which is particularly disturbing in light of the various abuses that came to light in subsequent decades in Ireland). Young Mahoney, after all, finds himself once again sharing a single bed with his father as the novel concludes, a man who routinely sexually molested him during his youth. As I suggest in this chapter, the many forms of father-son interrelation in *The Dark* stunt the protagonist's individualization. Their interrelation is visible even in the sunrise-sunset relationship of the two men in the field-working scene: in almost the same breath that Young Mahoney realizes "He was a man," he notices "that Mahoney was growing old" (*TD* 149). The two comprise part of the same family life cycle; in the Mahoney family line, McGahern suggests, each Mahoney male embodies a season and as one waxes, the other wanes. The cyclical dynamic works in tandem with other aspects against Young Mahoney's potential to emerge from the family unit as a distinct individual, a key theme of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of emergence.

Notably, the text never refers to the youth as "Young Mahoney," and both he and his father remain without a forename. For the protagonist, being called by his last name is awkward as well; when introduced to another character as Mr. Mahoney, Young Mahoney startles because he had "never been called Mr. Mahoney or sirred before, it was too unreal" (*TD* 79). The text remains coy about the protagonist's name, remaining mute about his first name even when the protagonist gazes upon its printed form. Indeed, when the youth sees his name printed in the newspaper announcing his scholarship

award, he wonders at the attachment of his self to his name: “Was that his name, was that him?” (*TD* 162). He stares “more at his own name printed than at the photo,” his name being less secure than his visage (*TD* 162). Even when he wonders at the strangeness of “people working to print his name and send the newspaper out to the world... all the eyes...gazing at his name” the text discloses no name (*TD* 162). The not-naming is an act that effaces the main character’s identity. Young Mahoney does not claim an individual name of his own, even to himself. McGahern explores Young Mahoney’s struggles to forge a stable identity for himself, but even at the end of the novel, speaking to himself in the second person, he still feels a “stupid resentment of your own unique identity being associated with your father, you’d be linked with and associated with your father, instead of being utterly alone and free against a background of snow” (*TD* 186). Without even a name of his own, and wearing, at most, the name of a man who has polluted his autonomy, Young Mahoney is not a character with a promising capacity to break from his family unit. Where the family name is used to indicate an individual, it applies more frequently to the father than the son. I thus follow the text’s convention of referring to the elder Mahoney as “Mahoney,” since the son uses the family surname to refer to his father, and the critical convention of identifying the protagonist of *The Dark* simply as “Young Mahoney.”

The critical convention usefully indicates how McGahern develops Mahoney’s eldest son’s identity primarily in relation to paternal authority. The textual strategy of withholding both names and qualifiers gives greater emphasis to a unity of identification between father and son and raises questions about the extent of their similarities and the pattern of how those similarities change over time. Both are Mahoney. It is as if affixing

a determinate referent to this protagonist would indicate too secure an origin or boundaries for this self and too clear a delineation of father and son.<sup>12</sup> In other words, by withholding the *Bildungsheld*'s name, the text offers no easy assignation of the protagonist's identity; McGahern offers up no clear identity to the reader.<sup>13</sup> The text's strategy indicates that Young Mahoney does not discover or develop a clear sense of who he is and how to relate to himself as an individual Mahoney.

In order to trace in this chapter how McGahern deploys the growing body in his mid-century Irish novel of development, the first section of this chapter provides an overview of *The Dark*, and suggests the bodily dynamics playing out in the text as well as the textual features that produce these dynamics. The second section explores the novel's discursive context, a cultural environment that sets up these bodily dynamics. I characterize *The Dark*'s thematic and cultural background by describing certain pertinent historical events, movements, and elements of Irish-Catholic nationalist identity discourse that shape the terrain of McGahern's bodily representations at the time. The third section traces out how McGahern represents the growing body's openness and volatility and draws connections between national and paternal dynamics. The fourth and fifth sections describe the protagonist's embodied experiences in closer detail and offer readings of the impacts that Mahoney and also the character Fr. Gerald have on Young Mahoney to help illuminate the body's crucial role in shaping McGahern's narrative. For reasons that will become clear through my discussion, McGahern's 1965 novel is an ideal

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<sup>12</sup> For discussion of McGahern's work in relation to fractured interpretations of identity, which threaten traditional representations of Irishness and twentieth-century nation-building, see Rogers.

<sup>13</sup> Depriving a male *Bildungsheld* of a name is emasculating. In *The Voyage In*, Gilbert and Gubar observe that "Just as triumphant self-discovery is the ultimate goal of the male *Bildungsroman*, anxious self-denial... is the ultimate product of a female education. What [Bronte's] Catherine, or any girl, must learn is that she does not know her own name, and therefore cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be" (276).

text for examining literary representations of the body during a period of Irish history popularly known—rightly or wrongly— as “de Valera’s Ireland,” after the political figure Eamon de Valera, whose career lasted from the Irish war of Independence into the 1970s. The conservative Roman Catholic head of state has also been seen as a figurehead of a rigid Catholic moral ethos that constituted a prominent strand of Irish culture in the twentieth century. As sexual abuse and other scandals came to light at the end of the century, the phrase “de Valera’s Ireland” has sometimes been used to indicate an era of sexual repression and hypocrisy. Like Eamon Maher, I regard *The Dark* to be an early and courageous exposure of “a hidden Ireland that is characterized by psychological and sexual abuse, an unhealthy preoccupation with the sins of the flesh, a guilt-ridden and pious population and a manipulative Catholic clergy” (30). An aim of this chapter is to explore the cultural forces intervening in the constitution of this protagonist at the site of his body.

Examining the role of the body in this text not only provides a richer understanding of the sexually oppressive social atmosphere that operated in post-independence Ireland, but also how certain presumptions about the growing, sexual body interact with underlying assumptions attached to the *Bildungsroman* form. Together, an ideal of sexual purity and the Irish cultural practice of recognizing a family group as the basic unit of society come into conflict with the ideal of individual emergence.<sup>14</sup> The brute social reality of Young Mahoney’s experience in *The Dark* prevents his achieving

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<sup>14</sup> See Conrad for discussion of the challenged the individual faced in relation to the authority of the heterosexual family unit, a social formation she refers to as the family cell. Conrad observes that “the dual forces of Christainity, which reinforced a patriarchal system of familial relationships, and British colonialism, which divided the land and penalized social formations that did not further British interests, helped to fix the heterosexual nuclear family as the primary unit group of Irish society” (5). Article 41.1.1 of the Irish constitution declares the family to be “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.”

the pure, free, independent and objective state to which he aspires and which the protagonist of a *Bildungsroman* is supposed to achieve.<sup>15</sup> McGahern's text understands the body to be a site inhospitable to pretensions of autonomous self-formation. By enrolling the volatile, open, growing body in a *Bildungsroman* and thematizing the protagonist's lack of control over it, McGahern's work reveals as hollow a presumption that the *Bildungsheld* will cultivate a harmonious form for himself, a presumption that stands particularly at odds with the realities of the social world McGahern portrays in his mimetic fiction, but which also has wider applications.

While McGahern now enjoys a significant literary reputation, it should be noted that *The Dark* caused scandal and received harsh criticism when it was first published, due to its frank approach to sexual matters and bodily experiences.<sup>16</sup> The Censorship Board in Ireland banned *The Dark* under the authority of 1929 Censorship of Publications Act.<sup>17</sup> McGahern lost his position as a teacher in a Dublin primary school as a result of the banning, which added to the controversy surrounding the novel. The censorship board, which enacted, in Julia Carlson's words, "an official literary censorship that permitted bureaucratic excess unchecked over decades by public opinion or the law" determined *The Dark* was "in... general tendency indecent or obscene," with "indecent" being defined separately as "including suggestive of, or inciting to sexual immorality or

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<sup>15</sup> With its portrayal of an embodied, male subject it provides an immanent critique of the "desire for autonomous self-formation" from a position within a culture. In this respect, *The Dark* fulfills Castle's definition of a modernist *Bildungsroman*. Castle draws on Adorno's concept in his explanation of the generic failure of the modernist *Bildungsroman*.

<sup>16</sup> Carlson notes that the novel "created a sensation when it appeared because the word 'fuck' is used on the first page, and there are descriptions of a boy masturbating" (53).

<sup>17</sup> Carlson argues that the act "reflects the moral concerns and principles of the leaders of the new Irish Free State," leaders who generally went on to become the leaders of the Republic of Ireland (3).

unnatural vice or likely in any other similar way to corrupt or deprave” (Carlson 4).<sup>18</sup>

The board did not make its specific justifications public, but we can surmise that authorities found the masturbation and sexual molestation scenes indecent. It is also reasonable to suggest that these authorities would be affronted by the novel’s intimations that abuses of power by parental and clerical authorities had a profound influence on the shape of the protagonist’s adolescence. It is precisely through its portrayal of bodies and sexual experiences that McGahern’s novel demonstrates an acute sensitivity to this dynamic.

#### I: OPENING *THE DARK*’S UNSTABLE SUBJECT AND INCONSISTENT PERSPECTIVE

As *The Dark* opens, Young Mahoney’s disciplinarian father makes it clear to the youth that he lacks control over his body. In light of the protagonist’s efforts to learn how to rectify this lack and his realization that ultimately he has no choice but to carry on with this lack, the story of this protagonist’s development can be read as a story of a struggle for authority over his body. Young Mahoney’s bodily experience is highly relevant to the narrative dynamic of this fiction of development. McGahern represents the protagonist’s body as a volatile feature of his coming-of-age experience, in contrast, then, to the phenomenological experience Joyce’s novel portrays, which subordinates the role of the body in the representative field and emphasizes Stephen Dedalus’s emotional, perceptive, mental development. I argue in the previous chapter that Joyce found descriptions of accumulating physical development inadequate to the task of expressing a

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<sup>18</sup> According to the Act, the censorship board was a body that could ban books on the grounds that they are “in... general tendency indecent or obscene” (Part II, section 6); that they devote ‘an unduly large proportion of space to the publication of matter relating to crime’ (Part II, section 7); and that they advocate ‘the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage’ (Part II, section 6).

protagonist's conscious development and that this led to his creation of a portrait of individual consciousness with an absent body. In other words, Joyce's text generally subordinates the body's role and places the center of its focus on the male protagonist's consciousness. In this chapter, I discuss a novel that portrays the male body in its material reality. Young Mahoney struggles to master his body (so that he can subordinate it), and ultimately fails in this task. Bodily experience shapes the development of the young male subjects that focus both Joyce's and McGahern's texts, but in McGahern's text the body plays the more overt role. Young Mahoney aspires to the bodily mastery that Stephen exhibits in certain moments of *Portrait*, but fails to cultivate it because McGahern's overt representations expose this individual's ruptured authority over his body, and, more generally, the body's inherent volatility and irreducibility to willful control.

Young Mahoney operates for much of the text with an expectation that he can bring the process of his formation to a close if only he could learn adequate discipline. He comes to the realization that "nobody's life was more than a direction" late in the text, a position that resolves the narrative drive to formal closure while also leaving the issue of his adult formation unresolved. Young Mahoney will continue to experience life as a direction as he ages. Its meaning will remain open until he passes away, an existential state he finds freeing and that simultaneously touches him with "as much foreboding as the sodden leaves falling in this day, or any cliché" (*TD* 188).

The novel traces the protagonist's concern with his lack of control over his body and his search for a satisfying resolution of the problem, most evident in his ongoing struggle to suppress his impulse to masturbate. This impulse is a particular problem



because Young Mahoney deliberates over whether he has a vocation as a Catholic priest, having made a promise to his mother on her deathbed that he would say a Mass for her (*TD* 33). Like Stephen Dedalus, then, this Irish *Bildungsheld* considers joining the priesthood.<sup>19</sup> McGahern's text sustains the question of a clerical vocation more broadly, however, and Young Mahoney finds himself unable to sustain a course of bodily mortification; he never achieves a position approaching the sort of aesthetic distance from the body seen in relation to Stephen.

Young Mahoney's deliberations and his desire to learn to control his sexual impulses cause him to pay a visit to his father's cousin, the priest Fr. Gerald. Young Mahoney seeks sacred knowledge about how to live properly, which Young Mahoney understands to mean living a life that is "good enough," in a body that is pure and full of grace (i.e., as the classical body I discuss in section III).<sup>20</sup> Not only is Fr. Gerald unable to satisfy Young Mahoney's search for a way to bring his body under his control, their encounter underscores for Young Mahoney the dangers of his culture's promotion of a repressive relationship to the body. When the priest joins Young Mahoney in the parsonage guest bed late at night, encourages the youth to make intimate confessions, and then refuses to acknowledge his own sexual longings, he leaves Young Mahoney "broken down...to the dirt" and "reduced" to flesh (*TD* 74). Then, by winning a scholarship after a grueling course of study during which he feels a "diabolical pride of drawing the mind

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<sup>19</sup> For a reading of the impact of the Irish Catholic environment on post-independence Irish narratives of development, see Bolton. As Bolton summarizes, the quiet and studious "were often singled out early in their school careers and encouraged to consider a religious vocation, thus compelling children at an early age to make a crucial formative decision (95). Similarly, when asked in an interview if he ever considered the priesthood, John McGahern once replied, "Of course. It would have been impossible to escape the idea unless you were either mature or thick-skinned. ... Religion was the dominant atmosphere of the schools, and from an early age these priests or brothers looking for vocations passed through like salesmen" (Myers 5-6, qtd. in Bolton 95).

<sup>20</sup> In effect, Young Mahoney seeks an equivalent of the scroll Wilhelm Meister seeks in Goethe's *Bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

to the boundaries of what it could take, the shiver of the nerves as it trembled back from the edges,” Young Mahoney travels to Galway to attend the university (*TD* 117). Later, after being ejected from class for smiling inopportunistly, and disappointed in his peers’ focus on earning a comfortable wage rather than on cultivating higher knowledge, Young Mahoney and Mahoney turn to another priest, the college Dean of Residence, for advice about the protagonist’s future direction. After their encounter with this pedagogue, Young Mahoney feels defeated by the priest, but then comes to the conclusion that the defeat “didn’t matter” (*TD* 188). Young Mahoney comes to see a nascent possibility that he will come to “more real authority than all this, an authority that had need of neither vast buildings nor professorial chairs nor robes nor solemn organ tones, an authority that was simply a state of mind, a calmness even in the face of the turmoil of your own passing” (*TD* 188). This calmness positions him to recognize and accept that while his corporeality will continue to remain beyond his control and he will face difficulty in refraining from fits of brute assertion, he may find peace in admitting that reality rather than attempting to change it. Acceptance that he cannot finally control his bodily drives will free him in a way that the rituals of bureaucracy, formal education, ceremony, authority and religion cannot.

Young Mahoney’s concern that his body is not under his control nonetheless percolates through the text, until he accepts that he will not grow to fully master it or himself. The scholarship he worked so diligently to earn proffers an opportunity for growth, but does not provide fulfillment. The “dream was torn piecemeal from the University” in his first week there as he recognizes that “everyone wanted as much security and money as they could get” and also when he realizes that he cannot face

attending the dance or dancing with a girl (*TD* 172, 176). To do so would risk “losing control and trying to crush her body to yours” (*TD* 175). When he and his father turn to the Dean of Residence at the College for advice about remaining at the university, Young Mahoney cites his responsibility to support other members of his family unit as a concern. He also worries that his physical and mental strength might not be adequate to completing the task. If he cannot finish his degree, he would have to accept defeat and “fall back on Mahoney for support,” which would place his family in economic peril instead of offering it his support (*TD* 174). It would also place him back in close proximity with his father. He realizes that the concern he vocalizes to the Dean that he “might get sick or fail and there’s more in the house besides,” sounds “as lame as it was” (*TD* 187). Although he recognizes that his concern about his body’s reliability sounds pathetic in the ears of the authority, he also recognizes his need to protect himself, for he remains vulnerable. *The Dark* closes with Young Mahoney planning to give up his scholarship and leave the university to take civil service employment with the Electricity Supply Board (E.S.B.) based on the rationale that the bureaucratic position offers greater, more immediate, security and also some measure of independence.

*The Dark*’s narrative perspective reflects the protagonist’s instability and difficulty in differentiating himself from among others in his family unit. Throughout, the novel alternates abruptly between first-, second- and third-person voices, a strategy that continually calls attention to the unsettled and shifting arrangements of the protagonist among the other characters and the relationship among the individual, the unit group, and even the reader. If there is a pattern of voice instanced in the novel, it is more suggestive than systematic. At the level of narrative voice, the novel thus poses a

question regarding the individual's relationship to the other members of his family, suggesting that Young Mahoney's individual position with respect to the unit group is unstable.

McGahern's use of the shifting point of view is a strategy that captures and calls attention to the protagonist's struggle to become "utterly free and alone," a position this protagonist cannot achieve, let alone maintain. In the second chapter, for example, the "he" of the first chapter merges with his siblings in a collective "they" subject.<sup>21</sup> James Cahalan notes that McGahern's novel "includes a somewhat ironic undercurrent" with this shifting point of view and, indeed, this technique muddies the possibility of expressing the protagonist's individual consciousness (110). When McGahern employs the second person voice in chapter six, after also using first person singular and third person singular voices, the effect is disorienting. The chapter begins with the line, "Much of the worst in the house had shifted towards the others, you had your own room with the red shelves after long agitation, you had school and books, you were a growing man" (*TD* 34). An effect of the second person voice is an injection of ambiguity as to whether the line constitutes a self-address or an address to the reader.<sup>22</sup> The reader may or may not feel hailed, depending on the reader's personal experience with having a room of one's own, red shelves, and a sense that "the worst" can be shifted to others. This unfamiliarity is resolved as it becomes clearer that the "you" refers to Young Mahoney.

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<sup>21</sup> The protagonist vacillates in and out of the plural form that Daugherty has described in a forthcoming article as a characteristic of the sentimental Irish childhood narrative.

<sup>22</sup> Richardson notes that "one of the more unsettling features of this mode of narration [second person] is that this distinction can be collapsed whenever the 'you' could refer to the reader as well as the protagonist" (*Unnatural Voices* 20). He proposes that some thematic pattern governs the pronominal shifts in *The Dark* (69). *The Dark* several indications here and elsewhere that it assumes readers will identify with the feeling of resentment described. Devine has suggested that the characteristic spareness and "innovative shifting of narrative point of view" combines to force "the reader to form his own judgments about the meaning of words and events presented" (49).

The choice to refer to Young Mahoney using the second person offers some indication that Young Mahoney feels some remove from himself in this period. However, McGahern soon employs another narrative voice at the beginning of another chapter. The experimental, unstable narrative voice constitutes an aspect of McGahern's testing of the possibility of this individual's emergence from the Mahoney family unit.

Fluctuations among the narrative voice continue through the text and, thus, his relationship to the narrative voice remains unsettled. Whether there is a clear pattern to the fluctuations of the narrative voice is debatable, though some critics have discerned trends such as the increasing use of the "I."<sup>23</sup> No one stance is held for long, however, and the last chapter forgoes pronouns completely, a textual strategy that leaves the issue less than resolved.<sup>24</sup> Notably, Mahoney, not his son, pronounces the last line of the novel: "Good night, my son, God bless you," a blessing that parrots the Catholic church's claim of authority over its parishioners, so that the novel closes with emphasis on the forces that have provided shape to the text's main identity (191). Young Mahoney's last line, the penultimate line of the novel, "Good night so, Daddy," is a return to the vocabulary Young Mahoney used in childhood to address his father, a regression from the more egalitarian "Mahoney" and more mature "father" he uses in the novel's latter chapters (191). I read the lack of markers of first-, second-, or third-person perspective as an abandonment of the protagonist's self-individualizing project; he can start that project

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<sup>23</sup> Devine says, "The shifts in point of view have no easily schematized pattern, making the changes more casual, less forced, and at the same time preserving their impact by keeping them unexpected. Changes in point of view are used to emphasize particular scenes and to force the reader to form his own judgments of the events presented by gradually refining the narrator out of the narrative" (53-54). He mentions the "absence of narrative presence in the last chapter" (Devine 54).

<sup>24</sup> For a more thorough reading of the implications of narrative voice in *The Dark*, see van der Ziel, who understands *The Dark* as a further development of Beckett's 'narrator/narrated' who creates the self through shifts of narrative perspective where "the main aim of the shifting perspective is to reflect the narrator's quest for a way of seeing himself: a search for his own identity" (106).

again and again through his life, but has let go of the bitterness with which he had been pursuing it. He recognizes that he will remain an incomplete self for the duration of his existence. Young Mahoney cannot differentiate himself from his father and the larger, paternalistic mechanisms of control he symbolizes; it is an exercise in futility only damaging to himself to continue the attempt. Having come to the understanding that he will not, and indeed, cannot, prevent being “linked with and associated with [his] father,” he has let go of his need to say “I” because he learns that there was “no real reason” to continue struggling to establish that “I” under these conditions (*TD* 186). Relenting from that struggle at least allows him to “laugh purely, without bitterness, for the first time” as he walks through the Galway rain with his father (*TD* 188).

Young Mahoney’s struggle can be traced back to the initial moments of the text. From its opening pages, McGahern’s novel evidences how patrolling and policing the body, its boundaries, and associated sexual impulses and drives was an unspoken (and therefore all-the-more powerful) expectation for the subject in this environment. The opening scene, for example, suggests that the forces affecting the shape of this protagonist (forces here channeled through the father who takes a certain amount of pleasure in exerting his authority over his son) target the body as an object of control, fetishize this targeting, and make bodily contact a point of concern for the youth. McGahern represents the youth’s body as open, and as unable to withstand such pointed targeting.

During the brutal initial scene, Young Mahoney learns that he lacks control over his body, and that this lack will thrust him into painful situations. *The Dark* begins by depicting a painful, formative experience for the protagonist: the elder Mahoney punishes

his son for purportedly allowing an obscenity, the word, “fuck,” to escape his lips. “I didn’t mean, it just came out,” the youth objects to the authority figure, a statement that indicates his failure to police what he allows to escape from his mouth (*TD* 7). The father echoes this thought in his corrective, “the filth that’s in your head came out, you mean” as he brings the formerly insignificant youth (who “didn’t mean”) into the world of the text with his commands in the opening lines, initiating him into the social order (*TD* 7). In the ensuing brutal—and witnessed—scene in which the father marches the son into his sisters’ room to be beaten, the father further compels the son to break. He topples the defensive position the son has set up for himself against his father, and breaches his physical defenses.<sup>25</sup> Mahoney makes Young Mahoney subject to his will and authority; the father ensures that the son is stripped bare and shamed in being held as example before one of his sisters. The treatment leaves the son irrevocably tainted by his leaking body; subsequently, the son will remain broken and impure, unable to ever feel capable of controlling his body and fully redeeming himself. In this prime moment, Young Mahoney experiences his open body to be beyond his control and subject to his father.

As the scene progresses, Mahoney orders his son to strip naked, first making verbal demands and then compelling obedience with silence: he “just moved closer. He didn’t lift a hand, as if the stripping compelled by his will alone gave him pleasure”

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<sup>25</sup> Froula summarizes that initiation rites performed on the modern body “symbolically enact a paternal appropriation of maternal origin as the fathers first force the son to break and repress his early identification with women and mothers and then compensate him for that loss by conferring their secret knowledge, their powers of symbolic birthgiving, upon him—powers endowed with ‘higher’ social value by the mystifying ritual that enacts and bestows them” (39). Appropriating the son’s maternal origin in this scene is a cheap task; his mother is dead. On a broader level, in the moment at the beginning of *The Dark*, I refer to as “the snap,” the father clearly forces the son to break but does not compensate him with powers endowed with ‘higher’ social value. The son is stripped bare but is not compensated by his father. Moreover, he becomes irrevocably tainted by his contact with abjection. He remains broken and impure, unable to control his body and fully redeem or martyr himself.

(McGahern 8).<sup>26</sup> Mahoney then orders his naked son into position in a leather chair and stands over him with his belt twitching “against his trousers, an animal’s tail” (*TD* 8). He administers two strikes with the belt, hitting the chair both times. In the moment, it is impossible for the son to recognize that the belt hits the leather skin of the chair and not his own skin. Young Mahoney does not know where his body leaves off and where the chair begins. The boy feels himself to be like a “broken animal” as he is forced to “lie in the chair, lie there and wait” for the threatened lashing (*TD* 9). In this moment, he feels himself broken open: Mahoney stresses Young Mahoney beyond his capacity to control his body, and his general incapacity for control is established as his internal weakness. As Young Mahoney waits for the belt to come down on him, “[s]omething in him snapped. He couldn’t control his water and it flowed from him over the leather of the seat. He’d never imagined horror such as this, waiting naked for the leather to come down on his flesh, would it ever come, it was impossible and yet nothing could be much worse than this waiting” (*TD* 9). This scene triggers a bodily response from this young man: hearing the sound of the belt hitting its target, he urinates on himself and the chair. In this encounter with his father, Young Mahoney is produced as a subject, specifically as a subject who inhabits a material body that ought not be trusted to maintain its proper functions. He will never trust his ability to control his material body and will be haunted by continual confrontations with his inability through the course of the text.

The protagonist’s struggle stems from being brought into identity in the textual world as an unreliable body, in the moment of the “snap.”<sup>27</sup> Young Mahoney might run,

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<sup>26</sup> The argument Herr puts forth in “The Erotics of Irishness” can further illuminate the arresting of somatic energy seen here.

<sup>27</sup> We might also say that “the snap” shows him to be a hybrid of the kinds of prisoners Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punishment*. In the moment of his interpellation, he understands his body to be broken by



not yet fully clothed, to the comfort of “the old bolted refuge of the lavatory, with the breeze blowing in its one airhole” where he and his siblings “all rushed hours as these to sit in the comforting darkness and reek of Jeyes Fluid to weep and grope their way in hatred and self-pity back to some sort of calm,” but he will never sustain that calm for long and repeatedly feels the need to return to this site where his abject state can be brought to a temporary equilibrium (*TD* 10). His abject body will, again and again, threaten to return Young Mahoney to the “pit of horror” he had touched during this initial encounter (10). He will later, for example, feel a “diarrhoea of tension” and a sense that he “could sit all night on a lavatory bowl” when he considers entering a co-ed dancehall, and takes only temporary solace in recusing himself from entering the dance (*TD* 175, 176). The social environment promises to create more sexual tension and excitement than he believes he could control, so, already defeated, he chooses to abstain and mitigate the risk that he will act improperly, since he has found he will not grow able to fully prevent it.

## II: THE GROWING BODY IN DE VALERA’S IRELAND

In common with many societies emerging from colonialism (and national environments in general), Irish society in the middle of the twentieth century championed a strict moral code. Unlike many other Anglophone nations emerging from colonialism in the twentieth century, the theistic nationalism that arose in Ireland following Independence was strongly Roman Catholic in tone. For instance, famously, and tellingly, the draft of the Irish Constitution ratified in 1937 was directly influenced by

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the discipline of power, becoming the kind of prisoner who loses his soul (i.e., internalizes biopolitical controls).

Archbishop John Charles McQuaid and was read by officials at the Vatican before it was presented to the citizens of Ireland.<sup>28</sup> With this backdrop, Roman Catholic moral and spiritual standards were particularly prominent in Irish society.<sup>29</sup>

It is useful at this juncture to provide an outline of the context surrounding *The Dark*, including the figure of Eamon De Valera. The conservative, religious Roman Catholic political leader emerged as a public figure during the struggle for Irish Independence from Britain and proceeded to serve as a government leader in various capacities for more than half a century. De Valera, for instance, largely undertook the framing of the Irish constitution.<sup>30</sup> A key player in the 1916 Easter Rising and the Irish War of Independence, de Valera served as the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State (the governing body prior to Ireland's becoming a sovereign state) and then as Ireland's first *Taoiseach* (head of government) from 1937-1948, 1951-43, and 1957-59 before accepting the more ceremonial and symbolic position of President, an office he held from 1959 until 1973. While the man was hardly the sole influence on the conservative cultural formation, referring broadly to "de Valera's Ireland" has become

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<sup>28</sup> For a history of the drafting, including de Valera's role in it, see Keogh and McCarthy.

<sup>29</sup>As McGahern would later put it in his *Memoir* (2005), "By 1950, against the whole spirit of the 1916 Proclamation, the State had become a theocracy in all but name. The Church controlled nearly all of education, the hospitals, the orphanages, the juvenile prison systems, the parish halls. Church and State worked hand in hand (210). In his characterization of life in Ireland by 1950, McGahern refers to the political chain of events the 1916 Easter Rising helped set off as the Irish fought for independence from British colonial rule, resulting in the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 and then the Republic of Ireland in 1937.

<sup>30</sup> John A. Murphy encapsulates de Valera's importance to Irish political life thus: "If there were no other reasons for de Valera's importance, he was at the center of political life in this country for forty-three years, not including the fourteen-year period as President. We have here a span of political power and influence virtually unparalleled in contemporary Europe and in Irish history" (2). Coogan colorfully summarizes de Valera's import to twentieth-century Irish life thus: "As befitted a man who sometime seemed to model his actions on the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Three Divine Persons in One God, his tangible legacies are three also: the Irish Constitution; the largest Irish political party, Fianna Fail; and the second largest Irish newspaper empire, the Irish Press Group, founded, as was so much of his political strength, on Irish America. His intangible influences can still be traced in the divisions between the leading Irish political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and in attitudes towards Northern Ireland, Church-State relationships, the role of women in Irish society, the Irish language and the whole concept of an Irish nation" (1).

shorthand for the repressive social climate and religious paternalism experienced in the Republic at the time, an experience which was enforced by a close collaboration of the Catholic church and the Irish state (Ferriter, *Judging Dev*). As one critic puts it, “Quite simply the history of Ireland for much of the twentieth century is the history of de Valera” (Coogan 1). The model of Irishness associated with de Valera’s Ireland, a banal nationalism that, as Tricia Cusack argues, “misrepresented Ireland as unmodernised and yet perpetuated a strong official resistance to modernity by the Irish state and the Catholic Church,” held sway over the discursive field of post-independence Ireland (235).<sup>31</sup>

The discursive field in post-independence was particularly complicated in terms of religion and gender. Some indication of the general character of the time McGahern describes can be seen in contrast between two significant documents, the *Forógra na Poblachta* or *Poblacht na hEireann* (Proclamation of the Republic or Proclamation of Irish Independence, also known as the 1916 Proclamation) and the Preamble of the *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Constitution of Ireland or 1937 Constitution).<sup>32</sup> Notably, a shift in the explicit gendering of the Irish nation and to a citizenry more gendered masculine occurs between the two and a greater emphasis on religion, specifically Roman Catholicism, surfaces. The 1916 Proclamation begins by declaring that, “In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland,

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<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most concise articulation of this vision of Ireland appears in De Valera’s now infamous 1943 St. Patrick’s Day address: “That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age” (qtd. in Keogh 133-134). As Cahalan summarizes it, the conservative moral code of the era is seen as having a “newly puritanical, Catholic-dominated, antifemale, antisexual ethos” (19). Cahalan cites Weekes, who notes that “Women [were] no more free in the Ireland of the rebel Eamon de Valera than they were in that of Queen Victoria” (22, qtd. in Cahalan 19). See also Rogers, St. Peter, Nash, and Valente, all of whom Cahalan cites (19).

<sup>32</sup> For an extensive, Kristevan examination of the foundational texts that constituted modern Ireland, see Pryor.

through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.”<sup>33</sup> The Preamble of the 1937 Constitution, by contrast, begins by evoking “the Name of the Most Holy Trinity,” referring to an exclusively Christian doctrine about the unity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The narrowing of religious sentiment from monotheistic deity to explicitly Christian deity is complimented by a different arrangement of players. In the Proclamation, the figure of Ireland is decidedly female and is referred to as having “organised and trained her manhood [her fighting sons]... having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal herself, she now seizes that moment... relying in the first on her own strength.”<sup>34</sup> In 1916, the cause is put “under the protection of the Most High God,” a theistic but non-denominational figure who can bless the Irish nation which must, “by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.” By contrast, the Preamble to the Constitution acknowledges “all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained all our fathers through centuries of trial, Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our Nation.” The 1937 document does not give the nation a gendered pronoun, acknowledges fathers but not mothers, and privileges a discourse of Christian obligation. Rather than a relationship between the martyr/fighting son and the female nation, the later document offers a vision of a collective citizenry creating unity and social order through giving “to ourselves this Constitution.” The Preamble to the Constitution promises that the “dignity and freedom

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<sup>33</sup> The gendering of the Irish nation in this document is by no means uncomplicated. As Weekes notes, for example, “Pearse’s famous Easter 1916 Proclamation spoke traditionally of Ireland as ‘her’ in the past tense, but when describing a futuristic, free country, he called Ireland ‘it’” (15).

<sup>34</sup> The text explicitly references as “her manhood” the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, all groups with overwhelmingly male membership.

of the individual may be assured,” but, as McGahern later suggests in his *Memoir*, its concerns about attaining “true social order” and restoring “the unity of our country” through the family unit predominated, as Article 41 of the Irish Constitution demonstrated by declaring the family unit to be the basic unit of Irish society.

In the face of this context, with his coming-of-age novel, McGahern seeks to portray the development of the offspring of a generation of Irish men who had witnessed a revolution and then the solidification of a repressive, conservative, religious cultural regime. This is to say that the male heads of household that are a mainstay of McGahern’s novels were part of the generation who saw the social form of the “family cell,” a conservative social formation already dominant in Ireland, given further authority in national discourse and in the Irish Constitution of 1937. The family cell model is based on a social formation in which a domestic unit group consisting of male and female spouses and their offspring is privileged, enshrining the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm. More than that, Kathryn Conrad argues, it is an ideology that believes “maintaining and containing the heterosexual family is... the most effective way to control borders, to reproduce the nation and state, to ensure ‘stability’”(3-4). An idealized vision of the family cell, with its prescribed roles for men, women, and children, was a key mechanism of twentieth century Irish life and society and was crucial to upholding the status quo instituted while de Valera was in power. The vision was backed up by an array of social and political legislation, many of which were formed around Article 41.3.1, in which the State “pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack.”

McGahern inscribes his protagonist within the family cell model, a social formation and ideology that underwrote the de Valeran vision of the Irish nation.

The workings of the Irish family cell model and the interrelated culture of containment that prevailed in twentieth-century Ireland has been the subject of several important studies of Irish cultural formations. My analysis here draws on the work of scholars such as Conrad, Margot Backus, and James M. Smith. Backus, drawing on Foucault's observations, demonstrates how the form of the heteronormative nuclear family cell, a central aspect of European social formations, had long been entrenched even more fully in Ireland by patriarchal Christianity and by British colonialism; that family structure was "central to that system's perpetuation" (Backus 240). In her analysis of the family cell in Irish National Discourse into the twentieth century, Conrad builds on Backus's observations in her study, *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse*, in order to demonstrate that the maintenance and perpetuation of this system ultimately "freezes the public sphere and reentrenches a limiting discourse of containment and exclusion" and suggests that this "state of affairs means political stagnation, the death of a public sphere, and justification for continued abuses of power—all in the name of the family" (4). Conrad notes that the effects of this system "are most obviously felt by those who do not fit the model and are excluded, silenced, or punished; but all, even those who seem empowered within the system, are held hostage by it, trapped within the family cell" (4). If the individual family cell could not keep to the model, it could be reinforced by what Smith has termed "Ireland's Architecture of containment."<sup>35</sup> Smith has demonstrated how those who did

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<sup>35</sup> According to Smith, the "concrete form of Ireland's architecture of containment encompassed an array of interdependent institutions: industrial and reformatory schools, mother and baby homes, adoption agencies,

not fit this model—including “unmarried mothers, illegitimate and abandoned children, orphans, the sexually promiscuous, the socially transgressive, and, often, those merely guilty of ‘being in the way’”— all-too-often found themselves subject to and even incarcerated within an interconnected system of institutions, legislation, and official and public discourses (Smith xiii). McGahern’s novel speaks to the difficulty of emerging as an individual from the Irish family cell and sensitively portrays how the architecture of his family cell constrains the emergence of the protagonist.

The family cell ideology and obsession with containment plays out in McGahern’s fiction through the bodily dynamics in his work, particularly through the boundary erotics among the father, the child, and the world outside. McGahern’s work often explores the workings of the family cell model through, for instance, the father’s struggle to “deal with the outside” for “[a]ll 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” (McGahern, *Amongst Women* 12). As Siobhan Holland suggests, a tendency for his father figures to feel his children around him almost literally as a cell, protective outer layer, of “his shell of self” characterizes McGahern’s work. In *The Dark*, this nascent dynamic of enclosure in the family unit can be recognized in the inverse feeling of “something breaking” experienced when Joan, the second eldest sibling of the family and the first child to be sent out to earn wages, rides away from the home in the priest’s car, and the subsequent sense of restoration that attends her return (*TD* 49). Concomitantly with the enclosure of the family around the father, there is a feeling of claustrophobia on the part of the children that they are formed

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and magdalen asylums, among others. In its more abstract form this architecture comprised both the legislation that inscribed these issues and the numerous official and public discourses that resisted admitting to the existence and function of their affiliated institutions” (2).

by and around their father, that “It’d be always as this” with their “hopeless life with no sign of change” under his stifling rule (*TD* 35). In other words, McGahern’s widowed father exerts a sort of centripetal force on the family cell. Such centering of the family around a father as capricious, cunning and frustrated as Mahoney lends even greater urgency to the protagonist’s drive to break away from his father.

The Mahoney family unit bespeaks the strains of the larger social matrix because in McGahern’s work, the model of the family cell is stripped to its most basic form. In representing a household headed by a widowed father, *The Dark* pursues an extreme version of this social model to its outcome. McGahern’s characterizations of father figures and their domestic authority over their children—Mahoney refers to his children as “this house”—are complex (*TD* 8). Through them, we see the pressures exerted on the family cell from within and without the family unit. As Holland notes, the “father figures in McGahern’s fiction are not easily assimilable to myths about a complacent mid-century patriarchy” and they “draw attention to the tensions and instabilities that exist in an Irish patriarchal social matrix which is performatively constructed and vulnerable to resistance” (186, 186-7). “In fact,” she argues, father figures

emerge as compromised figures that see themselves as effectively marginalized within the hierarchized operations of the new state. While they exercise real power over their families through verbal, physical, and even sexual violence, their perception that they have been disenfranchised draws attention to flaws in alliances between men in the home, the Church, and the establishment more generally. (Holland 186)



In significant part because the mother's passing damaged the Mahoney family and because authority over the unit has further accumulated to the father figure, the weight of Mahoney's authority over the family unit is intense. So, too, are the pressures society exerts on the family.

The wife's absence from the Mahoney home affects, among other dynamics, the family economy and how sexual energy circulates. It makes Mahoney solely responsible for the economic upkeep of his multiple children and returns this sexually initiated man to a supposedly celibate role; *The Dark* does not indicate that this widowed father will pursue sex with another woman or remarry.<sup>36</sup> McGahern is aware of how these issues interrelate, referring in one interview to what he called a "cultivation of sexlessness" at large in Irish culture that he links closely to economic pressures. The figure of the bachelor epitomized this phenomenon for McGahern in that "it wasn't economically possible for him [the figure] to marry until the parents grew too old. Celibacy was admired because of economic necessity, and, of course, the church came and copperfastened that" (Carlson interview 64).<sup>37</sup> The difficulty of sustaining celibacy is a recurring feature in McGahern's work and *The Dark* does not shy from representing the recirculations of frustrated sexuality within the Mahoney family cell. It shows, for example, the widowed father finding an outlet for his sexual frustrations in the abuse of his children. Even so, he acclimates his actions to the evolving shape of his family cell dynamic, sometimes with difficulty. Categories like birth order and sex seem to be factors in his selection of targets; "much of the worst" of it shifts towards the younger

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<sup>36</sup> The second marriage of the widowed father is a main concern in McGahern's later novel *Amongst Women*.

<sup>37</sup> For a provocative study of how the cultivation of such sexlessness may have affected individuals in a rural Irish community around the time *The Dark* was published, see Scheper-Hughes.

siblings when it is noted that the eldest son is “a growing man” and, similarly, there is an outbreak of violence around the time his daughter Joan begins to menstruate (*TD* 34).

As Mahoney’s attention roves around within the family, McGahern emphasizes the tight bonds that hold the family together; the family is bound up together so intimately that the teenage son knows the intimate processes of his sister’s pubescent body.

In *The Dark*, bodily pressures are also realized as economic pressures. Over time, bodily reality will destabilize the family cell; the corporeal declines that come with parents’ advanced ages and the bourgeoning of children into adults bring about necessary re-organizations of the family unit and, perhaps, dispersal of individual members of the family cell into the wider society. The premature loss of half the parental unit puts strain on the family resources, perhaps allowing economic pressures to register as centrifugal forces on the young family sooner. The already-compromised cell finds itself further exposed. For example, the shopkeeper, Ryan, who offers Joan a position as a domestic in his home, creates a threat to the entire Mahoney family. Notice that the matter of Joan’s return to the family cell is not fully settled until after Mahoney has established that Joan had not been “harm[ed]” by Ryan’s “interfering” with her, in effect, that she has not returned to the Mahoney home pregnant with a Ryan child, which would affect, among other things, the Mahoney family’s reputation. Further, in the family cell mode of thinking, any effects his interference may have on Joan are far less relevant than the possibility that the Mahoney cell may acquire another mouth to feed or other siblings’ opportunities would be harried by their sister’s disgrace at a time when it is already becoming necessary to risk sending its members out into the world for economic support.

The family cell model is a significant factor in the organization of the domains of control over individual bodies. In *The Dark*, children's bodies clearly fall under the domain of the family cell. Even though he is victimized by this social organization himself, Young Mahoney is conditioned to see children's bodies as the property of their family in general and the paternal head of the household in particular. When, for example, Ryan threatens the integrity of the Mahoney family cell by using his authority over his employee to harass Joan sexually, Young Mahoney is outraged. Why, the protagonist wonders, "couldn't Ryan climb on his wife in the deck-chair, that's what he had married her for, or couldn't he tear off the swimsuits and straddle the pampered daughters" (*TD* 93). While he does indicate sensitivity to Joan in her plight, Young Mahoney does not here object to the sexual use of young women by paternal authorities in general, he objects to the external threat Ryan poses to the Mahoney family cell and expresses the belief that Ryan's sexual advances should be contained within the Ryan family cell.<sup>38</sup> Recalling that Young Mahoney has experienced his own father's incestuous groping, it becomes clear that a father's dominion over his children's bodies is a principle deeply ingrained in this protagonist. He accedes to Ryan dominion over the bodies of his offspring and the right to use his children as he desires.

### III: THE UNFINISHED IRISH BODY AND THE INTERMINGLED FATHER AND SON

As part of the realistic novel's themes of sexual initiation, repression, frustration, and abuse, McGahern explicitly represents human bodies, including their various fluids

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<sup>38</sup> Conrad observes that the family cell in Ireland "regulated itself by keeping to itself; when social laws were transgressed in the family, self-preservation meant attempting to hide transgressions from the eyes of those who might punish them, whether it be the local community, the church, or the colonial authority... individual family cells regulated their public images and kept any instability under wraps" (9).

and secretions. Given the figuring of the protagonist's bodily openings and materials, we might say that McGahern employs "grotesque realism," Mikhail Bakhtin's term for images of the human that "turn their subject into flesh" by bringing them down to earth from the "higher," abstract level of the soul or spirit (*Rabelais* 20). The grotesque body is an "unfinished and open body (dying, bring forth and being born) [that] is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 26-7). While not the exaggerated style typically associated with the notion of grotesque realism (Bakhtin develops the concept as part of his theory of the *carnival*), McGahern's emphasis on Young Mahoney's bodily openings (the orifices through which the outside world passes in and out), and his movement from birth toward death achieves the effect nonetheless. Given the text's grim realism, it is little wonder the usual laughter and playfulness associated with grotesque realism is generally missing from McGahern's bleak, claustrophobic work; sensual pleasures derived from food and drink are crushed in the family's desperate grip on their farm, and sexual pleasure is overlaid by abuse and religious prohibitions: such playfulness conflicts with the text's often determinist sensibility.<sup>39</sup>

McGahern restores only a slight sense of carnival laughter through the ambivalent mixture of happiness and terror that Young Mahoney feels in recognizing that his life will begin again and again. That recognition gestures toward the principle of material growth that undergirds grotesque realism. Like Young Mahoney's body, the grotesque body "discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own

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<sup>39</sup> Some critics have primarily approached *The Dark* a naturalist text. As Cleary summarizes in his discussion of twentieth-century Irish naturalism, naturalism's determinist sensibility proceeds from its "assumption that the laws of heredity and social environment, abetted by the underswell of an ungovernable sexual instinct, allowed for only a very constricted sense of human agency" (114).

limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation” because it is an “ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking two links shown at the point where they enter into each other” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 26). *The Dark* shows these elements, particularly copulation and death, as distorted through interactions such as Mahoney’s sexual molestation of Young Mahoney. Through scenes such as the molestation that occurs in chapter three, McGahern blurs the point at which the members of the family unit enter one another in a way that links the experience of the grotesque body with “filth.”

The emblematic encounter I refer to as “the snap” illustrates the youth’s broken, unreliable body in this text, and foregrounds the role of the body in *The Dark* overall. The scene also binds Young Mahoney up with the process of abjection, a dynamic immersion and recoil from the bodily matter that confronts the subject with his mortality and, in this context, his state of subjection to Mahoney. Abjection, we have learned from Julia Kristeva, is an ongoing process of identity formation and maintenance. In her work, *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz advances Kristeva’s work, and suggests that subjectivity can be conceived as the interdependence and interweaving of corporeal exteriority and psychological interiority. Grosz describes bodies as having an ability to “always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control” and suggests that as a consequence of their “organic openness to cultural completion, bodies must take the social order as their productive nucleus. Part of their own ‘nature’ is an organic or ontological ‘incompleteness’ or lack of finality, an amenability to social completion, social ordering and organization” (xi). The organic body in *The Dark*, which

proves resistant to closure and completeness, resonates with Grosz's notion. Young Mahoney's body is a volatile body, written as open to cultural completion but not able to be completed. In this text, the body is liable to amplify his failings by producing and demonstrating his inability to control and maintain himself as a proper self; for instance, bodily materials tend to leak into this text in moments where the protagonist is under pressure. Grosz promotes an understanding of mind and body as inter-inflected and alternate to the delineation of mind from body—and subordination of the latter to the former—that characterizes much of western thought about human subjectivity.<sup>40</sup> *The Dark* similarly understands the body as inter-inflected with the psyche rather than clearly delineated; further, the text illustrates the role of the protagonist's body within the social order and also how the social order shapes that body.

Here, Bakhtin's concepts again become useful because Bakhtin provides a means of framing the critique McGahern mounts by representing Young Mahoney's real, "grotesque" body. Bakhtin opposes the grotesque body, a body that "is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses itself," with the classical body, a body that is a "closed, completed unit" (*Rabelais* 26). If the former, grotesque body is the body associated with carnival, the latter, classical body is the body of official culture, high spiritual rituals, and ceremonies. It is an individualized, consecrated, often clerical body, "monolithically serious" in tone and, most crucially, often stands pedestalled above the "degraded," grotesque body (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 5-20). According to Bakhtin, the classical body presents itself as a self-sufficient and "private, egotistic form, separated from the other spheres of life" (*Rabelais* 19). In this self-sufficiency and separation, the classical body

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<sup>40</sup> Grosz understands bodies to be "the very 'stuff' of subjectivity," "centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency," and to be unfinished, to lack finality in a way that leaves them amenable to "social completion, social ordering and organization" (ix, xi).

has close affinities to the adult form that can lend closure to the classical *Bildungsroman*. It is not a body of endless youth or transitive passing, but a body that has changed from one condition to another and has settled there. In this respect, the classical body has affinities with the symbolic function of the nation, which, as Esty suggests, “gives a finished form to modern societies in the same way that adulthood gives a finished form to the modern subject” (4). McGahern’s representations of the real, material, growing body intervenes in this symbolic function of the *Bildungsroman*. In representing the *Bildungsheld*’s body as continually growing in passing, McGahern separates the adult form of the body from a sense of formal closure and conclusion. Given the affinities of the hero of a *Bildungsroman* and the national culture, in representing his protagonist’s grotesque body, McGahern implies that the national body that Irish cultural authorities sought to promote in various ways was similarly degraded.<sup>41</sup>

Further, McGahern’s representations of the bodily in *The Dark* bring the novel into contact with narratives about Irish national identity in circulation during the twentieth century, including narratives concerned with the theme of blood and blood sacrifice. That is, the theme of blood operates within the discourses of family relations and Irish national identity. With his representation of blood, McGahern activates several registers of meaning related to the body, suggesting in *The Dark* that they are entangled. The abject bodily material, blood, is a symbol with potent metaphysical significations. Blood has force as a metaphor for the loss of innocence, sexual reproduction and family lineage; it also has particular resonance within Irish discourse in the twentieth century. Republican poets, most notably Padraig Pearse, and also W.B. Yeats, relied heavily on a

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<sup>41</sup> For an alternate view of McGahern’s work, see Cleary, who argues that McGahern’s generation of naturalist writers was “distinguished from its predecessor by a lack of overt political engagement or affiliation” (155).

motif of blood sacrifice in their nationalist literary works, employing it in their idealizing visions of Irish men who martyr themselves for Ireland and consecrate the national cause with the sacrifice of their blood. As I alluded during the above discussion, this logic informed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic that declared the Republic of Ireland independent from the United Kingdom, a Proclamation which Pearse himself read out during the 1916 Easter Rising. In her study of Irish culture's investment in these registers, Susan Canon Harris describes the "relationship between the meaning of blood and the meaning of the body, between national politics and sexual politics," a relationship in which certain types of blood are accorded significance to the public cause while others are excluded from the field (2). Sexual distinctions often play an important role in this assignation. For instance, Harris points out that in cultural practice, "there is a vast difference between the blood of the sacrificial martyr and the [menstrual] blood coming from [...] women's bodies. One cleanses; the other stains. One promises rebirth; the other negates that possibility" (Harris 2). Menstrual blood, for example, is regarded as an intensely sexed and impure type of blood and has been, particularly in Irish Republican discourse, as Begona Aretxaga has argued, abjected from the public field due to its "excess of signification" (128). That same discourse readily accommodates male blood; men who spill blood for the national cause are thought heroic. As Harris puts it, blood "which in the martyr's case marks his release from the limited corporeal world into the realm of ideal and abstraction, marks the menstruating woman as mortal, embodied, gendered, tied by her cycle to a temporally bound existence" (Harris 2). The blood sacrifice discourse commonly seen in Irish literary texts in the years leading up to independence was organized through a sexual dichotomy wherein the male sacrifices his



blood to or in service of the female figure of the Irish nation. In *The Dark*, however, blood is organized between the figures of the father and of the son. The role of the body in McGahern's post-independence novel must be understood in light of this alternative relationship

In Irish discourse, especially prior to independence, the story of the Irish subject has been produced time and again as a story about the subject's bodily capacity to bring about the envisioned nation. Yeats and Lady Gregory's play, "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" constitutes the paradigmatic expression of this idea. As Harris encapsulates it, this story rejects "the mortal Irish mother in favor of a symbolic one whose body, unlike that of her pedestrian counterparts, is inviolable and who can therefore provide the Irish subject with a clean genealogy and an uncomplicated pedigree" (Harris 11). By 1965, approaching the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1916, it was becoming eminently clear that the previous generation had brought about a durable incarnation of the Irish nation; McGahern's novel is invested in portraying the subsequent generation's experience of that nation. A struggle to reconcile the Irish subject of McGahern's generation supposedly released from the limited world into the realm of ideal and abstraction with the mortal, embodied, gendered, temporally-bound existence of the subject depicted in this novel is a struggle that plays out on the site of the protagonist's body. The realm of ideal and abstraction McGahern contends is shaped by his location in the particular time and place. With his mortal Irish mother dead and the nation stabilized, the protagonist is left examining the lines of his descent. The material conditions his protagonist contends with are powerfully shaped and constrained by the authoritarian father's position as a widowed, male head of

a large, Catholic household in rural Ireland, a position that accords him great authority and influence over his eldest son and every one else in his family.

McGahern uses the device of a blood-containing flea to explore the interrelation of the father and son. The flea is a classic metaphysical conceit, perhaps most associated with John Donne's poem "The Flea," in which the speaker points out to the addressee that "in this Flea, our two bloods mingled be" (ll 4). In both works, Donne's and McGahern's, the flea is recognized as a vessel containing the comingled blood of two people, a vessel that colors the fingernail that crushes it. By Donne's light, the flea is a device involved in a playful attempt at seduction, a prelude and gateway to sexual intercourse. The speaker of the metaphysical poem uses innuendo to suggest that since their blood is already mingled in the flea that has bitten both the speaker and the addressee, they are "almost, yea, more than married" and thus might as well share a marriage bed. In *The Dark*, however, the flea references a gross perversion of the Mahoney family's marriage bed. The flea also signifies contagion, a lack of hygiene, and the absence of the mother who is assigned responsibility for the female domestic order. While the speaker of Donne's metaphysical love poem describes a flea that has bitten both the speaker and a love interest, McGahern's flea has bitten both Mahoney and his son. Mahoney discovers it one night when the two had been prevented from sleep by the biting fleas that share their bed. This night, the "fleas were having a real feast" (TD 22). Together in the dark of the night, father and son get up to hunt the fleas from the bedclothes, catching and crushing them with their thumbnails. In *The Dark*, the son's blood, comingled with his father's in the chalice of the flea, stains his father red. When Mahoney, the father, catches sight of the trace of blood a crushed flea leaves on his

thumbnail, he holds it to the light, looks at it closely, and announces to his son that it is “Your blood and mine... those bastards feeding all the night on our blood... Just think of it—those bastards feeding all the night on your blood and mine,” an intimation that licenses what is to come (*TD* 23). As Donne’s poem indicates, such comingling of bodily fluids is associated with a sexual act. Indeed, Donne’s poem trades on the equation of comingled bodily fluids with sex. His poem draws focus to the mingling of the flirtatious speaker and the desired addressee, literally in the vessel of the flea but also through the sexual intercourse the frustrated speaker seeks but does not find. In *The Dark*, then, McGahern uses a flea to explore the symbolic and physical interrelation of a sexually abusive, widowed father and his unnamed son. Positioned on the heels of a scene in which Mahoney sexually molests his son, the playful seductiveness of Donne’s poem is completely absent from McGahern’s scene. Whereas Donne’s speaker pleads for the life of the flea, Mahoney proclaims, “[t]he quicker we get the DDT the better” (*TD* 23). Exterminating the flea removes the evidence it bears.

Since the discourse of blood ties positions a son as the bearer of his father’s bloodline, the son can thus himself be considered a vessel of his father’s blood. By deploying the flea as an additional vessel containing the blood of the two characters, McGahern draws further attention to the incestuous form of touching that Mahoney has just forced on his son in the bed. McGahern’s use of this device underscores how Mahoney transgresses his son’s personal space with unwanted, intimate, physical contact. The extent of this breach is developed in the third chapter of *The Dark*, which begins with Young Mahoney lying in the bed he shares with his father, waiting for him to retire for the night. Father and son share the bed the mother has recently vacated; due to the

mother's recent demise, the family's large size, and the austere circumstances of their life in mid-twentieth century rural Ireland, the son now shares the family's marriage bed with his father. In his wife's absence, Mahoney has begun to turn to his son for comfort "the nights he wanted love" (*TD* 17). Oftentimes he spills out his emotions to his son, keeping the youth up with "midnight heart-easings that could go on far into the mornings"; however, for Young Mahoney "there were worse things in these nights than words" as well (*TD* 19). In this situation, words are themselves perverse in their effects. Mahoney's "heart-easings" lead into series of interrogations about his son's filial love, which Young Mahoney can only answer affirmatively with the statement, "I do." The utterance of the words used to perform the rite of marriage in this context serves to draw attention to how the boy is drawn involuntarily but inalterably into union with his father. Once the boy has uttered "I do," Mahoney induces Young Mahoney to kiss him and takes the opportunity to put his hands about the youth. The "worse things" begin. As "the other face closed on his," Young Mahoney feels "the sharp stubble grown since the morning and the nose and the kiss, the thread of the half-dried mucus coming away from the other lips in the kiss" (*TD* 20). On the pretext that it "eases wind," Mahoney proceeds to touch his son intimately (*TD* 20). As the scene unfolds, the "worse things" are depicted, although their precise nature of these "things" remains obscure because the line between referent and euphemism has blurred. "[H]ands drew him closer. They begin to move in caress on the back, shoving up the nightshirt, downwards lightly to the thighs and heavily up again, the voice echoing rhythmically the movement of the hands" as Mahoney may be masturbating either himself, his son, or both (*TD* 20). The scene

ends with Young Mahoney feeling “unimaginable relief to be free and to suck breath in and to wipe his track off the lips” (*TD* 21).

The style McGahern uses to describe the sexual abuse of the son by the father obfuscates the bodily attributes, raising questions about what has occurred.<sup>42</sup> The writing expresses how the boy is helpless to remove himself from the situation physically or mentally, but does find some recourse in an attempt to distance himself from the situation through language. Young Mahoney has learned, apparently through repeated experience, “it was better not to think or care, and the hands—the rhythmic words—were a kind of pleasure if thought and loathing could be shut out” (*TD* 20). As if trying to secure a conscious removal for Young Mahoney where he can “not listen and not care,” the novel styles an ambiguous linguistic space around his relationship with his body (*TD* 20-21). McGahern uses the definitive article to establish and collapse the distance between Young Mahoney and his body; the article depersonalizes the body part it identifies. McGahern describes Mahoney’s touch as coming from “the other face” “the nose and the kiss,” “the stroking hands,” the fingers the thighs” and “the arms” (*TD* 20). As the scene goes on, the source of the heat and the sweat becomes ambiguous. “The growing hotness and the sweat were the worst but it was better to lie in the arms and not listen except to the thick lulling rhythm of the voice as the hands stroked and not listen and not care. It was easy that way except for the waves of loathing that would not stay back” (*TD* 20-1).

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<sup>42</sup> McGahern will later include a passage in his autobiographical text, *Memoir*, that offers to shed light on this scene. “When my father came late to bed and enquired as he took off his clothes if I was awake, I nearly always feigned sleep. He never interfered with me in an obviously sexual way, but he frequently massaged my belly and thighs. As in all other things connected with the family, he asserted that he was doing this for my good: it relaxed taut muscles, eased wind and helped bring on sleep. In these years, despite my increasing doctrinal knowledge of what was sinful, I had only the vaguest knowledge of sex or sexual functions, and took him at his word; but as soon as it was safe to do so, I turned away on some pretext or other, such as sudden sleepiness. Looking back, and remembering his tone of voice and the rhythmic movement of his hand, I suspect he was masturbating. During the beatings there was sometimes the same sexual undertow, but louder, coarser.” (188)

Like Mahoney's, Young Mahoney's body is likely to be generating heat and sweat in this situation. Young Mahoney is unable to control his bodily response to his father's touch; he feels loathing, but he also indicates that his body, too, experiences heat and unruly feelings. He will not listen "except..."; he cannot keep the sounds and sensations back. Waves of loathing constitute a more than reasonable response to his sexually abusive father, but the relation among the father's and the son's bodies in this scene is indefinite. It is clear that Young Mahoney struggles against them but cannot keep back the voice and the rhythm and the strokes and is instead carried along with the "waves...that would not stay back."

The admission that Young Mahoney might take a reluctant, vague and conditional pleasure in "the hands—the rhythmic words," in the physical motions occurring in this scene, complicates matters (*TD* 20). Mahoney's sexual excitement is evident; some question revolves around the degree of mutual physical experience. It becomes possible that Mahoney is masturbating either himself or his son or even both; nouns like "belly" and "thighs" can be euphemisms.<sup>43</sup> At stake in determining this reading is the possibility that Mahoney may be controlling his son's body and may be forcing him to experience his own sexual excitement. Young Mahoney lacks control in this interaction. Unlike the situation of the comingled bodies in "The Flea," Young Mahoney is comingled with his father and stripped of his bodily autonomy. Donne's poem, by way of contrast, is undertaken to convince the addressee to "stay," implying that the speaker accords the addressee at least enough autonomy to have a choice in the matter. In *The Dark*, the character has no choice. He can no more shut out the waves of "thought and loathing"

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<sup>43</sup> Maher reads them as such, concluding that the "father strokes his son's stomach and genitalia, causing both to reach orgasm" (22).

than “the thick lulling rhythm of the voice as the hands stroke” (*TD* 20). Mahoney holds significant power over Young Mahoney’s body, perhaps even over his sexual response. Certainly, his physical contact with his son leaves a lasting impression on the younger Mahoney’s sexual horizons. Further, his position over his son impinges on the youth’s capacity for self-restraint and control.

#### IV: CONFESSING BODILY VOLATILITY IN *THE DARK*

McGahern’s prose style heavily codes the protagonist’s body as an object with fraught relation to the protagonist. While the bedroom scene from the third chapter I have just described offers an initial introduction to and possible explanation for the technique and the impulse to detachment, the prose here is not unique to the novel in its capacity to defamiliarize and disassociate the protagonist’s body from himself. McGahern’s use of definite articles jettisons the protagonist’s possession of his body in other scenes that depict sexual excitement. For example, McGahern’s depiction of one of the “impure actions” that young Mahoney will later confess to his priest situates young Mahoney in an ambiguous relationship with his body. When Young Mahoney masturbates alone in his room just a few pages later, McGahern again describes sexual climax using the language of waves: “One day, one day, one day rising to a breaking wave, and that shivering pause on the height before the seed pulses, and the lips kiss frantically on the pillow” (*TD* 31). While Young Mahoney masturbates, he fantasizes about an encounter with a woman in a newspaper ad. In the fantasy, he does not claim possession of the body parts that come into contact with this fantasy woman: “[t]he eyes devour the tattered piece of newspaper as hotness grows. Touch the black hair with the

lips, salt of sweat same as my own, let them rove along the rises of the breast. Press the mouth on the black bursting lips, slip the tongue through her teeth” (*TD* 30). While he does use the possessive adjective “my” to claim “sweat” (arguably conceivable as the product of physical, masculine labor), he uses the definite article “the” to label “eyes,” “lips,” “mouth,” and “tongue.” This use of language tends to dissociate young Mahoney from his body. Relatedly, when masturbating, he treats his passive, fantasy woman as “the black hair,” “the breast” and “the shoulder,” effectively reducing her to a collection of objects. He bridges the linguistic gap the article has instituted between himself and his body, making definite his ownership of his body when it is at its most sexually aroused, active, virile, and penetrative. He deploys the first person pronoun in the climax, when he imagines how, “I try to pump madly on the mattress, fighting to get up her nightdress, and get into her” (McGahern 31). When his body is forceful, powerful, and active, he is willing to linguistically connect himself to it by assuming the first person, “I.” The use of the “I,” however, ruptures the distance that the “the” created, as the insertion of the speaker’s voice into the scene makes obvious the fact that the eyes, lips, mouth and tongue are not only definite, but also belong to the speaker. The attempt at detachment from these body parts ultimately reinscribes their physicality, entrenching these physical parts as specific, definite, and the property of the speaker, Young Mahoney.

Against the grain of Irish discourse and at risk to the censor’s ban, McGahern includes sexual materials from these male bodies in the field of representation. With his frank representations of Mahoney and Young Mahoney, who, like his father, also emits semen and other fluids within the pages of the novel, McGahern represents male bodies as sites where viscous, sexual bodily materials adhere and infiltrate the subject. Grosz



has observed that body fluids, “affront a subject’s aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity” by evidencing the lurking imbrications of the subject with what the subject abjects (194). Not only does McGahern represent abject bodily fluids, he intermingles the bodily fluids of father and son. In the course of his sexual act with his son’s body, Mahoney’s bodily fluids rub off onto the body of his son such that, simultaneously, both and neither body owns this borderline, viscous material. For instance, McGahern includes details like “the thread of the half-dried mucus coming away from the other lips in the kiss” that leaves “his track” across them (McGahern 20, 21). In fact, the novel associates several viscous bodily fluids with these male bodies. Though there is no specific mention of semen in this scene, it is clear that the elder Mahoney’s semen marks the bed sheets. At other moments in the novel, Young Mahoney worries about marking the sheets with his own semen, and collects his semen in his sock, spills it onto a newspaper, and spills it into hay the cattle would eat (32, 75, 118 142). In one moment, McGahern highlights this bodily material, as Young Mahoney makes an oblique consecrating gesture with it by taking “the woollen sock that had soaked the seed and h[olding] it to the light” where the attendant “dust of tiredness or hopelessness dry in your mouth” evokes the dust he kneels in while imagining how he might hold up the Sacred Host when serving Eucharist as a priest (*TD* 57, 58). These fluid materials—mucus, saliva, and semen—all mark the boundaries of the physical body, and exist in an ambiguous relationship with the body that produced them. These materials are abject—they belong to and were produced by that body, but, at the same time, no longer constitute a part of that body.<sup>44</sup> Their fluid location at the borders of the body betoken

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<sup>44</sup> These fluids belong in Julia Kristeva’s categorization of the abject. Kristeva explains, “These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death.

those bodies as subversively prone to challenging any attempt at containing the sexual body. If republican discourse promoted an ideal of the male body as heroic and pure, McGahern dismisses the notion with this demonstration that viscous bodily materials originate not only with the female body but also with the male body.

With this rendering of male bodies and male sexual fluids, McGahern expresses the sexual human body as an agent of resistance to the culture of containment prevalent in and around the Mahoney family cell. Grosz elaborates the ways in which sexuality resists containment and is, in fact, “incapable of ready containment” (viii). She argues that sexuality “refuses to stay within its predesignated regions, for it seeps across boundaries into areas that are apparently not its own” (viii). For Grosz, sexuality inserts desire into situations in ways that disturb their controlling definition. For example, as a drive “it infests all sorts of other areas in the structures of desire. It renders even the desire not to desire, or the desire for celibacy, as sexual” (viii). As an activity or practice, sexuality “refuses to accept the containment of the bedroom or to restrict itself to only those activities which prepare for orgasmic pleasure” (Grosz viii). In escaping boundaries, it establishes itself as at the border of meaning.<sup>45</sup> Sexuality’s ability to resonate on multiple levels and elide containment challenges attempts at definition. This intrinsic characteristic is part of what makes the sexual body a powerful object of representation in a literary work. In assigning his characters material, mimetically sexual

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There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver” (3, original emphasis).

<sup>45</sup> This capacity for seepage makes sexuality disturbingly viscous, but it is not viscosity itself that disturbs. Rather, “what is disturbing about the viscous or the fluid is its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper, the solid and the self-identical, its otherness to the notion of an entity” (Grosz 195). Grosz looks to Mary Douglas for the way that she “refers to all borderline states, functions, and positions as dangers, sites of possible pollution or contamination. That which is marginal is always located as a site of danger and vulnerability” (Grosz 195). Both Grosz and Douglas tune their discussions to conceptual as well as physical registers.

bodies, McGahern employs a textual strategy that exposes the vulnerability of a discourse that idealizes bodily purity to the real dimensions of bodily drives.

While Mahoney's interference gives the protagonist's dynamic (dis)avowal of his "grotesque" body greater urgency, the text also articulates a "classical" impulse to disassociate from grotesque bodily materials. Grosz has described and characterized the cultural coding of the body, observing that Western culture has constructed the body in a way that, "in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services" (Grosz 14). In other words, the cultural construction of masculinity and masculine bodies in western society tends to disavow the role of the body in the operations of the male subject and has tended to emphasize the role of the female body as an object. This construction has long been established and entrenched through the sort of dichotomous thinking that Grosz demonstrates the body tends to resist. For instance, in the nineteenth century, as Joseph Valente has described, discourses of Anglo-Saxon supremacism over the Irish "played on and played into the modern, markedly gendered schism of mind and body, thought and feeling, reason and fancy, in order to suggest that the Irish, like women in general, were constitutionally ill-equipped for the dispassionate pursuit of state and social policy and were for that reason properly dispossessed of any real historical agency" (Valente, "Myth of Sovereignty" 190). This dichotomous thinking has long precedent; the matter/form distinction "in terms of the distinction between substance and accident and between a God-given soul and a mortal, lustful, sinful carnality" ushered in by the Christian tradition refigured distinctions "effected

already at the threshold of Western reason” (Grosz 5). McGahern surrounds his character with specific circumstances that combine to bring broad features of Western society’s relationship with the body into relief. The specific charges and exigencies that contribute to the shaping of the individual in Young Mahoney’s time and place amplify this more general relationship.

Another element that is not uniquely or essentially Irish, but which is amplified in the social environment surrounding Young Mahoney, is that of the confessional. Foucault has observed that the act of confession is integral to the production of the subject. The prominence of the confessional to *The Dark*’s expression of Young Mahoney’s development in a strict Roman Catholic environment indicates that McGahern, too, recognizes that confession plays an important role in shaping the embodied subject; both the act of confession and also the Catholic confessional appear repeatedly in *The Dark*. McGahern is working out issues of bodily purity raised by the republican discourse of pure bodily sacrifice to the national cause, and particularly through Young Mahoney’s incestuous bodily comingling with his father, McGahern is working them out in the context of the Irish Roman Catholic tradition. In essence, McGahern is examining how discourses around bodily purity double-team the adolescent subject when he is hedged in by both the paradigms of Irish nationalism and Irish Catholicism. With the confessional theme, McGahern illuminates the way in which embodied subjects internalized his culture’s bodily expectations and codes for excluding bodily reality and experiences from representation. Through representations of confession, McGahern shows how the role of the sexed body, especially the male body,

was conditioned and repressed by cultural practices that affected the production of Irish subjects in this era.

In *The Dark*, the then sixteen-year-old protagonist regularly attends the Catholic duty of confession. As he steadily moves forward in line, he envisions himself moving towards “a confession of guilt, and the moment of confessing would be a kind of death,” imagining an execution with himself as victim and the priest as a famous English hangman who came to Dublin to hang Irish criminals (40). Within that dark, containing space, he lists his sins for his confessor: lies, anger, forgetting to say his prayers, all standard fodder for the confessional. He finds little difficulty in claiming sins of this variety. The admission of another type of sin, however, causes a ‘kind of death’: the confession that he had committed sins of impure thought and impure action. The sexual connotations of these thoughts and actions make them more difficult for the young man to confess, and he cannot do so within the space of the confessional without splitting his actions into physical and mental components. The Catholic institution of the confessional and his confession heavily depends on a separation of mind from body, as does mid-century Irish masculinity, which views the body as the source of dirt and evil and therefore seeks to distance Irish masculinity from embodiment.

The following conversation ensues between Young Mahoney and his priest in the confessional. Young Mahoney employs euphemisms (i.e., “impure actions”), and the priest responds by remaking them linguistically (i.e., exciting yourself), and then inculcating Young Mahoney in the likely futility of attempting to diminish the habit:

“Confess then, my child. You needn’t be afraid.”

“I had impure thoughts and did impure actions.”

“Were these impure actions with yourself or someone else?”

“With myself, father.”

“You deliberately excited yourself?”

“Yes, father.”

“Did you cause seed to come?”

“Yes, father.”

“How many times?”

“Sometimes seven or eight times a day and other times not at all, father.”

“Could you put a number on them?”

“More than two hundred times.”

“And the thoughts?”

“More times than the actions, father.”...

“That is all you have to tell, my child?”

“That’s all, father.”

“You must fight that sin, it’ll grip you like a habit if you don’t, if you don’t break it now you may never be able to break it. You must come often to confession.” (McGahern 41-2)

Throughout Ireland and indeed throughout the Catholic world, uncountable versions of this conversation between the priest and Young Mahoney have taken place.<sup>46</sup> The power dynamics at play in this particular conversation circulate around issues of authority and male sexuality. The priest communicates that Young Mahoney is required to continue to give an accounting of his personal actions to a religious authority. Their exchange also communicates the Catholic Church’s authority to dictate to penitents like Young

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<sup>46</sup> E.g., the famous exchange in Frank O’Connor’s short story, “First Confession.”

Mahoney that they have a duty to properly confess the sin of sexual desire, and to protect themselves from it. The act of confessing itself brought the body under scrutiny, and, in so doing, associated it with sexuality and evil.<sup>47</sup>

Confessing sexual thoughts and actions in this way entails defining them as sinful, since anything sexual is confessed, and anything confessed is a sin. Tom Inglis discusses how the space of the confessional seeks to separate the soul of the penitent from the implicitly sinful body. The architecture of the confessional itself situates the penitent at a remove from his or her body. “Under examination in the confessional,” Inglis claims, “it [the body] was confined to a dark space, hidden from public view, from the confessor, and from the penitent himself” (Inglis 149). The confessional, therefore, becomes a place where it is imperative to hide the penitent’s body, an enclosed space where a penitent learns to mistrust his or her body, and to begin to separate the part of the self that thinks and decides to act from the part of the self that acts. The confessional box becomes a space where a Catholic can learn about dissociating from his or her own body. At the same time, however, it underscores to this protagonist the difficulty of establishing boundaries between his thoughts and actions, in other words, his mind and body, and also the difficulty of disassociating himself from his body and sexual desires.

Young Mahoney is reluctant to confess that he has masturbated more than two hundred times because the confession ties him to repeated sexual behavior. At the same time he feels the compulsion, whether social or personal, to confess this action to the priest. The priest recognizes Young Mahoney’s anxiety, and seeks to alleviate it with the

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<sup>47</sup> Inglis argues that in modern Ireland, “Confession played a crucial role in sexualising the body. The confessional was where the activities of the body were examined and suitable penances distributed. The modern Irish Catholic soul became constituted through a discipline of the body created and maintained by a rigorous system of examination, supervision, and punishment. The body was seen as a major source of evil” (149).

repetition of the comforting address, “my child” and the admonition to not be afraid, statements that work in tandem to reinscribe the priest’s position of power. Young Mahoney’s confession leaves the priest unsurprised. He has heard similar confessions many times before, as evidenced by the rote questions he addresses to the adolescent, and has asked the same questions to illicit the same responses. The ritual becomes formulaic. Louise Fuller points out that in Catholic Ireland, “[f]or many, the fact that their disposition in receiving the sacrament was important scarcely entered in, and confession became a rather mechanical process of confessing sins in number and kind, or if they did not have any, the sins of their past life” (118). For an adolescent such as Young Mahoney, this holds true to the extent that he takes a strict numerical account of his masturbatory sins, counting “[f]ive sins already today, filthiness spilling five times, but did it matter, the first sin was as damning as a hundred and one, but five sins a day made thirty-five in a week, they’d not be easy to confess” (*TD* 31). The habit of counting masturbation instilled by this formula increases Young Mahoney’s anxiety about the quantity of the sins he feels compelled to confess, shifting the focus from the quality of the sin itself. What continues to trouble him is the magnitude of his sexual drives and desires, rendered more difficult to contain as the running tally grows. To Young Mahoney, it signals an inability to consciously control the sexual drives he gave vent to in chapter five when he masturbated with the newspaper clipping.

At this point in the narrative, chapter seven, it has already become clear that this protagonist’s ability to control his sexual drives has been deeply challenged; the bedroom scene with his father has already occurred in chapter three. In his confession, Young Mahoney admits to masturbating, but he does not admit to the sexual behavior that has



taken place between himself and his father. In other words, in the confessional, certain sexual behaviors can be brought within control—the control of the Church, the authorities in Irish society— but certain other, highly fraught sexual behaviors remain outside of that control. Notice that the formula for confession excludes his father’s actions from the field. Strictly speaking, Young Mahoney did not himself entertain “impure thoughts” or undertake “impure actions” in that scene but it does seem as if his father’s actions caused Young Mahoney’s “seed to come.” While his father’s trespass over his son’s body is in itself damaging, the narrative parameters of the confessional put the experience into a state of limbo. By not admitting to or airing his experience of these sexual acts, he cannot be forgiven for them. Therefore they are all the more damaging to his sense of control, which was itself damaged in the sexualized beating of the originating moment of “the snap.” The marks of the sexual relationship between the father and the son become more permanent because Young Mahoney cannot move past them through the act of confession. He can only receive partial absolution for the pleasure he could not help but take in the experience of molestation at the hands of his father. This is not a sin of omission—it is not the case that Young Mahoney had responsibility for his father’s action—for he cannot confess his father’s sin, and his father was at confession, too. Here, McGahern underscores the impossibility of Young Mahoney gaining control over his body. His inability to confess the act while in the confessional inscribes Young Mahoney’s lack of control over his body more deeply.

## V: FINDING “SOME LIMBO OF CONTROL” IN MCGAHERN’S IRELAND

The ritual of sexual confession and the delineation of those thoughts and actions which can be offered up and forgiven in *The Dark*, contributes to a problematic understanding of masculine sexuality, especially when considering the rampant sexual abuse coming to light in contemporary Irish culture. The formula of sexual confession begins to construct what it means to be masculine in a Catholic community. In their article “Sexuality, Masculinity, and Confession,” James Bohman and Larry May discuss how this formula affected their development as Catholic adolescents. In their experience, “the sinfulness of masturbation was emphasized over and over, but the penances were very minor. Indeed, it was expected that we would engage in masturbation, but that in feeling the obligation to confess it we brought it under the powers of forgiveness of the priest” (140). Accordingly, this system inserted ambiguity into their understanding of unofficial church policy. No abiding deterrent remains once the original, official dictate against masturbation has been disregarded. “[T]he subsequent acts of masturbation were both ‘dirty but also somehow ‘OK’ in light of the fact that we had every expectation that they would be, again and again, forgiven and thereby cleansed” (Bohman and May 140). This moral environment subtly equalizes sexual acts. As Bohman and May argue, “what the confessional tended to do was to make us feel that all forms of sexual abuse should be viewed in the same way as was masturbation. It was no more sinful, or so it seemed to us, to bring oneself to sexual climax than it was to pressure and even to force a girl to bring you to climax” (Bohman and May 140-1). Aggressive sexuality and masturbation, because adolescent boys had little reason not to continually anticipate forgiveness for both, became equally permissible. In addition, the expectation of continual forgiveness

positioned both acts as relatively “uncontrollable, and the best that one could hope for was that the frequency was kept to a minimum” (Bohman and May 141). Hence, “the Catholic confessional both repressed and legitimated abusive sexual behavior among males, and it was in this way that the Catholic confessional gave us a sense of our masculinity as something both sinful and not fully controllable by our own wills” (Bohman and May 141). In this way, the ritual of Catholic confession supports a masculine ethic that equalizes all sexual acts, welcome or not, and also has implications for abusive priests who in seeking absolution felt free to abuse again.

This equalization of action indirectly supports the objectification of women through the implicit sanctioning of the notion that male sexuality is uncontrollable and object-oriented. The situation leaves men, as Bohman and May recall, “consumed with female anatomy and with viewing pornographic pictures as stimulus to masturbation” (140). An adolescent’s choice of masturbatory material and a woman’s body become interchangeable and equally acceptable sexual stimuli. Male sexuality therefore comes to seem properly directed toward objects such as female bodies and objects that represent female bodies, which this ethic regards as on the same plane. Because these objects purportedly cause men to sin, they become dirty, bad, and defiling, thus further underwriting the inscription of women’s bodies as dirty and further motivating the distancing of the self from the body. Cahalan describes how Young Mahoney is imbedded in this system. Indeed, “[Young Mahoney] is conditioned by his culture to be able to enjoy eroticism only if his object is defiled, exploited, and confined to his imagination; he admires and is enamored of young Mary Moran, but (now examining himself in detached second-person pronouns), ‘The only way you could have her... was

as an old whore of your mind” (123). Young Mahoney demonstrates his orientation towards objectification with his penchant to masturbate to magazine articles and, later, his inability to convince himself he wants to participate in the university dance with young, flesh and blood women in attendance.

When he faces his opportunity to attend the dance, Young Mahoney is paralyzed. He discovers that it can be as difficult to compel his body to act as it can be to prevent it from acting. The body is not inert but volatile, not an object completely at his disposal. For this character, it is “not so easy to drag to your mouth either for that one destructive kiss, as hard to lose your soul as save it. Only in the mind was it clear” (177-8). His inability to set foot in the dance, to cross through the gates into a dancehall where other students are moving, where he might come in contact with “naked shoulders of the women, glitter of jewellery on their throats, scent and mascara and the blood on their lips, the hiss of silk or taffeta stretching across their thrusting thighs” is expressed as a physical revulsion toward crossing the boundary (177).<sup>48</sup> Looking through the gates, he feels “the blood pounding at the temples, you felt you could sit all night on a lavatory bowl. The hands were trembling” (*TD* 176). His body is used to express the same boundary erotics and control issues that are felt throughout the text. He tells himself, “Control yourself. Control yourself. It’s not the end of the world. It’ll be forgotten by tomorrow morning” but he knows it is “no use” (*TD* 176). His body, however, tells him “No. No. I’m not able to face it. I’m sick” and ““You can’t face it,’ the nerves shivered” (*TD* 176). It is his body that keeps him back.

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<sup>48</sup> Esty provides a reading of the character Lois Farquar’s reluctance to similarly cross thresholds in his reading of Elizabeth Bowen’s *Bildungsroman*, *The Last September*. See his chapter “Virgins of Empire: The Antidevelopmental Plot in Rhys and Bowen” 160-94.

It is also his body that kept him from going forward with another life. Increasing Young Mahoney's frustration outside the gates to the dance is the sense that he had traded his opportunity to join the priesthood for the experience of the "natural fulfillment" found in secular life (176). Having felt himself to be "forgiven, the world given back to you, washed clean as snow" after he received absolution from the priest in the confessional scene, Mahoney renews deliberating the possibility that he might become a priest (*TD* 43, 176). It was his inability to control his bodily desire to masturbate that had been the obstacle to that path in the first place. After his confession in chapter seven, he decided that he would "master" that desire as a priest: "You'd give your life back to God, you'd serve, you'd go to death in God's name and not your own. You'd choose your death, you'd give up desire other than in God" (*TD* 56). In ways reminiscent of the sacrifice the republican hero/martyr might make for the nation, Young Mahoney aspires to make a sacrifice of his mortal life to the larger cause. Feeling a strong pull toward a sexual life, however, he worries that even as a priest he might continue to feel the compulsion (a worry that recent revelations of sexual abuse by priests support). He envisions himself masturbating in the dark confessional while listening to girls give confessions or even "burst[ing] out of the box and tak[ing] her in madness," tearing off the girl's clothes and raping her on "the stone floor of the church" (*TD* 55). Antipathetic to enacting that compulsion and far from certain that he will "find some limbo of control," he seeks certainty that as a priest he can master that desire (*TD* 59).

It is in this search that Young Mahoney turns to his relation, Fr. Gerald, who invites Young Mahoney to visit his home in order to discern whether he has a vocation. On the first night of Young Mahoney's stay, the pair engage in a conversation through

which Young Mahoney comes to a more thorough understanding of how such compulsions can be denied. The priest initiates this conversation when he slips into the youth's room in the dark of the night and then into his bed, actions that do not bode well for the encounter. Young Mahoney tenses, worrying "what could the priest want in the room at this hour, the things that have to happen... was this to be another of the midnight horrors with your father," and these worries seem founded when the priest climbs into the bed and puts his arm around the youth (*TD* 70). The priest inquires into what troubles Young Mahoney about becoming a priest and soon directs the conversation to the youth's sexual experiences and desires. The conversation is structured much like the earlier confession scene, with the priest asking similar questions about the youth's actions, possible sexual partners and the number of times he has masturbated. In this instance, the circumstances surrounding Fr. Gerald's questioning indicate that this confession is elicited at least as much for Fr. Gerald's pleasure as for Young Mahoney's edification. The scene, another instance of an elder man taking his pleasure through trespass over Young Mahoney's body, leaves unacknowledged (and, in fact, concurrently enacts) another act of sexual deviation from the Catholic norm. McGahern puts the scene of the Mahoney family bed and the Catholic priest's bed into conversation with each other.

From his place beside Young Mahoney in the bed, with his arm around the youth, Fr. Gerald inquires into whether Young Mahoney thinks he might break the grip "this vice" has on him and gets Young Mahoney to confirm that this is the "most reason why you're not sure, why you think you're not good enough" to take up the priesthood (*TD* 73). Young Mahoney at first takes the confessional situation at face value and sincerely asks the priest for his opinion. This is Young Mahoney's opportunity to establish

whether it is possible to break the habit and join the clergy. “Do you think I might be good enough?” he asks (*TD 73*). In the pause before Fr. Gerald’s answer, the stakes of his answer for Young Mahoney are made clear. He wants unambiguous confirmation that he, Young Mahoney, can achieve control over his bodily impulse to masturbate, that he would “give up desire other than in God. You’d die into God the day of your ordination. All your life would be a death in readiness for the last moment when you’d part with your flesh and leave. You’d be safe” (*TD 56*). He feels himself to be “nothing and broken, cheap as dirt” but holds out a rising hope that the priest will confirm that he is capable of mastering his compulsion: “would the priest restore the wreckage, would he say—yes, yes, you’re good enough” (*TD 73*).

While not unambiguous, Fr. Gerald’s reply holds out a confirmation: “I don’t see any reason why not if you fight that sin” (*TD 73*). Overjoyed, Young Mahoney takes hold of the weak confirmation and proceeds to seek instruction from Fr. Gerald regarding how the priest fought “that sin” (*TD 73*). He believes “everything was open” between him and the priest, “you could share your lives, both of you fellow-passengers in the same rocked boat” and wants to learn from the priest how to break the vice’s hold (*TD 73*). “Had you ever to fight that sin when you were my age, father?,” he queries (*TD 73*). The priest gives no indication that he has fought that sin, let alone broken it, and remains silent. He ignores the question and effectively denies that he felt the bodily compulsion. His silence conveys to Young Mahoney that he was “out there alone with your sins,” and “by no means in the same boat” (*TD 73*). He determines he might fight that sin but is not good enough to break it. The priest’s silence implies not only that Fr. Gerald is not affected by this sin but that he is offended by Young Mahoney’s assumption that Fr.

Gerald had ever fought against “that sin.” He will only go so far as to suggest that other priests may not have maintained lifelong celibacy, stating “[m]ost of those in my youth who became priests were gay. They kicked football, they went to dances in the holidays, flirted with girls, even sometimes saw them home from the dances. They made good normal priests” (*TD* 74). Fr. Gerald rejects the implication that his celibacy has been inconstant and that he did not always have full control over his own body.

The obvious hypocrisy of Fr. Gerald’s answer enrages the youth and he rejects the hypocritical priest and that for which he stands. Fr. Gerald ‘had broken down your life to the dirt, he’d reduced you to that, and no flesh was superior to other flesh. You’d wanted to share, rise on admittance together into joy, but he was different, he was above that, you were impertinent to ask” (*TD* 74). Young Mahoney’s basic understanding of the human condition, an understanding shared by the text as a whole, is that the body is weak and beyond the subject’s capacity to control fully. He had hoped that Fr. Gerald would enlighten him differently and, instead, feels betrayed that Fr. Gerald would crawl into bed with a young man, invite him to share his innermost secrets and then use the authority of his position as if he was above such actions. Young Mahoney is convinced that Fr. Gerald “must have committed sins the same as yours once too, if he was flesh” (*TD* 74). “What right had he to come and lie with you in bed,” Young Mahoney rails, “his body hot against yours, his arm about your shoulders. Almost as the cursed nights when your father used stroke your thighs” (*TD* 74). When Young Mahoney is “stripped down to the last squalor” and shamed for admitting his fleshly condition, the lesson he learns from this priest is a lesson in how a figure of authority can shape discourse such that his bodily reality is denied, his bodily experience is concealed and his pleasure is given vent (*TD*



75). Discourse can be manipulated to disguise the body and to shame those who cannot wield control over their body's volatility.

By way of response, the youth turns to his body for release from his frustrations. He again masturbates and afterward feels "more stupor than calm," as physical exertion and sexual release brings him from a state of anguish to a state of unawareness (*TD* 76). His movements are portrayed as automatic and mechanical, but in context they amount to an oblique rebuttal. Given that Young Mahoney has previously been able to hear the whisper of clothes brushing across the floor as the priest made his way to Young Mahoney's room, and the fact that the priest entered the guest room on the premise that he could hear the young man's restless tossing and turning, the priest would clearly hear the sound of the bed springs creaking in rhythm as Young Mahoney "pumped mechanical" (70, 76). His actions can be read as a signal to the priest that Young Mahoney rejects the priest's advice and does not have the will to control his masturbatory impulse. He will confirm this the next morning at Mass when he refuses communion. The sound is likely to remind Fr. Gerald that he, too, is capable of feeling sexual desire and, in fact, has just been feeling these desires, for Fr. Gerald has just sought out an encounter with a young man he has invited into his home, joined in bed, and aired this sexuality while refusing to admit the existence of his own bodily desires.<sup>49</sup> In this, Young Mahoney asserts his equality with the priest as a fleshly body: "He must have committed sins the same as yours once, too, if he was flesh" (74). Mahoney's actions offer a critique of a celibate ideal that empowers a man like Fr. Gerald to make an

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<sup>49</sup> The fact that Fr. Gerald has arranged to have John, a sixteen-year-old boy from a poor family some distance away, come to live with him and is grooming him to keep house for him is ominous. Eamon Maher has also expressed concern about Fr. Gerald's relationship with John, who is supposedly "fond of housework" (*TD* 64).

adolescent feel “stripped down to the last squalor”: “No one had the right to do that to anybody,” including priests and fathers in bed with young boys (*TD* 75).<sup>50</sup>

While Church and State found McGahern’s portrayal of adolescence too graphic and profane for public consumption, it must be noted that McGahern considered himself a Catholic writer and has claimed that he has “nothing but gratitude to the (Catholic) Church” (Maher 1).<sup>51</sup> Richard Burr Lloyd has argued that McGahern’s protagonist seeks to fulfill his vow to “lift the darkness with the light of Catholicism, the dominant religion of Ireland” by saying the Mass that Lloyd believes McGahern intended to be “not only a literal affirmation of the protagonist’s mother, but also a symbolic affirmation of her religion (Catholicism) and of her country (Ireland)” (7). Young Mahoney would become a priest if he could trust himself to maintain his vow of celibacy; his mistrust in his ability to control his bodily desires and prevent himself from eventually enacting the rape fantasies he envisions in multiple instances dissuades him from that path. His struggle to gain control his body so that he might pursue a priestly vocation constitutes a central plot movement and results from the dual experience of his father’s abuse and his mother’s desire that he join the celibate priesthood. As Lloyd puts it, “the focus of the novel is on the young adolescent’s struggle to lift the darkness by freeing himself from his abusive father and the constricting farm while at the same time reaching some sort of reconciliation with his dead mother who wanted him to become a priest” (12), but I would emphasize that his body is a crucial operator in this focus. His aspiration is incompatible with his image of his body, which he sees as incapable of sustaining

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<sup>50</sup> In this line of questioning, McGahern touches on the affinities of the *Bildungsroman* and the discourse of human rights, which Slaughter describes in *Human Rights, Inc.*

<sup>51</sup> Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid was involved the controversial affair surrounding the banning of *The Dark* and McGahern’s subsequent firing from his teaching position.

celibacy and prone to sexual violence. His vision of a life that is to him an alternate secondary to the priesthood—married life—is also prevented by his mistrust in his ability to control his body. Attention to the body’s role in this plot dynamic reveals a desire to live out an idealized life that is frustrated by his bodily reality.<sup>52</sup>

McGahern’s early work portrays intimate familial and sexual experiences that were suppressed from public view in the mid-century Republic, and anticipates many of the themes and controversies that became predominant in Irish discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. Recognizing this, Dermot Bolger has recently described McGahern as an icon of the generation of Irish authors who found the pious atmosphere of the Irish State oppressive and hypocritical.<sup>53</sup> As Bolger puts it, authors of this generation “were not going to be shunted abroad or work into safe living-death jobs, a generation of writers and readers who had nothing to lose by taking apart that state to examine how it worked inside.” Analysis of McGahern’s portrayal of the body in *The Dark* helps to explain how McGahern’s protagonist nonetheless chooses to be shunted toward the sort of job Bolger characterizes, the civil service job with the E.S.B.<sup>54</sup> The novel displays how this

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<sup>52</sup> McGahern’s expression of his loyalty to Catholicism gives off an impression that his realistic portrayals of Irish life expose certain realities with reluctance, suggesting disappointment that things are so. The body has a particular tendency to bring out these issues in the work of an author Waldmeir terms a “Catholic writer.” According to Waldmeir, the Catholic writers he discusses, “write about material that is recognizably Catholic. That is, their works use characters, terms, and events drawn explicitly from the tradition” (15). Moreover, for authors like McGahern, as well as the authors Waldmeir examines, including Louise Erdrich, Mary Gordon, Annie Dillard, J.F. Powers and Alfred Alcorn, Waldmeir notes that, in enrolling the body in their literary representations, the object for these authors is not to “flood the Church with change. Each of them, however, would challenge it to look more closely at itself, to consider change in the light of the ways it has, at times, honored the body and, at times, abused it” (15). McGahern is unlike most of the authors Waldmeir describes, however, who engage in this challenge with “a remarkable sense of innocence that speaks of their hope” (15). Such innocence in McGahern has lapsed and is incompatible with the experience of abuse that is central to McGahern’s depiction of bodily experience. The embodied experiences he portrays seem incompatible with such hope.

<sup>53</sup> Bolger suggests that, ironically, this generation came to this attitude because it benefitted from the education reforms of the 1960s. For an overview of what has been called “The Educational Revolution,” see Keogh (272-79) and Ferriter (*Transformation* 596-99).

<sup>54</sup> McGahern worked as a teacher prior to *The Dark*’s publication.

stultified environment where the family, especially the father, and the emerging subject are interrelated impinged on the emergence and development of the individual.

#### CONCLUSION

We must situate McGahern's novel within the context of the Irish experience of Independence at midcentury in order to properly understand the integral role of the body in this text. Situating McGahern's novel in historical and discursive context helps to discern the historically specific image of human biological identity operating in the world of *The Dark*, and examining how this context tends to shape the role of the body in McGahern's text. McGahern's realistic depictions of the subject's body, a body that urinates, seeks sexual release, grows taller and develops muscles, figure prominently in the text. This examination opens into exploration of the biological father's authority over the embodied subject and then widens to an exploration of the religious father's authority over that subject. Discerning that body is highly relevant to McGahern's narrative because McGahern's thinking about the body shapes the plot, characterization, setting and other aspects of narrative.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that Joyce suppressed his *Bildungsheld's* body from representation in order to maintain control over the internalized, psychological emergence represented in *Portrait*. That novel is recognized to have rejuvenated the *Bildungsroman* for the modern era. By historic coincidence, Joyce's *Bildungsroman* was published in book form in 1916, the same year Pearse and company proclaimed the Irish Republic.<sup>55</sup> McGahern's *Bildungsroman* demonstrates that it is formed in this wake. McGahern's subsequent *Bildungsroman*, *The Dark*, is not situated on the cusp of a new

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<sup>55</sup> *Portrait* began appearing in serial form in 1914.

epoch but is instead situated within a larger, post-independence epoch, which, as Bakhtin formulates it, “goes beyond the limits of a single life, whose duration is represented primarily by generations” (Bakhtin, “The *Bildungsroman*,” 18). The sense of being situated within a larger epoch can be felt in *The Dark*, hence the novel’s weighing of the father and the son against each other, almost literally, in a cyclical pattern that contrasts with the more generally linear formation of the *Bildungsheld*.<sup>56</sup> This impulse resonates with a similar impulse to explore the interrelationship of the protagonist’s bodily and conscious development. Young Mahoney is the next generation of Mahoney. He exists in the post-independence epoch, a state in which social authority is both stable and larger than his family cell; “you and Mahoney would never give commands but be always menials to the race he’d [the priest/university dean] come from and still belonged to, you’d make a schoolteacher at best. You might have your uses but you were both his stableboys, and would never eat at his table” (*TD* 187-88). He might become a man in his father’s eyes when he becomes physically able to labor as a man, but his emergence is delimited and will have no transformational effect on the world.

The psychological element of development that Joyce seeks to elevate over other grammars of development is inchoate in McGahern’s work—the narrative voice is more scattered, or it conveys a psychological development that is more inchoate, less successfully individuated. In *The Dark*, “the world was a shattered place” (36). In the conditions of McGahern’s world, few other modes of individual development remained available. His novel can only move chronologically and resolutely forward. The result is

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<sup>56</sup> As they keep pace together working the family farm, the son’s waxing strength is brought to bear on the wane of his father’s; “[w]hat was strange to notice was that Mahoney was growing old. He’d stop and lean on the pick, panting” and would tell his son to “[t]ake it easy. No need to burst yourself. Rome wasn’t built in a day” (*TD* 149).

a certain aura of inevitability and futility—the plot moves resolutely forward through time without an accumulating sense of emergence. Thus, *The Dark* ultimately arrives at an irresolute yet progressive resolution, with Young Mahoney in bed again with his father and planning to leave for Dublin in the morning, feeling that “nobody’s life was more than a direction” (*TD* 188). Indeed, biological life runs in only one temporal direction; one can begin again and again, but each beginning in the series is undertaken with an ever more aged body and, in *The Dark*, a sense of accumulating futility. In taking up the novel form to rehearse the struggles of the Irish subject in the twentieth century, McGahern must contend with the way the novel form is occupied with portraying the emergence over a life course of some temporal duration and under particular socio-historical circumstances, and also the fact that a novel must end. Young Mahoney instead ends up in a limbo of aimless direction, never fully choosing his path and inhabiting a position of sexual repression, a path that is for him unstable and impossible to maintain. The text outs him as an embodied subject but leaves him in a limbo of control.

CHAPTER THREE  
**“She is Going to be a Normal Woman”:** Feminine Materiality,  
 Development and Sideways Growth  
 in Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s *The Dancers Dancing*

Orla Crilly, the protagonist of Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s novel, *The Dancers Dancing* (1999), wants to be normal.<sup>1</sup> For Orla, the term, “normal,” “consists in being even” and according to her, “Normal people are people who are more or less identical to everyone else, and who fit, tongue and groove, foot and slipper, into their time and place. Normal people are in tune” (Ní Dhuibhne, *Dancers Dancing* 139).<sup>2</sup> Whether Orla will turn out to be a “normal” Irish woman who will fit into her time and place is a main concern of this *Bildungsroman*; this plot concern is bound up with and dramatized through representations of her developing body. Normality is visible in Ní Dhuibhne’s novel as a biological condition as well as a social and discursive production, and being normal in this work involves corresponding to a particular social standard as well as being the right shape and size. Indeed, in this coming-of-age novel, corporeal size and shape are key to the coordination of normality, as can be seen in the passage’s emphasis on a close fit between the body (“foot”) and accouterment (“slipper”). Thirteen-and-two-months-old Orla’s “fit” into her time and place is in question because of the growth she experiences

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<sup>1</sup> In this desire, we might find her to be a normal adolescent. In other words, the discourse of adolescence shapes our regarding of Orla as normal for feeling abnormal and seeking to establish normalcy as she navigates her course between childhood and adulthood. For more about how twentieth-century norms are reproduced and constituted in relation to youth and adolescents, see Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*, especially the chapter “‘Why Can’t I Be Normal?’: Sex Advice for Teens”. For further discussion of why wanting to be normal can be problematic, including a demonstration of how the statistical norm is an abnormal subject position as well as an exploration of the ethical shortfalls of evaluative norms, see Warner’s similarly titled *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *DD*.

and because she does not quite meet cultural certain standards. We see this when we read that she “is fattish. To be precise, since judgments in this area can be so subjective, she is five foot four in height and weighs ten stone twelve pounds, i.e., almost eleven stone [or 154 pounds], in her vest, pants, and bare feet, in the morning before breakfast” (Ní Dhuibhne, *Dancers Dancing* 10).<sup>3</sup> As this description indicates, *The Dancers Dancing* pays close attention to bodily details and is highly conscious of normative standards that provide shape to narratives of human development. Orla’s body grows thick with complication in relation to the norm. In fact, as I will demonstrate through my reading in this chapter, Orla “grows sideways.” Using Kathryn Bond Stockton's notion of "sideways growth," a type of growth which occurs within an active temporal suspension at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood, a delay during which a queer child’s relation to the normalizing concept "growing up" is conceived in literary works including Ní Dhuibhne’s, I examine the role of the developing female body in *The Dancers Dancing*.<sup>4</sup> I find that the role of the body in this narrative of development is to expand the possible modes for female development in Irish literary discourse.

Orla’s body is a crucial feature of Ní Dhuibhne’s coming-of-age novel; this protagonist’s biological development is an index of her eventual able-bodied, heteronormative emergence. Crucially, it becomes clear to Orla that she is going to be a

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<sup>3</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *DD*.

<sup>4</sup> I use queer to mean nonnormative identities and behaviors that may be, but are not necessarily, expressive of homosexual desires. I define queerness in accord with Bruhm and Hurley, who argue for a spacious definition of "queer" in the context of children, one that recognizes both its "more traditional sense, to indicate a deviation from the 'normal'" and its "association with specifically sexual alterity," rather than confining the term solely to genital homoeroticism (x). For complementary understandings of queer see also Stockton’s article in Bruhm and Hurley’s collection, and Stockton’s monograph *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Since *The Queer Child* was published subsequent to the publication of an article version of this chapter, I retain citations of Stockton’s provocative article. See also Halberstam. My use of “queer” is intended to be similar to what Giffney calls “quare theory,” a term she employs to articulate “the specificities, nuances and methodological tensions between expressions of queer theory in an Irish context and theoretical formulations of queer theory originating in Anglo-North American contexts” (198).



normal woman when her bodily development reaches a certain threshold. When she begins to menstruate, that is, and a “spot of blood marks her grey pants like a bright poppy,” this spot is a sign that, “Unlikely as it seemed, she is going to be a normal woman” (*DD* 203, 204). Until that time, whether Orla will be normal is an open question, an “open secre[t], gleaming red, half-hidden” (*DD* 204). Until that time, Orla is “Orla the freak. Orla who might never get them [her periods], be mysteriously overlooked by nature, forgotten about” (*DD* 204). The fact of her menarche serves as a normalizing pivot that assigns the queerness of her adolescence—a delayed, bodily blooming that had helped to create space for her development as a female Irish subject—to the past. That is, *The Dancers Dancing* relies on Orla’s coming (hetero)reproductivity to bring the various aspects of Orla’s development to coherence.<sup>5</sup> Because of these textual operations, *The Dancers Dancing* provides an opportunity to assess the standard operations of an adolescent Irish girl’s bodily development in literary representation.

Since Ní Dhuibhne works within the well-known genre of the *Bildungsroman*, drawing on the capacity of bodily representations to help conjure the emergence of the Irish female subject, this strategy in *The Dancers Dancing* highlights the *Bildungsroman*’s usual reliance on the power of the normate subject position in subject production.<sup>6</sup> As opposed to the “freaks” whom Orla knows are socially “forgotten about” or undermined because their bodies do not meet expectations, normates are the people such as the “normal women” that Orla wants to be, people who typically enjoy certain privileges because they meet certain social expectations. The “normate” is constituted against visibly marked “freaks,” people with disabilities, or people with other extraordinary

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<sup>5</sup> In other words, the novel employs the standard “somatic syntax” that Nicole Seymour argues other novels, specifically Carson McCuller’s *The Member of the Wedding*, might resist.

<sup>6</sup> Shumaker establishes that *The Dancers Dancing* is a *Bildungsroman* (1).

bodies because “people can represent themselves as definitive human beings” through comparison with these figures (Thomson 8). Rosemarie Garland Thompson introduced this neologism to designate “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (Thompson 8). Orla’s interest in, essentially, assuming a normate position is significant because it highlights how conjoining subjectivity with a female *Bildungsheld* challenges the genre’s boundaries, as the *Bildungsroman* conventionally associates female figures with embodied difference. Thompson finds testament to the power of the normate figure in the way “people often try to fit its description in the same way that Cinderella’s stepsisters attempted to squeeze their feet into her glass slipper,” an observation echoed in Ní Dhuibhne’s foot-and-slipper metaphor, though Ní Dhuibhne’s slipper is made of more flexible stuff than glass (8). Ní Dhuibhne’s work interrogates the fit between the female Irish body and the *Bildungsroman*, stretching out the body model of the classic heroine and attempting to make it strange—but not too strange. Orla’s foot may, metaphorically speaking, get squeezed into the slipper for a time but, in the end, Orla causes it to stretch a bit, and breaks it in. That is to say, Ní Dhuibhne’s *Bildungsroman* enlarges the range of standard discursive possibilities through portrayals of Orla’s developing female body, and then generally adheres to the standard.

Ní Dhuibhne’s novel configures the protagonist’s body in such a way that Orla is able to assume an approximation of the normate position, a position that Robert McRuer argues is becoming more visible and flexible in the contemporary era due to the influence

of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>7</sup> In order to explore how the expansion of the normate position to a wider range of figures, especially female figures, impacts the role of bodily representations in Ní Dhuibhne's work, I provide in this chapter close readings of bodily representations in the eponymous stories of her collections *Blood and Water* (1989) and *Eating Women is Not Recommended* (1991) before moving to analysis of the role of the body in her subsequent *Bildungsroman*, *The Dancers Dancing*. The larger aim of this exploration is to describe, through a case study of the evolving struggle to represent the female body in one Irish woman writer's work, how the "Woman as Ireland" trope hinders female narratives of development. Attending to how Ní Dhuibhne's representations of female bodies modulate in the earlier short stories enriches understanding of what is at stake when Ní Dhuibhne portrays a fat, adolescent female body in her emphatically Irish coming-of-age novel. To achieve the more flexible range of normalcy apparent in the novel, the narrative denaturalizes a number of standard Irish figures by complicating and undermining them in various ways, a process that puts Orla in a close but also an odd relation to Irish identity practices. In other words, in figuring contemporary Ireland as thirteen-year-old Orla, *The Dancers Dancing* uses her growth as a vehicle that transforms heteronormative notions of gender and time in Irish discourse. In juxtaposing Orla's bodily development and the development of her aunt Annie ("the freak"), and in featuring each female's potential to figure the nation, Ní Dhuibhne's text imagines literally, figuratively, and temporally expansive alternatives to the tropes of femininity available in Irish nationalist discourse.

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<sup>7</sup> McRuer contends, "because of changing economic, political and cultural conditions at the turn of the millennium, the relation of visibility in circulation around heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, homosexuality, and disability have shifted significantly" (*Crip Theory* 2).

After briefly surveying the Woman as Ireland trope and the Irish iconic order in the first part of this chapter, I provide a discussion of how Ní Dhuibhne approaches the female body in the titular pieces of her short story collections *Blood and Water* and *Eating Women is Not Recommended*. Through this discussion, we can see how representations of the female body evolve in Ní Dhuibhne's prose. In the latter part of this chapter, I argue that queerness and queer uses of time and space, what Judith Halberstam calls "willfully eccentric modes of being" that have "the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space," propel her *Bildungsroman*'s plot movements (1,2). In order to open up new life narratives, the text temporarily establishes such modes of being before closing them back down, snapping to established forms when a certain stage of biological development is reached: reproductivity. Her relationship with this stage is highly fraught, as I will describe, for in Ireland, reproductive biology provides definition to Irish womanhood; the Republic of Ireland is infamous, for example, for using the words "woman" and "mother" interchangeably in its constitution, which has helped to stage the terms of debate about female subjectivity within Irish discourse.<sup>8</sup> In the eventually normalizing process of naturalizing Orla's growth, the narrative makes use of a disabled aunt figure to outline a normate position for Orla. With Thompson, McRuer avers that representations of the normate are often enabled by the normate's proximity to physical and cultural otherness, with a prime embodiment of this otherness being disabled

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<sup>8</sup> The constitution of the Irish Republic also makes formal the assumption that "woman" has a "life within the home" (136). The institutionalization of gender roles in Irish law and culture is noteworthy, yet Irish nationalism is hardly atypical in employing "Woman" in service of a postcolonial political agenda. Steel argues, "at both a conscious and unconscious level, national identities feed into one another, as do male identities in relation to women. Thus, underlying more glamorous yet deadly female images such as the 'dangerous seductress' or femme fatale, woman as Ireland has a long and, in some respects, 'universal' history which predates the more overtly political British or Irish nationalist iconography and relates to the structure of myth and witchcraft" (98).

figures.<sup>9</sup> The normate, Thompson writes, is constituted through “the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries” (8). As McRuer’s work helps us to see, *The Dancers Dancing* achieves normalcy for Orla by way of contrast against her disabled aunt (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 13). The heteronormative epiphany the contrast engenders helps to secure the protagonist’s position in the emerging Irish symbolic order.

#### I: THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* AND THE ICONIC FEMININE ORDER IN IRISH CULTURE

If being normal “consists in being even,” being abnormal seems to have come to be the norm for the protagonists of Irish coming-of-age novels because these novels often emphasize uneven developments. Especially since Independence, Irish representational practices have featured the attachment of meaning to bodily and other aspects of development.<sup>10</sup> As Bolton has described, the Irish *Bildungsroman* after Independence often emphasized discrepancies between the maturation of the self and biological maturation as a comment on the “liberatory” experience of Irish independence. Bolton observes that in Irish novels after Independence, Irish *Bildungshelden* “often mature too quickly, or else they reached the temporal milestones of maturity—pubescence, physical maturity, leaving school—but remain immature and inexperienced” (10). I have described, particularly in relation to McGahern, how the fissures and blockages between these aspects, magnified in particular ways by national discourses, play a prominent role

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<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, McRuer makes this point more overtly, arguing that “the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness; that—in fact—compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness and vice versa” (“Compulsory Able-Bodiedness” 88-9).

<sup>10</sup> Such attachments of meaning to bodies are common across cultures but specific in their particularities and operations; I am exploring this attachment within a particular context, twentieth-century Irish literature.

in shaping expressions of Irish coming-of-age experiences. Ní Dhuibhne's *Bildungsroman* is concerned with reconciling these discrepancies. *The Dancers Dancing* ultimately orchestrates Orla's development as in harmony with these temporal milestones of maturation.

*The Dancers Dancing* is able to do this because the symbolic order it confronts was felt to be undergoing a period of flux and re-vision; the novel was published at a time when the post-independence paradigm and its norms were shifting. By 1999, the marked social upheaval that accompanied the boom economy commonly known as the "Celtic Tiger" had sparked reevaluations of Ireland's relationship to its past, present, future, as well as its relationship with the rest of the world."<sup>11</sup> As I outlined in the introductory chapter, declarations that Ireland had come of age were popular. Further, social controversies involving young women, such as the X Case,<sup>12</sup> the death of Ann Lovett,<sup>13</sup> the Kerry babies scandal,<sup>14</sup> and others, had repeatedly brought young female Irish bodies

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<sup>11</sup> The term "Celtic Tiger" is used to describe both Ireland's socio-cultural upheaval and the rapid and dramatic economic upturn of the 1990s reminiscent of the roaring "Asian Tiger" economies of the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>12</sup> The anonym "X" was used to protect the identity of a fourteen-year-old Irish girl impregnated by rape. She was prevented from leaving Irish jurisdiction, where abortion is banned, to obtain an abortion abroad after her family approached the *Garda Síochána* ("peace officers" or Irish police force) to inquire if DNA material could be retained as trial evidence. The resulting Supreme Court case, Attorney General v. X, ultimately determined Irish women's right to abortion if a woman's life is put at risk including, crucially, at risk of suicide, by the continuation of a pregnancy.

<sup>13</sup> Ann Lovett was a fourteen-year-old girl who died in 1984 after giving birth to a stillborn child alone at night in a grotto dedicated, ironically, to the Immaculate Conception. See McCafferty, "The Death of Ann Lovett."

<sup>14</sup> Joanne Hayes is the woman who had recently birthed a stillborn and who was falsely charged with the murder of an unrelated infant during the course of the "Kerry Babies" affair. As I discuss in relation to Enright as well, Hayes' prosecutors put forth the argument that Hayes experienced "superfecundity," becoming impregnated twice, by two different men, in the same 48-hour period. McCafferty has colorfully described the subsequent "tribunal of inquiry" as a "six-month saga of sub-pornographic scenarios, which saw Joanne Hayes regularly coupled, in brutal graphic seamy sleazy detail, with unidentified men in numbers unknown" (McCafferty, "Woman to Blame" 169). See also Maguire.

to public attention by the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Jane Elizabeth Dougherty notes in her analysis of coming-of-age in the 1990s, “the symbolic order was itself being revised” (“Coming of Age” n.p.). If the Irish *Bildungsroman* after Independence “often represented the failure of Irish *Bildung*: the subject could mature, but the society in which he lived had not,” then as “Irish society itself matured” we might anticipate the protagonists of 1990s Irish *Bildungsromane* will find something closer to success and a more harmonious relationship of the maturing self and the temporal milestones of maturation. And we will not be surprised to see the body featured prominently in narratives. However, Dougherty also points out that in contrast to Irish boyhood, which is “canonized, prize-winning, best-selling, and even parodied” in the 1990s and “by now constitutes a well-established literary genre of its own,” novels about Irish girlhood are “obscure, and often formally or stylistically peculiar” (“Unwritten Irish Girlhood” 50).<sup>16</sup> She suggests that authors writing Irish girlhood either refuse or find it awkward or even impossible to apply tropes such as progressive development toward individuation, narrative immediacy, and arrival at full consciousness of subjectivity within a feminine context. This context is made more complicated by Ireland's history of colonization, which has fostered an abundance of allegories of Ireland. As I will discuss throughout this chapter, the writing of a female Irish child's development entails deviating from what is generally recognized as Irish literary tradition. For Ní Dhuibhne, it involves approaching symbols that have sometimes been disabling to Irish women generally and to Irish women writers in particular, but that at least offer “subject positions with which to

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<sup>15</sup> Each of these names evokes not only a personal tragedy but also a national media event. See Conrad, particularly chapter 2, “Fetal Ireland: Reproduction, Agency, and Irish National Discourses” (70-116), and Maguire.

<sup>16</sup> Dougherty's examples of Irish literary boyhood include Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* and, of course, “the ur-Irish boyhood,” Joyce's *Portrait*.

grapple, to oppose, to reject, and to de-and reconstruct” (Dougherty, “Coming of Age,” n.p.). Ní Dhuibhne works through these symbols in order to produce a queer, new embodiment of the nation oddly appropriate to the shifts and reconfigurations occurring in Ireland during 1990s.

Interested in expanding the possibilities for narrating Irish female identity, Ní Dhuibhne enrolls the female body—in different guises—as a narrative strategy for engendering nonnormative literary (but, in reality, quite ordinary) versions of Irish femininity such as the Irish girl. Ní Dhuibhne’s work seeks to humanize narratives about Irish females, to give reality to a literary subject position that has been colonized by myths, icons and ideologies. In this way, Ní Dhuibhne’s work participates in the movement to respond to what Boland calls a firmly established “rhetoric of imagery” that fuses the national and the feminine in a way that oversimplifies both and which co-opts the position of Irish women as speaking subjects (76). For centuries, the major trope of Ireland as woman has been fitting narratives of national development to the female body. Though the fusion of woman-and-nation is not unique to Irish nationalism, this aspect of Ireland’s national literary tradition has been recognized as a particularly powerful force. Jacqueline Fulmer helpfully summarizes that the Mother Ireland trope was “utilized repeatedly in song, poetry, drama, and later, propaganda, in the service of Irish Independence [and] the enchanting maiden/death-dealing hag dichotomy finally engulfed the idea of the feminine in Irish culture. Woman was the Nation, and the Nation was Woman” (3).<sup>17</sup> The traditional maiden/hag pairing relates most directly to Ní Dhuibhne’s representations of the adolescent Orla and her paternal relation, the disabled Aunt Annie.

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<sup>17</sup> Fulmer cites Boland, and Coughlan (““Bog Queens”” 93, 94) for this point in particular, and also provides a useful catalogue of scholarship on the Young Queen/Poor Old Woman dichotomy, referencing Innes, *Woman and Nation* (16-21); Mills (73); Walsh (21); and Lawless (914).



These representations are particularly interesting because they resist coordination with the Irish maturation matrix that defines Irish women as reproductive,<sup>18</sup> mothers specifically,<sup>19</sup> including the Virgin Mother Mary,<sup>20</sup> natural and in harmony with the landscape,<sup>21</sup> and as pure and passive nationalist symbols.<sup>22</sup>

The trope of Woman as Ireland poses various and substantial challenges for narratives of individual Irish women's development in part because it severely constrains and overdetermines notions of "growth." Nationalist narratives operate through the logic of transformation; her lovers/sons' actions can cause Cathleen/Ireland to transform from a crone to a queen, or back to a crone, at any time. These transformations between one static emblem and another typically occur in the blink of an eye, in parenthetical notes in a dramatic script, or off stage. A transformation is a switch that is flipped; there is no space in such myths for expressing a gradient between the crone on the one side and the queen

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<sup>18</sup> Dougherty notes, the "nationalist symbols through which Irish female subjectivity has traditionally been understood do not include among their ranks any female subject who is not yet reproductive" ("Coming of Age").

<sup>19</sup> I discuss the role of Orla's English mother Elizabeth later in this chapter as representative of her generation; further analysis of her Englishness would be fruitful, but I believe less relevant to the role of the body in this novel specifically because it serves as one among many ways in which Ní Dhuibhne complicates Orla's fit in relation to her time and place.

<sup>20</sup> Mills lists the 'virgin mother' as one of a trio of feminine icons in Irish culture, alongside the enchanting maiden as 'poetic muse' and the "mother Ireland/Cathleen Ní Houlihan" (Mills 69; see also Coughlan, "Bog Queens" 89, 90). Fulmer describes how the virgin/whore dichotomy has parallels in Irish culture where, as time passed "[r]igid misapplications of the religious ideals evoked by the Virgin Mary and female saints wedged Irish women into limited roles. "To deviate from local interpretations of the 'virgin-' or 'sainted mother' template, as it developed over the last few centuries, could cause a young woman to be labeled a whore, and in some instances, land her in a Magdalene home for 'wayward' girls. Once incorporated into the 1937 Constitution, the idea that respecting women meant hallowing them as mothers led to a perversion of that respect in the form of restrictions on women's employment, economic, and political activities" (Fulmer 4). I address the virgin model more fully in relation to Anne Enright's work.

<sup>21</sup> Connolly provides a reading of how Ní Dhuibhne "manages to evoke and evade" Irish female images with her description of the Irish landscape (3). For overview and analysis of how "place" and landscape intersect with gendered Irish identities, see Nash.

<sup>22</sup> As Cullingford argues, these representational patterns have "helped to confine Irish women in a straitjacket of purity and passivity," or as Ingman puts it, these "Nationalist symbols had material consequences... Irish women, with the example of the Virgin Mary set before them, were to embody the purity of the Irish nation. Sexuality thus became bound up with nationality. A certain female behavior, based on chastity and purity, guaranteed the purity and alterity of the Irish nation" (Cullingford 1). As Ryan and Ward argue, in Irish nationalist discourse, Irish "women become the bearers of the symbols of nation but their everyday experiences and agency are denied" (2).

on the other. There is no room for ambiguity as to the woman-nation's time of life; she either is or is not fertile for reasons that have everything to do with the state of the nation she represents. When national sovereignty seems lost, Ireland, as the Old Woman/hag/crone, "grows" old. When some potential for independence emerges, Ireland, as Cathleen Ní Houlihan, "grows" young. The entrenchment of these mythic narratives in Irish discourse shapes expectations that Irish female narratives will progress in this dramatic mode, which has helped to suppress feminine, Irish developmental narratives experimenting with more organic modes of expressing the passage from girlhood to womanhood. As many feminists have pointed out, these narratives regard Irish women as objects, deny them agency, and refuse their lived experiences. This trope impacts and complicates the representational operations of bodily development in narratives about developing Irish female subjects. Irish literary tradition and certain cultural practices have attempted to contain the female body—or as Cheryl Herr would say, "to *still*" it—by making it static. In her characterization of the "erotics of Irishness," Herr has identified "a reflexive and widespread resistance to seeing movement, to recognizing its necessity, and ultimately to sanctioning radical changes of posture" (13). She hypothesizes that Ireland is "keyed into the photographic dimension in most of its cultural registers" in contrast to, for example, the cinematic dimension," and that this preference results in a tendency for Irish culture to overlook and repress the dynamic movements of bodies between formal postures (5). Herr finds that "Ireland has literally eroded, in the sphere of representations that constitute social identity, a comfortable sense of the body; in traditional as well as in colonial and postcolonial Ireland, the body has frequently been associated representationally with danger and has been scrutinized with an

intensity that stills (photographically)” (6-7). To the extent that there is such resistance to seeing gradual movement between iconic, still images, the difficulties of recognizing transitional developmental modes are compounded. Transformations, on the other hand, are an always-present discursive possibility. Simply put, representations of gradually accumulating bodily growth run against this preference for sudden transformation and subsequent stasis.

The woman-nation trope has made some female life stages less legible than others. Veronica House explains that the pervasive tropes of Irish literature confine women as the objects of myth. They leave “no room [...] for a woman’s natural ageing process” and fix “women in ‘a terrible suspension of life’, so that they are unable to age and die” (108). House argues that Boland “tries to reshape the poetic and mythic images of women by writing the ageing body into poetry” (108). Similarly, Ní Dhuibhne writes the ageing body into her novel, even expanding on Boland by writing not only an ageing but an aging disabled woman into the narrative. The figure Ní Dhuibhne more successfully makes room for is that of the female child, another of the stages that are often overlooked in studies of Irish development. In the Irish literary context, literary female childhood is not a typical phenomenon. Girlhood, as Dougherty points out, has eluded Irish literary production: “the Irish female childhood is most often written as unwritten and unwriteable” (“Coming of Age”). My reading of *The Dancers Dancing* draws out how Ní Dhuibhne cultivates the woman-as-nation trope in relation to Orla, at one point even dressing this adolescent girl in the Irish tricolor in order to establish the connection.

While I provide general parameters for the trope’s operation in Irish cultural productions in this chapter, my examination focuses mainly on Ní Dhuibhne’s approach to

this trope through her depiction of two female bodies in particular, that of the fat adolescent girl and of the disabled rural woman figured as Orla's Auntie Annie. *The Dancers Dancing* holds up both of these embodied female figures, Orla and Annie, as meaningful to the Irish nation, especially the post-independence nation, ultimately privileging Orla. Ní Dhuibhne's work references the version of this trope famously promoted by former President Eamon de Valera, who encapsulated it in his well-known "St. Patrick's Day Address" in 1943.<sup>23</sup> These figures relate closely to two types of Irish persons that de Valera envisioned would populate the "dreamed of" Ireland, an Ireland filled with "sturdy children" and laughing, "comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age."<sup>24</sup> In *The Dancers Dancing*, the force of the woman-as-nation trope gathers most reflexively around Annie, for she is the inhabitant of the Crilly family's ancestral home in rural Donegal. Annie's home and fireside may resemble the forum of old age De Valera envisioned, but Annie herself is incapable of full participation in any forum. Annie, we learn, was probably "deprived of oxygen in the birth canal," which results in an array of disabilities of moderate severity that do not "need acknowledgment" but which cause great anxiety to Orla nonetheless (*DD* 141). By presenting this aging figure that occupies an iconic role in the national imaginary as disabled, Ní Dhuibhne implies that the discourses championing Irish rural domesticity

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<sup>23</sup> A critique of De Valera's Ireland is common in Ní Dhuibhne's work. In the short story "The Truth about Married Love," for example, she overtly characterizes "de Valera's Ireland" as a place and time "where every form of contraception was strictly illegal, where women were barred from most jobs, where families were large and poor and, it seemed, often cold and miserable, where life was a frugal vale of tears to be passed through en route to eternal bliss or damnation" (163).

<sup>24</sup> In his 1943 "St. Patrick's Day Address," DeValera described, "That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age" (206).

have been disabling for Irish women since they were conceived. This critique is available because of the trope's familiarity. Positioned alongside Annie, Orla constitutes a "sturdy" child, as her "fattish" body betokens. In fact, Ní Dhuibhne represents her as having a "sturdy body, sturdy mind," so sturdy indeed that "she has one of those stiff natures that cannot bend itself to another role. It is not a virtue: rather a mixture of gaucheness and slow-wittedness that has rendered her the way she is" (*DD* 145). Because of her "stiff nature," then, it is the role that must be bent to her just as, similarly, the role of maiden/cosy homesteader of serene old age is bent to the aunt figure.<sup>25</sup>

The familiar version of old woman/young maiden dynamic is a unified one; the old woman and the young maiden are two aspects of the same figuration of the nation. Ní Dhuibhne organizes this traditional dynamic differently, by opposing the figures of Annie and her niece. The residual magnetic force residing in this opposition makes the relation of the niece to the aunt a source of anxiety to Ní Dhuibhne's younger characters, Mary and then Orla, who worry over the implications of their respective aunt's disabilities for their development. This opposition is one that evolves within Ní Dhuibhne's work. Before it appears in extended form in Ní Dhuibhne's *Bildungsroman*, Ní Dhuibhne presents the story of Aunt Annie and her niece in the title story her 1989 short story collection *Blood and Water*. The aunt/niece relationship constitutes a major theme in Ní Dhuibhne's work; tracing its evolution helps to illuminate the various representations of female bodies in Ní Dhuibhne's oeuvre.

"Blood and Water" connects the niece's mental abilities with the disabled aunt's body, drawing force from the magnetic interrelationship of the sturdy child/maiden figure

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<sup>25</sup> Both figures have basis in Ní Dhuibhne's autobiographical experience. In an interview, Ní Dhuibhne states "Blood and Water," the precursory short story to *The Dancers Dancing*, "is kind of autobiographical. I had an aunt who's a bit like that one [the "aunt who is not the full shilling"] (Perry 254).

and the woman by the fireside/hag figure, which can be pervasive in the national field. A close reading of the early short story allows us to see how the old woman/young niece dynamic plays out in Ní Dhuibhne's work when the role of the national is less urgent than the relation of the two female figures. The short story portrays failed or perhaps merely ambiguous *Bildung*, and attributes the niece's lingering self-doubts about her mental abilities to her failure to resolve a dilemma concerning her link to the female material that has confronted her since her youth: the dilemma of her deep connection to her aunt, symbolized by a "splodge" of dirty, feminine material daubed on the wall of their ancestral home near the butter churn. The niece's irresolution goes some way toward undermining the otherwise straightforward narrative of development, a *Bildung* narrative that requires only the limited scope of the short story form to portray the protagonist's development. This protagonist experiences the temporal milestones of maturation: education, evidenced by her successful completion of university courses; sexual initiation, evidenced by her marriage; and physical maturity, evidenced by her childbearing. As the story closes, however, her mental capacity is significantly in doubt because of her interrelation with her disabled aunt, the keeper of her maternal family's ancestral home.

## II: FEMALE EMBODIMENT IN "BLOOD AND WATER"

Mary, the protagonist of "Blood and Water," recounts one of many holidays her family took in the 1960s or 1970s to her maternal ancestors' home in the *Gaeltacht* (area where the Irish language is commonly spoken), where her Auntie Annie Bonner still keeps house. For the majority of the text, Mary, speaking in the first person and using the past tense, describes her earliest experiences there. The story ends with a short passage

that references Mary's return to the *Gaeltacht* as an eleven-year-old Irish language camp scholar, and then a short, concluding passage set "many years" later, in the present ("Blood and Water" 12).<sup>26</sup> Thus, because Mary speaks from an adult subject position throughout the short story, this text bears out Dougherty's observation that the "Irish girl remained unspeakable: there is no text in which we are given 'literally a girl speaking'" even at the threshold of an era in which, as James M. Smith observes, "so much female experience was for the first time becoming speakable" ("Nuala" 87). As an adult, Mary struggles to present her educated self to her "prim suburban neighbours" and "rather aristocratic" husband; she is concerned that she is failing to embody the image of adult Irish womanhood she envisions for herself (BW 121). Mary's narrative illustrates certain challenges she faces as an educated, comparatively worldly Irish woman in a culture that dichotomizes representations of womanhood as symbolic, maternal beings and domestic, maternal bodies. Mary's struggle suggests that there remains little or no space in this formulation for women's sexual and intellectual life outside the nation and the family. *Ní Dhuibhne* focuses on Mary's preoccupation of her memories of her aunt and of the abject splodge she first encountered in her aunt's home when she was on the cusp of adolescence. Aunt Annie is Mary's mother's closest family relation; as in *Ní Dhuibhne's* later novel, the story's focus on the girl's aunt displaces the typical focus on the mother-daughter relationship and gestures toward opening the story into a wider appraisal of the community outside the insular nuclear family.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike with other female characters, *Ní Dhuibhne* does not represent Mary as a highly embodied character. As she narrates in first person, Mary reveals little of her

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<sup>26</sup> Hereafter cited in the text as BW.

<sup>27</sup> For discussion of the mother-daughter dyad's predominance in Irish women writers' works, see Ingman.

body, which might be expected from a character that likes for her “ablutions to be private and unobserved” (BB 113). In the mode of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the text is more concerned with the protagonist’s perceptions of other bodies than with making the protagonist’s body a visible element of the story. In other words, the bodily occurs in this short story as a thematic conflict; the protagonist develops her response to the visible bodies she finds mortifying. This becomes apparent when, for example, all the members of Mary’s family must remove their shoes in order to make a religious pilgrimage to Doon Well. Mary recoils.

The pain! Not only of going barefoot on the stony ground, but of having to witness feet, adult feet, our parents’ and our aunt’s, so shamelessly revealed to the world. Like all adults then, their feet were horrible: big and yellow, horny with corns and ingrown toenails, twisted and tortured by years of ill-fitting boots, no boots at all. To crown it, both my mother and aunt had varicose veins, purple knots bulging hideously through the yellow skin. (BW 116-7)

The emphasis on the discoloration and misshapeness of the adult feet and the disgust at the state of the women’s veins in this passage brings out an important aspect of this short story’s approach to the body. In “Blood and Water,” visibly rendered bodies are grotesque, a category Mary attempts to keep at a distance from herself.

In literary discourse, the category of the grotesque is most often discussed in relation to the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom the image of the grotesque is related to “lower bodily stratum” and which exaggerates the human body in its



“convexities and orifices” (*Rabelais* 20, 37).<sup>28</sup> For herself, Mary aspires to something closer to the “classical body,” a category antithetical to the grotesque that Bakhtin also theorizes, as a body that is “strictly completed” and “finished” (*Rabelais* 29). As Mary Russo summarizes it, the “classical body” is “transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek; it is identified with the ‘high’ or official culture of the Renaissance and, later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie”<sup>29</sup> (8). As I suggested in the previous chapter, this characterization of these aspirations suggest a certain affinity between the classical body and the protagonist’s anticipated body in a *Bildungsroman*. Additionally, *Bildungsromane* have force in relation to national registers, which complicates figurations such as Mother Ireland, a social figuration of and for the people of Ireland, by rendering her changes grotesque, even as they find resonance in the growth of the *Bildungsheld*. If the grotesque body is a body that grows and transitions, as opposed to the classical body that is complete and static, then grotesquerie inheres both in a figure of the nation such as the Woman as Ireland figure and in the *Bildungsheld*, compounding the force of the grotesque in the *Bildungsroman*.

The logic of transformation common in representational practices helps to relieve the resulting tension between the grotesque and the classical bodily principles in the *Bildungsroman*. When transformations occur instantaneously and/or literally and metaphorically off stage, the grotesqueries attached to the transformation necessary to

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<sup>28</sup> For Bakhtin, the grotesque body is a social body and “is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.” The “main events in the life of the grotesque body” include “Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing,) as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body.” Thus, the “bowels and the phallus... play the leading role in the grotesque image” and “Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus” (317).

<sup>29</sup> See also Rowe.

achieve a “classic body” for the Irish people are elided and concealed. Since the body in question is a female body, the impulse to conceal the grotesque is particularly charged. When this impulse was coupled with the assumption that individual Irish women offered guarantees of national purity with their behavior, the representational stakes are even higher. It is little wonder, then, that encounters with the female grotesque prove vexing to Irish female characters such as Mary, characters who are seeking not only to gain understanding of their society but who are also expected, by dint of their position as protagonists of coming-of-age narratives, to undergo some sort of transformation. We can see this playing out in “Blood and Water,” a story which gains its force from the individual Irish woman’s response to the female, Irish grotesque.

A main thrust of the grotesque theme in “Blood and Water” is located in the “splodge of a dirty yellow substance” that occupies Mary’s attention (BW 114). Mary encounters this splodge—butter, actually—on the wall of Annie’s home during her childhood visits. This unhygienic splodge brings out a sense of an underlying repulsion toward material feminine substances that Mary has internalized. Such regimes of thought extend throughout Western culture and tend to view corporeal bodies as unpredictable, uncontainable, messy, inferior swamps.<sup>30</sup> The splodge illustrates gynophobic anxieties about female corporeal seepage; not only is it female, it is animal and a product of lactation. It is also a product of feminized labor and one commodity that has largely fallen under the purview of Irish women. As an adult, Mary, having attended a university course in ethnology, can retrospectively identify the material as “butter, daubed on the wall after every churning, for luck,” as part of a superstition and premodern, animistic, folklore-

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<sup>30</sup> In her classic article outlining this paradigm, Bordo delineates the masculinist notion that “[s]wamped’ inside the body, one simply [does] not have a perspective from which to discriminate, to examine, to judge” (449).

based belief system (BW 114). She states that her youthful self abhorred it on the grounds that “it symbolised something quite other than good fortune, something unthinkably horrible” (BW 114). In a room where the narrator brought in clean water and washed herself, a soft, ambiguous and mysterious substance smeared on the wall caused anxiety. She admits, “[t]his thing so repelled me that I never even dared to ask what it was, and simply did my very best to avoid looking at it while I was in its vicinity, washing or bringing back the bucket of water from the well, or doing anything else” (BW 114).

For Mary, the splodge functions as the most abject of materials because it links her culturally formed concerns about female embodiment and her maternal inheritance. Julia Kristeva, who first developed a theory of the abject, argues that through abjection, the self defines itself as a self; what is abject is that which is radically excluded in order to establish boundaries between the self and the non-self (1).<sup>31</sup> It must be noted that abjection functions by forcing the self to confront the elements of the self that the self rejects as “other.” Abjection thus reconfirms the centrality of those jettisoned elements to the processing of a concept of self. The abject threatens the subject from the inside and the outside; it is involved in establishing a boundary between the two, though abject materials can never be definitively relegated to one category or the other because they are involved in establishing a boundary between the two. Abject materials are often associated with bodily orifices, which are sites where “inside” and “outside” are demarcated. For Kristeva, abject materials associated with sexual difference bespeak danger; it “stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through

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<sup>31</sup> Kristeva describes that during the process of abjection, “that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (Kristeva 1).

internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference” (Kristeva 71). The significances of these materials are, of course, culturally influenced. Kristeva calls the abject and abjection her “safeguards. The primers of [her] culture,” thus underscoring how, in her theory of the process of subject formation, culture plays a significant, shaping role (2). Ní Dhuibhne’s literary depiction highlights the involvement of a traumatic confrontation with bodily material associated with sexuality to subject formation.

The splodge continues to shape Mary’s conception of feminine substances into her adulthood. For Mary, it evokes a superstitious, mentally challenged maternal aunt who she suspects she mirrors beyond facial resemblance. It signifies the rural, west of Ireland, familial roots that prevent her from fully integrating into her suburban Dublin culture. Further, the formless splodge seems likely to be contaminated by dust, bacteria, mold, and/or mildew, hence the “dirty” color that causes young Mary to take it for “some kind of fungus” (BW 114). Mary understands feminized, formless, seeping “dirt” as defiling, which amounts to a denigration of the feminine body and maternal inheritance Annie and her splodge of butter connote.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the splodge evidences how Ní Dhuibhne’s short story is attuned to contemporary trends Grosz has identified where women “are represented and live themselves as seepage, liquidity” (203).<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the pairing of Annie and this splodge utilizes a “metaphorics of uncontrollability, the ambivalence between desperate, fatal attraction and strong revulsion, the deep-seated fear of absorption, the association of femininity with contagion and disorder, the undecidability

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<sup>32</sup> Note that “dirt” in this context is not necessarily a foul or filthy substance. Rather, it is, as Douglas argues, matter that is simply out of place. See Douglas.

<sup>33</sup> Grosz asks, “Can it be that in the West, I our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping, liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment—not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order?” (203).

of the limits of the female body” (Grosz 203). Grosz suggests that patriarchal structures preclude a model of “dual sexual symmetry” and, rather, establish biological models for sexual difference that posit “the body in a synecdochial relation to the fluids it contains” (196). Highlighting Mary’s complicit reaction to the splodge helps to make patriarchal Ireland’s anxious control over constructions of material feminine bodies visible.

The short story associates and freights material from Mary’s youth with feminine significations and carries the splodge over into her adult present, when she “feels in her mind a splodge of something that won’t allow any knowledge to sink in. A block of some terrible substance, soft and thick and opaque. Like butter” (121). Mary, years later, has just had her busy wife-and-mother schedule disrupted by her aunt’s heart disease, which recalls her to the summer visits to Donegal she experienced years earlier. In the process of sifting through her memories, she speedily outlines her subsequent attendance at university ethnography courses and her marriage to a non-national as if flagging how times have changed and her personal horizons have changed with them. The retrospective framing device Ní Dhuibhne employs in “Blood and Water” filters the adolescent’s narrative with the distancing lens of the past tense and now-adult Mary’s retrospection. It is revealed that Mary feels that she must navigate her relationships to both Annie and her ancestral home as part of her “coming of age.” Here, the “coming of age” motif appears to focus the narrative on a protagonist’s adolescence while actually emphasizing her adult perspective. The narrative itself sustains Mary’s adolescence by revisiting her visits to the *Gaeltacht* as well as the processes of identity formation and self-awareness she was compelled to develop in response to her relationship with and in relation to her aunt.

Mary engenders herself as a contemporary Irish woman by constructing her gendered identity in opposition to the previous generation. Annie at once personifies and exaggerates a certain old, Irish ideal of “authentic” Irish womanhood, known in the Irish language as the *Bean an Tí* (woman of the house). Mary writes Annie and her home as a regressive archetype of Irish womanhood: primitive, deformed, contaminated, and grossly material. Annie’s backwardness enables Mary to identify her own progress. It also allows Ní Dhuibhne to introduce a maternal yet non-reproductive elder into Mary’s childhood. The text disrupts the *Bean an Tí* ideal by assigning Annie a limited mental capacity as well as a non-reproductive body. Mary’s relation to Annie and their physical resemblance carries with it the constant implication that Mary is also mentally or physically disabled, which would threaten Mary’s position.

More specifically, the Annie of “Blood and Water” is mildly mentally and physically disabled, if “[v]ery mildly so: perhaps she was just a slow learner” (BW109). As a rural woman from the earlier generation, her disability has remained unclassified. Rather than sent away to an institutional facility, she was embraced as part of her community. The text explains that children like Annie who was born in rural Ireland in 1925, “were merely considered ‘delicate’” and not subject to the medical attention subsequent generations were more likely to have received (BW 110). However, she looks, to her niece’s “city-conditioned eyes,” “like a freak” (BW 118). Mary reports that if Annie had been born thirty or forty years later, she “would have been scientifically labeled, given special treatment at a special school, taught special skills and eventually employed in a special workshop to carry out a special job, certainly a much duller job than the one she pursued in reality” (BW 109-10). Mary recognizes that, had she been born

later in the century, Annie would have been subject to capitalism's habits of inventory and Fordist repetitions and her disabled body would have been subject to the increasingly powerful cultural architecture of containment that was in fuller effect in Irish society by the middle of the twentieth century. Ní Dhuibhne's short story indicates that the emerging nation-state's increasing control of public images would likely have mandated Annie's removal from public view because of her disability; Annie would have been filtered out of the nation's self-image. As it is, Annie looked "uniquely outmoded" even "in a place which was decidedly old-fashioned" (BW 118). While the short story suggests that there is some wisdom in allowing Annie to exist peacefully in this close-knit, slower-paced social world, Ní Dhuibhne also suggests that in 1989, the woman of the Irish fireside icon was showing its age and its limitations.

In "Blood and Water," the aunt's bodily form receives attention, which deflects and refracts attention from Mary's body to an extent. The protagonist opposes her identity against her aunt as she attempts to enter a symbolic order premised on a horror of formless materiality. In other words, Mary's question, "how does one who is ten resemble one that is fifty," drives "Blood and Water" (BW 118-9). The answer that remains at the end of this short story is that they are connected, that the adult Irish woman bears more than a simple family resemblance to the disabled woman and the abject material she is associated with. Disability is conflated with socio-spiritual "impurity."<sup>34</sup> Although Mary later attempts to present herself as having grown past her childhood loathing of her aunt, her residual anxieties betray her. "Blood and Water" depicts its young, female protagonist as

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<sup>34</sup> This collapse is an instance of the cultural representation of people with disabilities Robert McRuer addresses through his reading of the 1997 American film *As Good as It Gets*: "disability (the anomalous behavior for which [Jack Nicholson's character] has been diagnosed and which sets him apart from other people) is conflated with his character flaws" (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 23).

having internalized her culture's primers about female bodies, as is indicated by the short story's ultimate capitulation to the established, patriarchal order that Mary remains bound within.

With its depiction of Annie's mental limitations and physical state, Ní Dhuibhne's text provides a feminine image whose mental limitations are tied to her biology. Mary understands Annie to be a woman who operates only at a material level; "She was articulate only on a very concrete level, and all abstract topics were beyond her" (BW 109). Mary's narrative even overemphasizes, exaggerates, and multiplies Annie's disabilities in order to cast Annie as a monstrosity rather than a figure simply unable to easily participate in oral communication.<sup>35</sup> For example, young Mary describes Annie as "deaf" though elsewhere she notes that Annie is at least able to hear her sister's family car approaching (BW 111). In effect, Mary presents Annie's body as degraded in order to corroborate her failure in higher reasoning. As a figure who occupies an emblematic female role in this short story, Annie offers a significant challenge to Mary. Annie functions as a metonymy for a complex matrix of femininity, maternity, and rural, native Irish identity that stands at odds with the more educated and worldly image Mary would like to project. Mary explains that when she was a child, she hated her Aunt Annie precisely because she "resembled her aunt physically" (BW 118). When confronted by this resemblance, Mary reports that she felt self-hatred: "I would cringe and wrinkle up in horror. Unable to change my own face, and unable to see that it resembled hers in the slightest... and how does a face that is ten resemble one that is fifty?... I grew to hate my

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<sup>35</sup> Multiple disability is often used for narrative vilification. Davis has noted that in "order for the audience to fear and loathe the creature, [the creature] must be made to transcend the pathos of a single disability. [...] Disabled people are to be pitied and ostracized; monsters are to be destroyed; audiences must not confuse the two" (144).



physique. And I transferred that hatred, easily and inevitably, to my aunt” (BW 118-9). Mary, who occupies a body that at least outwardly appears to resemble that of her aunt, must prove to herself that she truly merits the educational status she has achieved even as her intense and irrational hatred of her body and her aunt undermines her pose. Ní Dhuibhne describes how this young Irish woman must face a challenge issued by an ideology that hierarchizes rational over irrational, mind over body, male over female. Her protagonist develops in dialogue not just with Irish tradition but with western patriarchy in general. And, ultimately, she accepts its forms.

The splodge thus continues to trouble Mary at the end of the narrative when she intimates that as an adult, she feels like an imposter; she is not at all certain that she has earned her place. “Are my wide education, my brilliant husband, my posh accent, just attempts at camouflage?,” she asks herself; “Am I really all that bright?” (BW 121). Mary’s mistrust of feminine corporeality exposes the instability of the “mature” position she believes her university studies and marriage should have stabilized. Mary admits to being “still ashamed, you see, of my aunt. I am still ashamed of myself. Perhaps, I suspect, I do resemble her, and not just facially. Perhaps there is some mental likeness too” (BW 121). Mary’s narrative closes with a sense that she recognizes but remains within a system in which women, to use Grosz’s formulation, “have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body” (Grosz xiv). The last lines of the short story read like a confession: Mary feels in her “mind a splodge of something that won’t allow any knowledge to sink in. A block of some terrible substance, soft and thick and opaque. Like butter” (BW 121). As a youth, Mary cannot stand the splodge, and, years later, she knows that her abjection of feminine

materiality implicates her in its web. Accepting the connotations attributed to female materiality by a gynophobic regime, Mary remains in the vortex of abjection, unable to emerge because of the way she configures female embodiment.

### III: FEMALE MATERIALITY IN NÍ DHUIBHNE'S EARLY CELTIC TIGER WORK

Because she features bodily materials so prominently in her female developmental narratives, Ní Dhuibhne's work must approach the association of the female body with the "grotesque," for, as Kathleen Rowe puts it, the "grotesque body is above all the female body, the *maternal* body, which, through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of 'becoming,'" (33). In this, we can see Ní Dhuibhne's work contributing an Irish perspective to the international effort by late-twentieth century feminist writers like Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter to recuperate the female body through literary representation. This literary effort participates in a general feminist investment in examining and politicizing representations of the body, an investment that has, among other things, established that theories such as Bakhtin's are severely limited when the crucial, organizing role of gender goes unnoticed. As Russo observes in relation to the topic of female grotesque in the mid-1990s,

What is of great interest at this critical juncture is the assessment of how materials on carnival as historical performance may be configured with materials on carnival as semiotic performance; in other words, how the relation between the symbolic and cultural constructs of femininity and Womanness, and the experience of women (as variously identified and

subject to multiple determinations), might be brought together towards a dynamic model of a new social subjectivity. (54)

In Ní Dhuibhne's Irish context, this conjuncture coincided with the national political shifts and events such as the election of Mary Robinson as the first female President of Ireland. As Dougherty writes, Robinson is "widely seen as having given birth to an emerging Irish symbolic order" ("Coming of Age," no page available).<sup>36</sup> This coincidence seems to have had a significant impact on Ní Dhuibhne's approach to the grotesque.

Yael Shapira gauges how the effort to include material female reality in literary representation has affected the longstanding association of the female "grotesque" with social transgression, an association she argues has "a specifically *narrative* history."<sup>37</sup> As Shapira observes, feminist authors have made this link a contemporary site for intervention and revision of longstanding associations (55). Shapira argues that their efforts have impacted the "changing 'fit' of body and narrative" so that the female grotesque is not solely a warning to women who would transgress cultural boundaries, but can be an asset to vivid storytelling about women's real experiences (Shapira 55). Their work, however, raises the question of what the wave of representational effort affects—"when women themselves appropriate and reframe such images" as the female grotesque, Shapira queries, "can the body's 'disorder' stand not for danger but for an exhilarating challenge to oppressive social boundaries?" (53). Shapira, using Bakhtin's

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<sup>36</sup> It has become a truism of contemporary Irish society, Dougherty notes, that the "unlikely election of Mary Robinson to a largely symbolic post changed—changed utterly—that society" ("Coming of Age" n.p.).

<sup>37</sup> Shapira articulates how the congruence of body and narrative functions, especially in relation misogynous ideologies that have used the female grotesque as a storytelling asset (51). How this relation translates to reclamations of the female body as literary subject matter to the Irish national context is the subject of my future study of Anne Enright's work.

notion and augmenting it with Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject to read Margaret Atwood's work, suggests that this reclamation has not so much altered the power of the grotesque female body to signify as unruly as it has come to symbolize alternate kinds of unruliness (63). That is, if representations of grotesquely real female bodies such as the ones we see in Ní Dhuibhne's work—fat bodies, bodies that menstruate, bodies with greasy hair, disabled bodies—still signify as unruly, this unruliness may be redeployable to feminist ends. Shapira reminds us, however, to look out for hints like the ones she reads in Atwood's work that market forces can readily co-opt the increasing visibility of the female body in literary representation. Indeed, Ní Dhuibhne is sensitive to how the increased visibility of female material experiences in Irish discourse results in increasing exposure to the disciplining, legislative habits encouraged in late-twentieth century capitalist economies and global capitalism. When Ní Dhuibhne's second collection of short stories, *Eating Women is Not Recommended* (1991) was published, cultural and economic phenomena that eventually came to be associated with the then-nascent "Celtic Tiger" were already an important theme in Ní Dhuibhne's work. In short stories such as "Eating Women is Not Recommended," the wary approach to the social changes suggested by the promulgation of holiday cottages around Aunt Annie's home seen in "Blood and Water" is matched by an awareness that such social changes may provide occasion for different approaches to female materiality in Irish culture. As Jacqueline Fulmer puts it, "Consciousness-raising...accompanies consciousness of tradition in Ní Dhuibhne's works" (78). Like Christina Hunt Mahoney, Fulmer sees in Ní Dhuibhne's second short story collection an eruption "into full-scale resentment of the imposition of traditional female roles" (Mahoney 260, qtd. in Fulmer 78).

Ní Dhuibhne displays an interest in representing “grotesque” female materials and sensitivity to capitalism’s shifts in her 1990s works such as her short story, “Eating Women is Not Recommended.” The title evokes Jonathan Swift’s famous proposal that the poor Irish should sell their children to be eaten by the rich; the reference to Swift calls attention to Ní Dhuibhne’s concerns with Irish women’s position in the contemporary economy. The story depicts a middle-aged woman named Lennie. As the story opens, Lennie is dreaming she has discovered that the food for the party she is hosting was either missing or inedible. Subsequently, the story follows Lennie from her home to her local grocery store, back home, and then back once more to the store. During her first shopping excursion, Lennie is gently alerted by fellow customers and then, more accusingly, by the female store manager that she has spot of menstrual blood visible on her pants. When she is able to retreat to her bathroom at home and view the spot herself, Lennie describes it as the “size of a new penny. No, smaller” and like a “[m]inute crimson farthing, shining against the pale green velveteen. Poppy in the meadow singing,” and also states that it reminds her of an impressionist painting by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Ní Dhuibhne, “Eating Women” 137).<sup>38</sup> Her description of the blood spot emphasizes its visibility, and connects it with both natural growth and public currency.

As Ní Dhuibhne presents Lennie’s handling of the spot of menstrual blood, the eponymous story of Ní Dhuibhne’s first “Robinsonian” collection displays an overt feminist perspective and looks toward models of global capitalism for the possibility of fresh conceptions of various flows of labor, goods, and bodily material. With its representations of the bodily, “Eating Women is Not Recommended,” references how global capitalism impacts cultural mores by making formerly unmentionable female

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<sup>38</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as EWNR.

bodily flows into a problem to be solved by the purchase of disposable products. We see Lennie return to the store to confront the store manager who reproached her for breaking social etiquette with her accidental menstrual display. The gender-sensitive social infraction merits, she believes, financial punishment. Lennie returns to the store calling herself a “menstruating tiger” cunningly intent on receiving “an apology, and also a refund” in response to her claim that the manager has “harassed me sexually here in this shop” (EWNR 139).<sup>39</sup> Lennie is savvy in her demand that financial compensation be coupled to social etiquette and is fluent in the language of political correctness used to police feminist gains against gender inequality that had been made at the time. Lennie verbally attacks the female store manager who, Lennie claims, would not have publically reproached a man or a child wearing clothes with a small blood stain:

You harass me, because my blood is different, isn't it? It's woman's blood. It's menstrual blood. It shouldn't be seen and it shouldn't be talked about, isn't that so? In some societies women are put apart in menstrual huts while they're at it... the unspeakable. In this shop, this capitalist, exploiting shop, where they sell fruit from South Africa, where they pay women less than a pound an hour, where even the managers are dupes, where the clothes are cheaper than anywhere in town because they're made by slave labourers, children, in Korea and Hong Kong, menstruating women are tabooed. Aren't they? It's nothing to do with hygiene. A woman with a blood stain on her pants is no less hygienic than a woman with a blood stain on one of your stinking sanitary towels, on

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<sup>39</sup> The tiger metaphor is an interesting coincidence. The earliest use of the widely popular term “Celtic Tiger” to refer to the economic boom has been traced to a report Kevin Gardiner produced for Morgan Stanley in 1994.

one of your poisoning tampons. The crime is being seen. This blood is not to be seen: it's to be invisible, odourless, unspoken. Because its female blood, isn't that it? (EWNR 140)

The female store manager gives no verbal answer to Lennie's onslaught, though the spectacle draws the attention of the police, who arrest her for breach of the peace. Neither the store manager nor the police address Lennie's argument in the ensuing melee; in this commercial space, Lennie's argument is out of place, and her body is explicitly represented as subject to social authorities. Lennie's ethical argument is buried by their efforts to police and contain a woman they recognize to be a hysterical female. Ní Dhuibhne's short story demonstrates how capitalism's tendency to shape attitudes toward feminine hygiene and propriety in service of a market for feminine products. The materials that are noticeably grotesque here are the same kinds of things that are being monetized. Ní Dhuibhne shows us that the things that make us grotesque also make us susceptible to exploitation by market forces. This observation carries over into Ní Dhuibhne's 1999 novel, where it occurs as a more subtle yet profound exploration of the relation between female corporeality and Irish literary discourse. I examine this nexus more fully in section IV.

Both Ní Dhuibhne's short story, "Eating Women is Not Recommended," and her novel, *The Dancers Dancing*, demonstrate sensitivity to ways in which women are encouraged to rigorously police their bodily processes and, indeed to police other women, as evidenced by the female store manager's role in "Eating Women." A perception that female bodily material is repulsive due to its potential to release mess and wetness, including menstrual blood and, in other instances, milk, motivates this attitude. If

menstrual blood tends to be associated with more transgressive characters in Ní Dhuibhne's work, the author tends to associate milk and dairy products with women who tend to conform to more traditional modes. In Ní Dhuibhne's novel, Elizabeth Crilly, the protagonist's mother, exhibits this attitude and similarly offers a model of femininity focused on containing and policing her own female body, and leaving her daughter to do the same. Elizabeth exemplifies the generation of "ladies" the novel describes as having "set rigid boundaries to the march of their personal experience, as they have guarded their rebellious bodies in unbreachable roll-ons, rigid nylon stockings that no breath of air could penetrate" (*DD* 76). These women have internalized regimes of control over both women's bodies and experiences. The novel summarizes the ethos in the following parenthetical note (a grammatical structure that draws attention to itself as openly secret knowledge): "(Women in Dublin don't want to acknowledge the existence of breasts: they haven't got them, and if they have, those protuberances certainly don't contain anything as messy, as repulsive, as animal, as wet, as milk. I ask you! Milk comes from bottles and Cow and Gate cans, thank you very much indeed! Bosoms are dry pointy pincushions, tucked away in brassieres. And there they stay)" (*DD* 56). Note how breasts, so often objectified as sexual objects, are presented here as potential sites of leakage and are thus all the more strictly policed. Their fullness, their liquidity is emphasized, yet contained and displaced onto bottles and cans. The metaphor "pincushions" at once evokes a violent image of a needle piercing a region of female anatomy and renders breasts arid (pincushions are filled with dry materials that will keep pins from rusting). "Pincushions" banishes the immediate threat of leakage but maintains an aura of violable penetrability about the maternal body.



With the detail about the Cow and Gate cans, Ní Dhuibhne again raises the suggestion that this construction is influenced by the expansion of capitalist markets in the twentieth century. Cow and Gate, a now global company originally based in England, is a well-known seller of infant formula.<sup>40</sup> Thus, this company put its products in competition with female bodies' organic products. Commercial infant formula is a manufactured substitute for human breast milk; makers of the product profit from the social attitude Elizabeth displays, an attitude that marks, among other things, her classed ability to purchase manufactured products. Cow and Gate milk is produced in English and in Irish dairies, so Ní Dhuibhne's naming of this particular formula brand may also gesture toward the imperial economics of exchange that continued to link the two countries even after Ireland became independent. Thus, Cow and Gate also reflects a global trend of industrial consolidation by global companies. Ní Dhuibhne directly links this globalized company to Elizabeth's generation's attitudes toward their bodies and, particularly, their bodies' liquid products.

For Ní Dhuibhne's characters like Lennie and Elizabeth, the female body is unstable and liable to cause public disturbance (as "Eating Women" indicates) or private discomfort (as *The Dancers Dancing* indicates) without notice. In the novel, Ní Dhuibhne presents Elizabeth as almost constantly engaged in efforts to manage her unruly body. Whereas Lennie learns that fighting against certain social expectations about policing the body can result in heightened policing, Elizabeth's experience teaches her daughter that female bodies are inherently unhealthy, so much so that Elizabeth's

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<sup>40</sup> The Cow and Gate Company claims to have operated creameries in England and in Ireland since 1887. The company played a significant role in the creation of a market for powdered infant formula in the twentieth century, has since globalized through a merger with the multinational Danone Group, known as Dannon in the United States (Cow and Gate).

daughter, Orla Crilly, comes to understand the time of her childhood to be “the era of the sick” (*DD* 56). Orla observes that her mother “gets everything. Today a headache, tomorrow her kidneys may be at her. Gallstones, cystitis, trouble with the bowel movements. She will be yellow and liverish, or green and wan. Almost every part of her anatomy lets her down from time to time, and whenever it does Elizabeth is at death’s door” (*DD* 58). These non-gender-specific ailments may be named without impunity. The text is, on the other hand, concerned with portraying how Elizabeth’s generations’ gendered complaints are euphemized rather than named. “Mothers are sick with other, motherly, ailments, many so revolting that there is no name for them, or not a name that you or they would care to utter aloud. ‘Headache’ is the word they use. Mothers have headaches even more often than children have the flu. Nearly every day in many cases. Elizabeth suffers from the headaches” (*DD* 57). The “revolting” female reproductive system makes Elizabeth unreliable and ugly. “Elizabeth well looks lovely, in Orla’s estimation, but Elizabeth ill is another story. Jekyll and Hyde. She can transform herself from being a queen to being a witch, a washy green-eyed monster wrapped in skin-coloured nylon stockings” (57). The text displays the mother’s body made unpredictable and monstrous by its reproductive cycles and, moreover, transforming between two static images. Not coincidentally, the nationalist image, Cathleen Ní Houlihan, also follows that pattern.

Ní Dhuibhne portrays Elizabeth, despite her Englishness, as a typical “Dublin Women” of her time throughout the novel to emphasize that Orla is a member of a subsequent generation. The text puts their generations in direct contrast: “Elizabeth belongs to the class or generation that doesn’t ask questions, and Orla to another category

of humankind, the category that does” (*DD* 203). Elizabeth’s indifference toward information, which Ní Dhuibhne indicates is not essentially Irish, contrasts with Orla’s usual curiosity. With Elizabeth’s name and the mention of the Biblical figure, John the Baptist, Ní Dhuibhne seems even to draw a parallel between St. Elizabeth (John’s mother) and Orla’s mother. By extension, Orla is cast as a John the Baptist figure, making ready for and announcing the arrival of a new age. When Orla queries the mechanics of the Christian narrative of the unborn John the Baptist leaping in St. Elizabeth’s womb as the pregnant Virgin Mary approaches, for example, Elizabeth offers a “vague and not strictly accurate account of some of the facts of life,” explaining that “every month the womb is cleaned out and then you bleed for a few days” (*DD* 203). This is the extent of the “biological details” Elizabeth presents to her daughter, “not because Elizabeth wanted to withhold information but more likely because she didn’t have any and, oddly enough, didn’t seem to feel any lack on that account” (*DD* 203). The religious context of Elizabeth’s lesson makes menstruation into “a remote, theoretical issue. Orla had assumed that she would never be visited by such a bizarre and outlandish experience” until her first period actually arrives (*DD* 203). The elements of religious mysticism Elizabeth incorporates into her worldview and offers to her daughter do little to prepare Orla for her menarche. When it occurs, Orla thus finds herself with “only the vaguest notion about how to deal with the substantive problem: that bright red spot. Orla has nothing. No equipment, no money. If she had money, she wouldn’t anyway be able to get sanitary towels. There are none for sale in Tubber” (*DD* 203-4). In this way, the novel exposes the dominant narratives of bodily development offered to this Irish girl as ineffective and impractical. They leave Orla unprepared for her own

bodily reality. She eventually resolves her problem by turning to another member of her own generation, another adolescent girl, Sandra, for help. Sandra jokes that she is “Auntie Sandra to the Rescue,” but her relation to the other adolescent is closer to sisterhood, and reinforces that Orla is sometimes better served turning to members of her own generation for assistance with bodily matters (*DD* 212).

Ní Dhuibhne’s literary productions use and evaluate the trope of gendered change in the production of Irish womanhood across a period of Irish history that was intensely aware of the infiltrations of the globalized economy into Irish life. Her portrayals of gender in the contemporary, highly globalized Republic of Ireland support Kath Weston’s observation that “[p]eople who have to wend their way through the latest in capitalism often learn to produce gender as a constant that must be constantly reconfigured, usually in that old direction called progress” (Weston 128-9). Elizabeth’s attitude is cast as something that Orla’s generation can supersede and, through that narrative of progress, differentiate itself from its predecessors. Ní Dhuibhne’s work positions women who were adolescent in the 1970s against the prior generation of Irish women and traditional representations of Irish femininity in order to mark progress for Irish gender relations in the 1990s. Weston examines the popular claim that contemporary formations of gender have superseded earlier, less egalitarian forms of gender. Weston’s analysis foregrounds time’s role in contemporary gender formations, which she suggests are conditioned in today’s globalized world by “insistent attempts to commodify gender along with other aspects of identity” (xii).<sup>41</sup> In other words, change is a time claim used in this era of globalization to “grasp the times, in the dual sense of apprehension and acquisition” that

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<sup>41</sup> With this approach, “At issue is not so much how gender constructs have changed through time, but rather how perceptions of the way things were in the past shape the construction of gender in the present, and how the bodies of older women serve to sediment younger women’s perceptions” (Weston 108).

shape gender and make claims on bodies (Weston 129). In order for changes in gender formations across generations to feature in Ní Dhuibhne's novel, one generation (Orla's) progresses while another generation (Elizabeth's) is left behind.

This is not to say that contemporary gender formations are easy for Orla to negotiate—far from it, particularly in relation to the body. Jeanette Shumaker has suggested that the protagonist of Ní Dhuibhne's *Bildungsroman* struggles to accept the grotesque female body, to “accept [herself and...] to separate herself from disparagement of the female body” (110). Shumaker argues that for Ní Dhuibhne's protagonist, “maturation entails accepting the grotesqueness of [her] body. The female body erupts through excess weight and unruly sexual desires” (103). She concludes that through “questioning the grotesqueness of the female body and the so-called lowliness that it signifies,” Ní Dhuibhne in fact takes part in the counter-tradition of the Irish novel described by Gerry Smyth, which “can be understood as an attempt to escape the limitations of the nation's colonial heritage and the manner in which it was forced to construe the world in terms of rigidly defined, oppositional categories—Irish and English, woman and man, national and alien” (Smyth 43, qtd. in Shumaker 110). Shumaker's work insists on the necessity for reading the Irish female body in overt relation to national context, for the grotesque representations that occur in this text are connected to the national embodiments that frequently erupt into Ní Dhuibhne's narrative as well. Ní Dhuibhne's bodily representations, for instance, intend to comment on various Irish national representational practices from across the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> In order to

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<sup>42</sup> For instance, with her choice of title, Ní Dhuibhne references the final line of Yeats's poem “Among School Children,” which asks, “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” Marjorie Howes describes how around the time he was writing, for Yeats, “Ireland was developing an identifiable national culture—but a vulgar and oppressive one that demanded a maimed version of femininity. Women whose only

succeed as a *Bildungsroman* depicting Irish female development, the novel must also reorganize a number of them. In order to represent an Irish female protagonist learning to accept the grotesque female body and becoming “a normal woman,” this *Bildungsroman* must find a way to naturalize female bodily development.

The temporal experience of normality is highly relevant because bodily development supplies a temporal schema to narrative. In the introduction to this chapter, I described how Orla wants to be a “normal woman” and how, in *The Dancers Dancing*, normality consists in being even (DD 139). The novel initially describes normality as in fitting into a time and place and being in tune, but it proceeds to complicate this statement. As Ní Dhuibhne develops this thought more fully, she goes on to state that, “the most normal people of all are those who hear the latest [musical] air split seconds before the majority and set the tone, beginning to sing in time to it, split seconds ahead of the posse” (DD 139). As Susan Cahill shows in her reading of this passage, “to be normal, to fit perfectly into one’s time” by this logic, “is to be slightly out of time, ahead of time. Thus, even when one achieves ‘normality’ and evenness, one can still be out of synch with most people’s temporality. ‘Normal people must constantly look forward in order to fit into the present and inhabit the future in order to inhabit the present’ (Cahill 75). Such anticipatory futurity in a *Bildungsroman* may constitute true *Bildung* in Bakhtin’s sense, in that the emergence of the *Bildungsheld* brings about the emergence of a new epoch.<sup>43</sup> I raise this possibility again in my exploration of *The Dancers Dancing* in the next section.

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options were marriage or emigration were forced to sell themselves like livestock, degrading their youth and bodies by organizing their sexuality around economic and practical concerns rather than around romance and pleasure” (140). Ní Dhuibhne invites comparison of the versions of femininity available in Irish national culture across eras.

<sup>43</sup> I explored this notion in relation in the chapter on James Joyce’s *Bildungsroman*.

IV: IRISH GIRLHOOD AND QUEER TIME IN *THE DANCERS DANCING*

As a cast of young Dublin students boards a school bus bound for the West of Ireland where they will spend the summer studying Irish language and culture, Ní Dhuibhne's novel *The Dancers Dancing* pauses to describe Orla Crilly's thirteen-year-old body. The omniscient narrator lingers over this Irish girl, dilating to describe her body and how she is dressed in the Irish tricolor, turning her into a queer figure for the Irish nation. Orla's "fat bottom bulges inside her green corduroy trousers. And peeping out from their green hems are shoes . . . which have a dainty little heel and a white pearl buckle in front, very attractive, but which are a very peculiar color for shoes, namely tangerine. The surface even has the dimpled, slightly repulsive texture of orange peel" (*DD* 11). Ní Dhuibhne suspends narrative time to turn out this picture of Orla's developing body and curious ensemble so that the "odd" dimpled texture of her peculiarly colored shoes becomes a visible echo of what her fleshy, fat, expanding body materializes: she grows sideways, a kind of growing that is not "growing up." Ní Dhuibhne calls attention to this growth through the voice of Aisling, a girl who is to Orla "perfect in every way" and who is named after the Irish vision poem tradition, which is closely related with the Woman as Ireland trope. When Aisling exclaims "[v]ery patriotic!" at the sight of her friend Orla's green, white, white and orange outfit, Ní Dhuibhne underscores that Orla's sideways growth is a response to a long-standing national discursive regime that shapes and constrains Irish women's—and girls'—life schedules even in the late twentieth century (*DD* 11).

*The Dancers Dancing's* expression of contemporary Ireland as thirteen-year-old Orla uses her growth as a vehicle that transforms heteronormative notions of gender and

time in Irish discourse. In this section, I will argue that queerness and queer uses of time and space, what Judith Halberstam calls "willfully eccentric modes of being" that have "the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space," propel this narrative's movements (Halberstam 1, 2). *The Dancers Dancing* makes use of queer meaning-making practices attached to representations of childhood in Western culture to naturalize the developmental narrative of an Irish girl. Finding that the available routes for "growing up" both Irish and female do not work, no longer work, never did work, or were never mapped in the first place, Ní Dhuibhne hangs time in suspension to begin to imagine the transitions between Irish girlhood and Irish womanhood. In other words, the figuring of sideways growth in Ní Dhuibhne's novel signals that she finds the narrative routes between youth and adulthood available in late-twentieth-century Irish discourse ill fit girlhood. Thus, *The Dancers Dancing* suggests that queer narrative routes better suit the experience of growing up female in the late-twentieth-century Irish Republic and in a discursive tradition where femininity has been tied up with national representations.

Ní Dhuibhne's reliance on queer temporal and developmental modes responds to the dearth of extant models for writing the maturation of a female Irish child. The familiarity of novels depicting Irish boyhood, for example, tends to overshadow and determine expectations for novels resembling the *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age novel, a genre often epitomized by, and usually explicitly defined in relation to, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Traditionally, the *Bildungsroman* has been tied to narratives of national development both in the West and in postcolonial spaces. *The Dancers Dancing* wryly demonstrates how readily the genre can be applied to nationalist



renditions of twentieth-century Irish history by including a one-paragraph mini-*Bildungsroman* of the "new Ireland" that produced Orla's language college. This passage casts the Irish nation as a youth who has had a "deprived harsh childhood" characterized by a "long dull struggle for self-assertion" against British imperialism (*DD* 18). This "new Ireland" is "born in the heady days of the Celtic Revival" and is the offspring of a divine father, the Catholic Church, and presumably, Mother Ireland, though the maternal line is unnamed (*DD* 18). By 1972, the "new Ireland" is maturing as expected: "now the country has reached adolescence and is breaking away from its Roman fathers" (*DD* 18). This short national history follows a linear chronology of gradual development that promises to culminate in independence and self-determination. Literary critics have long recognized that these tropes are gendered socially and psychologically masculine and are often incompatible with feminine horizons of possibility (Able, Hirsch and Langland 12-3). Ní Dhuibhne's project hopes to reimagine overdetermined tropes in order to expand those horizons.

Emphasis on masculine developmental modes in the Irish literary tradition constrains the possibilities for writing Irish girlhood, and this context is made more complicated by Ireland's history of colonization, which helped to foster an abundance of allegorizations of Ireland as feminized or infantilized. However, Ireland's avatar has rarely, if ever, been both female and a child until Ní Dhuibhne dresses Orla in the Irish flag. Young people, particularly girls, are largely irrelevant to a nationalist identificatory schema and occupy a marginal position in the social hierarchy. While there is a minor tradition of representing Ireland as a child, as Richard Haslam reminds us, the Irish child-nation motif is gendered male in the vast majority of these instances. It is not a

coincidence that the generic child is, by default, male, nor is it coincidence that children are tacitly presumed to be simultaneously asexual and pre-heterosexual.<sup>44</sup> These presumptions are foundational to the Western heteronormative ideologies that undergird Irish nationalist discourses, which as Kathryn Conrad observes, drew upon notions of the heterosexual "family cell" by envisioning "Ireland as a woman who needed to be saved by her devoted sons from rape by the colonial invader" (11). Such myths accorded agency to Ireland's mature sons; these discourses feature the child role as a mere ploy in the interest of inscribing adult power relations in favor of nationalist men. Indeed, *The Dancers Dancing* makes it clear that Irish adults regard children as their subordinates: "Children are there to carry out adults' orders, first and foremost. Their feelings, and adults do not believe they have any, simply don't matter" (*DD* 137). During the era of Orla's youth, at least, children have no right to be a child, "[n]obody has or ever had; that is the thinking" (*DD* 137). As the novel remarks, "at this time and this place," it is "considered perfectly acceptable" to believe that "children are merely substandard grown-ups, to be ignored or whipped into adulthood, but never tolerated on their own terms" (*DD* 7). This is the view of the camp counselor, Sean O'Brien, who cannot be convinced that children's preferences matter. "One sweet is the same as another, perhaps, is his point of view, indicating how little he understands his charges. The little buggers don't matter, perhaps, is his point of view, indicating how little he likes them" (*DD* 14). Elsewhere in the novel, Ní Dhuibhne underscores children's social marginality when the students who have packed the local shop are forced to wait while the shopkeepers attend to O'Brien, the single adult's, late arrival. The annoyance Orla feels but cannot articulate about being "used to being pushed aside, all the time, if any adult demands prior attention" is a

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<sup>44</sup> For further discussion of this temporal paradox, see the Bruhm and Hurley.

response to the shopkeepers' signaling of children's relative insignificance in the symbolic order under capitalism (*DD* 54).<sup>45</sup> Patriarchal preference only amplifies this social attitude toward girls.

Since predominant systems of signification tend to favor male conditions, the project of rendering Irish girlhood as the experiences particular to life as a prepubescent female in Ireland faces a problem of legibility. Ní Dhuibhne's text observes, "Boys were boys or lads or fellas. Girls were just young *ones*: they did not merit a generic name of their own" (79, original emphasis). This passage makes visible how young females can be further effaced in Irish discourse. The label "girl" can itself serve as a catch-all phrase denoting a female's position in relation to the institution of marriage; as Angela Bourke notes, "'girl' in the older Ireland meant an unmarried female," such that a phrase like "middle-aged girl" operated as less an oxymoron and more a sign of marginal social status (16).<sup>46</sup> *The Dancers Dancing* recognizes that girlhood often disappears into received narratives about womanhood. The narrative explains, "Knowing too much is a burden Orla has been given to carry, because she is a girl. Girls read and learn and in consequence know too much. Nobody in Ireland likes a child who knows anything" (*DD* 34). *The Dancers Dancing* critiques this animosity toward the feminine and feminine knowledge ascribed here to a cunning child, and even suggests that prevalent Irish narratives tend to mature girls precociously because they expose and condition Irish girls to traditional, gynophobic gender dichotomies from a young age. It pronounces, "Girls are often owl-fashioned, their eyes are cunning and knowing, peering from their polite and silent faces, while boys are innocent, lovable and cherished. Orla has been taught this

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<sup>45</sup> The shopkeepers' temporary refusal of service is in many ways analogous to the treatment of fat people Moon and Sedgwick consider. See Moon and Sedgwick.

<sup>46</sup> For this point, I am indebted to one of *Éire-Ireland's* peer reviewers.

since she was about two years old" (*DD* 34). Irish girls are thus hustled toward maturity earlier than boys because this early conditioning to certain narratives of knowledge entails a loss of innocence, a defining characteristic of childhood. Compared to boys, Irish girls can be precociously dismissed from the category "child."

Simply put, there is a gap, or in the language of *The Dancers Dancing*, there is an "ocean that no bridge or ship or airplane or seagull or albatross or anything could ever cross," associated with girlhood in Irish culture (30). That gap corresponds to the narrative passage between girl and woman. Dougherty notes that a "disconnection of girl and woman is a hallmark of the Irish literary girlhood" and attributes this disconnection to a writing tradition that positions subjectivity as antithetical to Irish girlhood ("Nuala" 52). She claims, "unlike male subjectivity," which the language of psychology dates to the Oedipal stage, "female subjectivity begins at puberty—which is where much Irish women's life writing also begins" (Dougherty, "Nuala" 58). Reproductive maturity can indeed define Irish womanhood with particular rigor; Ireland is infamous for using the words "woman" and "mother" interchangeably in its constitution, which has helped to stage the terms of debate about female subjectivity within Irish discourse.<sup>47</sup> Thus, puberty flags where nationalist narratives meet Irish females with demands for "normal" sexuality and life schedules that dictate that until they are reproductive, young females are rather more "young *ones*" than "girls." Ní Dhuibhne's depiction of a prepubescent subject, however, attempts to uncouple female subjectivity from reproductivity.

*The Dancers Dancing* urges that attention be paid to the discursive cracks and crevices surrounding girlhood through the interplay of the verbal and the material. The introductory chapter, "The Map," locates "the story" in a catalog commingling physical

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<sup>47</sup> See also Steel (98).

objects and bodily matter with politicized phrases. It is in a "chthonic puddle and muddle of brain and heart and kitchen and sewer and vein and sinew and ink and stamp" and a continuing list of other familiar items that crescendos into a mantra of "say nothing and say something and in between, in between, in between, that is the truth and that is the story" (*DD* 3). If the truth is in the "in between," it is also buried in the landscape of Irish discourse, or so the novel's corollary goes. "The rest of the story is in the mud. Clear as muddy old mud," the novel proclaims (*DD* 3). The physical and discursive are interjacent here; what might be symbolic is also material. Thus, if the story is in the mud, so, too, are young Irish bodies. The meshing of literal and figurative perhaps becomes most apparent when Orla stumbles upon a *cillín* (communal burial site for unbaptized children).

Memorials like the *cillín* testify to the material effects that the nation's discursive regime has had on Irish lives, particularly women and children's.<sup>48</sup> They are emblems of what Smith calls "Ireland's culture of containment," which organized the social environment of twentieth-century Irish Republic and "disembodied sexual practice by obscuring social realities, especially illegitimacy, in discursive abstractions. And they concealed sexual crime, especially rape, infanticide, and abuse, while simultaneously sexualizing the women and children unfortunate enough to fall victim to society's moral proscriptions" (Smith, *Architecture of Containment* 2). When faced by the *cillín*, Orla responds not with the abject horror Ireland's moral culture encourages but with simple curiosity as "she brings her hands to the job, pulling and scraping" at the mud (*DD* 202). The text further confronts Ireland's culture of containment and too-often complicit literary tradition with an intertextual reference. Orla's "pulling and scraping" evokes Seamus Heaney's well-

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<sup>48</sup> For further analysis of the role of a *cillín*/killeen in the Irish social landscape, see Smith ("Retelling Stories").

known poem "Digging." Whereas the speaker of Heaney's poem digs with his snub, intermediary pen, one known to conjoin the Irish landscape and the female body, Orla puts her body in physical contact with the infant bones.<sup>49</sup> What can be obfuscated by discursive abstraction is made manifest in *The Dancers Dancing*.

Ní Dhuibhne structures her novel to encourage the excavation of gaps in female developments in Irish literary discourses and hangs moving suspensions ("grows sideways") across those voids, particularly as the most extended, camp section of the novel unfolds. The novel points to interstices, like the thirty-year gap between the penultimate and the ultimate chapters, as the places where new meanings are made and where the "truth" ultimately lies. By taking an adolescent as its subject and constructing various temporal frames around her developmental narrative, Ní Dhuibhne's text renders chronological developmental progress ambiguous and complex, thus participating in queer time. In *In A Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam advances the notion that

queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification. If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity. (1)

Such a notion, I argue, enables the reader to understand how adolescence can have a queering effect on linear, teleological narratives, one that dovetails into the project of imagining change rather than progress.<sup>50</sup> While its protagonist flirts with queer sexual

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<sup>49</sup> For a landmark reading of Heaney's representations of the Irish land as female, see Cullingford.

<sup>50</sup> See Weston (128-30).

identities, it is *The Dancers Dancing's* queer renderings of time enabled by that flirtation with childhood sexuality that create a temporal space to reimagine the Irish national narrative. Within this temporal space lives the possibility of expanding and developing alternatives to the overdetermined nationalist narratives of Irish Womanhood.

Parentheses become a key feature of *The Dancers Dancing's* expression of female development and its suspension of time. In fact, a parenthetical structure organizes the novel. A trio of short introductory chapters, each differently located in time and space, gives way to a more extensive middle section and then a concluding chapter called "Now." This parenthetical form frames Orla's camp narrative as an "in between." The prose is also sprinkled with parentheses that can bracket off their content as a narrative aside or an explanatory interjection of an additional level of meaning into a narrative. Parentheses contain meaning and also multiply it. They belie the narrator's central concern and can also serve to call attention to attempts to displace it. For example, the narrative offers contrapuntal correctives to the children's apparent obliviousness to contemporary political events. One chapter title declares, "The truce is over (but not to worry it's 1972)" (DD 98). The reminder that "it's 1972" shuttles the reader between 1972 and the "Now," of the novel's publication in 1999, when 1972 can be more readily contextualized as a significant year of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, which were receding in 1999, especially following the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The novel's parentheses—the structural bracketing performed by the first and last chapters, the bracketing of references to particular political moments—echo the instantaneous movement of transformations, while the repeated vacillation simultaneously undermines the stasis a transformation might achieve.

The framing chapters envelop a central section set (mostly) in 1972 at a summer camp–like Irish language college in the *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking region), a setting that removes Orla and the other relatively urban students from both their everyday spaces and from their everyday time. The *Gaeltacht's* geographic remove from the students' routine domestic spaces makes it possible for the language college to resemble the American Girl Scout camp Kathryn Kent discusses, which can be seen as "a counterpublic space for the inculcation and nurturance of (sometimes) antinationalist, antibourgeois, and antiheterosexist identities and practices" (175). The novel deigns the *Gaeltacht* "a land of the child," a place where "there is a kind of equality . . . that isn't possible in Dublin, land of 'What Does Your Father Do?'" (*DD* 136). Not only does this labeling of the *Gaeltacht* offer an alternative to the association of the West of Ireland with Mother Ireland and Irish as a mother language; it also demonstrates that the summer camp, as a space, liberates the students from some of the influences adults have over their lives. The language college is experienced as an intermezzo in the students' routine education and maturation, an aside that is nonetheless significant to the production of Irish citizens. If the basic unit of Irish society is the heterosexual family cell, as Conrad argues, then the language college setting allows Irish children to experiment with identities and practices that are inherently queered by being outside the familial sphere.

From a normative Western adult perspective, queerness is an inherent, if strenuously ignored, feature of childhood. We rarely pause to comment upon how queer it is that the Freudian child, for example, is said to express both same-sex and opposite-sex sexual desires at various times.<sup>51</sup> In the thirteen-year-olds' subculture depicted in *The Dancers Dancing*, the expression of heterosexual desires becomes explicitly transgressive.

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<sup>51</sup> For more extensive discussion of the queer Freudian child, see Stockton as well as Bruhm and Hurley.



For example, Orla knows it is "odd" to like her dance partner, Alasdair, even platonically. Orla becomes queer for having alliances outside the circle of the other adolescent girls: "If she were normal, like Aisling and Sandra, she'd think he was a weed" (*DD* 49). This expression of childhood homosociality is not *The Dancers Dancing's* only flirtatious attachment of queerness to childhood. A store dubbed "The Gay Child," "Dublin's most exclusive children's boutique," is perhaps the most visible sign that Ní Dhuibhne plays with the overcoding of innocence onto childhood sexuality (*DD* 84). The name "The Gay Child" cannot help but evoke homosexuality, even as it attempts to banish that connotation of the word "gay" by pairing it with the asexually coded word "child." The store's (failed) attempt to make "gay" signify solely as "happy" participates in the cultural regime that would deny childhood sexuality too vociferously to be convincing. The name also references concerns that the influx of capitalist goods, particularly clothing, seen in 1970s Ireland might "pervert" the Republic's cultural future, its children.<sup>52</sup>

Outside influences, in the form of English and American children's novels, and residual post-colonial anxieties about linguistic purity nurture this protagonist's preexisting queer tendencies. Orla romanticizes that Irish college would "be like a summer camp, like something she had read about in *The Bobbsey Twins*" (*DD* 27). Her mass-market paperback-influenced vision of the citizen-shaping space of the *Gaeltacht* displays how readily queerness attaches to girlhood and suggests that English influence, and indeed the girl's intelligence, amplify her inclinations. British author Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* series sparks Orla's special interest in the character Darrell Rivers, "with whom Orla has always identified absolutely" (*DD* 27). Darrell, whom Orla's description

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<sup>52</sup> O'Hearn reports that the country "which had virtually clothed and shod itself in 1960 imported more than 77 per cent of its clothing in 1980" (41–42).

paints as a rather butch adolescent complete with a gender-neutral name, "was the kind of girl who would rather be martyred at the stake than give up her right not to wear makeup. A shirt and tie is what she liked to wear" (*DD* 27). Novels about Darrell inspire Orla to fantasize about girls in swimsuits.<sup>53</sup> Orla's *Malory Towers* reverie culminates with an account of "the best and most memorable dream she had ever had . . . laughing girls in red swimsuits diving from the diving board. . . . Rocks, ripples, red swimsuits. Lovely perfect English accents. . . . English as she should be spoke. Girls as they should be taught. Life as it should be lived" (*DD* 28). Foreign, late colonial influences contribute to Orla's coupling of sexual and linguistic desires as she imagines this camp scene, but Ní Dhuibhne refuses to contain the threat queerness makes to the stability of the nation/state by equating queerness with foreignness.<sup>54</sup> Orla is queer *and* native.

The narrative is quick to prick Orla's red swimsuits fantasy, though the native *Gaeltacht* setting cannot inscribe heteronormativity onto Orla as the Irish college administrators might wish. "Of course Irish college could not be like that. Of course not. Orla knows. She should: she's been to Tubber before, three or four times at least. It's here her father comes from, so she knows exactly what it's like" (*DD* 29). Orla is no "[o]rdinary *Gaeltacht* scholar"; the language college cannot fully be a counterpublic for her because "Orla is not entirely free from her family, not like the other children for whom Tubber is a holiday camp only, a haven removed from every adult connection" (*DD* 136). Orla, as the protagonist of an Irish novel of development, and moreover, as a green corduroy and tangerine-shoe-wearing avatar of contemporary Ireland, is tangled with the

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<sup>53</sup> Orla's fantasy bears a strong resemblance to Stanley Lloyd's cover art for the first edition of Enid Blyton's *First Term at Malory Towers*.

<sup>54</sup> For analysis of national narratives that construct homosexuality as a "foreign" threat, see Conrad (21–69).

politics and values of nationalism. As the daughter of an English-born mother and a Tubber-born father, Orla belongs "in between" two symbolic spaces. The text labels her "Orla of the double allegiances, Orla of the city and the country, Orla who belongs in both places and belongs in neither" (*DD* 29). Orla is Ní Dhuibhne's experiment with representing contemporary Ireland as a study in hybridity. She embodies binaries that help form the Irish imaginary; there are "two sides of the Crilly coin: the good and the bad, the tourist west and the dull east, the rare Irish and the common English . . . the desirable rural idyll and the unchosen urban reality. Holiday and work. Past and present" (*DD* 6). She has to embody these binaries if she is to figure as a new national ideal, but her "in between" existence alienates Orla from her friends. At the same time, it is not "normal" for such an astute and complex Irish girl to figure as Ireland. Ní Dhuibhne's insistence that Orla's gender is a salient factor in her subject formation is a threat to nationalist regimes of thought to the extent that, as David Lloyd has argued, "the desire of nationalism is to saturate the field of subject-formation" (182).<sup>55</sup> Orla's femininity, let alone her queerness, threatens the primacy of national identification.

In its temporal as well as in its spatial horizons, the novel departs from traditional national representations. Orla wears her flag outfit when she is a prepubescent girl, which places her at a distinct temporal remove from existing representations. At times, it is Aunt Annie Crilly who seems to come closest to inhabiting the national ideal. She is an Old Woman figure and the inhabitant of Orla's paternal family's ancestral *Gaeltacht* home. However, Auntie Annie serves as a crippling metaphor from which Orla must save herself. Auntie Annie is "out of kilter, not plumb with the world. Her face is crooked, her mouth is crooked, and she walks with a clumsy and awkward gait; her feet cannot be

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<sup>55</sup> Also see Conrad (55–56).

relied upon to meet the ground at every step" (*DD* 138). Auntie Annie was likely damaged at birth and will never have a sound body capable of reproducing Irish children or images of the Irish nation. Further, she is hard of hearing. She tells stories (which the college's Irish language instructors record for posterity) but is deaf to the contemporary world and is thus a (maternal) transmitter of culture. This old woman of the Irish homestead is not "normal" and does not fit into her "time and place" (*DD* 139). While Orla's queerness serves the novel's rendering of a new alternative to traditional representations of the nation, Annie's body is made literally crooked as a meditation on how damaging the tradition of personifying Ireland as female has been to Irish women.

The nationalist formulation of "woman" tethers an aura of mythic authenticity and timelessness to what is nonetheless a specific time of a female's life: her reproductive years and beyond. If in Irish nationalist iconography, as in the Irish constitution, women are defined in relation to reproductive function, the category of "maiden" demarcates one end of the symbolic spectrum. A maiden is partially defined in relation to her youth, but more significantly, in terms of sexual experience. She might not have yet experienced bodily sexual contact but is nonetheless recognized by her culture as equipped for it. She, unlike a preadolescent or even an adolescent, has experienced physical changes that make her capable of reproduction. At the other temporal extreme of the paradigm is the crone, a formerly reproductive woman. While both maidens and crones are synched with heteroreproductivity, an adolescent representation of the nation must necessarily stand outside this symbolic economy. This thirteen-year-old has not yet "been given her badge" that admits her to "the circle of real girls and women"—the reproductive capacity signaled by her menarche (*DD* 204).

Physically, Orla is between girl and woman (or female child and "girl," as in postpubescent, unmarried woman). Even after her menarche, Orla is anxious that she will not be able to maintain her status as a menstruating woman. "Maybe her period is going to be snatched away before it even started properly, because she doesn't deserve it, being obviously so incompetent? Will it be bestowed on some more worthy girl, less awkward, with a large supply of every feminine accessory?" she worries (*DD* 205). Orla's first period might function as a transformation, but in Ní Dhuibhne's hands, it is also a transition—Orla's insecurity that she might not stay in the category of (future) "normal woman" suspends her somewhere between queer girl and normal woman by making imaginative space for alternate possibilities where social status might not be achieved through reproductive bodily function, but instead through some other merit. Literally and figuratively, Orla enters the story already ripe with imaginative potential that does not transit between girl and woman in a way familiar to Irish discourse. Her fatness is a visible reminder that the text gives weight to the protagonist's developing body in ways we cannot wholly see.<sup>56</sup>

#### V: THE REPRODUCTIVE BODY GROWING UP

Orla's adolescence, not her maturation, organizes the imaginative economy of *The Dancers Dancing*, particularly its temporal horizons. While adolescence has been generally characterized as merely a temporary stage in a cumulative, linear developmental progression, in which an individual experiences the dawning of mature reproductive

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<sup>56</sup> Stockton, as she catalogs some types of queer children, observes that "fat" can serve as a "thick figuration and referent for a child (a sexual child) we cannot fully see. Fat is the visible effect, in this instance, of a child who cannot grow 'up' in his family as his preferred self. So he grows sideways—literally, metaphorically" ("Growing Sideways" 288). Orla's fat may also express anxieties about increased capitalist accumulation seen in Ireland in the 1970s. Also see Moon and Sedgwick (231).

capabilities and the emergence of (presumed) heterosexuality, recent scholarship enlarges our understanding of the concept. A postmodern approach to adolescence, such as Nancy Lesko advocates, recognizes that changes take place over time without necessarily attaching narratives of progress to those transitions. Queer uses of time and space destabilize "panoptical time," a Foucauldian term Lesko employs to describe how expectations of linear progress discipline adolescents and structure cultural expectations about development.<sup>57</sup> The temporal suspensions and crevices emphasized in *The Dancers Dancing* render visible and undermine the force of panoptical time. Rather than emphasizing the concluding "Now" chapter, in which the now adult Orla speaks in the first person, for example, the novel's flickering parenthetical chronology deemphasizes some of the conclusive force of the "Now" chapter by positioning it as simply one of multiple time frames around her adolescence. Within the central camp section, the force of panoptical time gradually loosens and the children's temporal experience begins to differ from the one imposed by the adult regime.

Headmaster Joe believes, has to believe, that the day is so packed with activities that the students have no time to get up to mischief of any kind.... It is all mapped out and at all times a copy of the map is in his head, every pupil carefully spotted on it. But of course there are intervals, interstices, crevices in the edifice he has constructed that he can't afford to know about. Creases of time, worn patches and tiny holes that in the beginning seem too insignificant to be worth thinking about, but which are

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<sup>57</sup> Lesko uses "panoptical time" to "indicate how adolescence was understood as a chunk of time that could be displayed and manipulated" (107).

gradually expanding as the summer wears on. Slowly his map is cracking, and through the cracks the insects start to creep. (*DD* 67)

The intervals and cracks Headmaster Joe cannot officially acknowledge are the very times and spaces that constitute the bulk of the novel. It is in these temporal spaces that Ní Dhuibhne imagines Orla's route between girlhood and womanhood.

Ní Dhuibhne makes the linear expectations of panoptical time strange. She depicts her young protagonist growing laterally and she implements the "literary indirections and linguistic seductions" Stockton describes, which "do what children are often shown as doing: approach their destinations, delay; swerve, delay; ride on a metaphor they tend to make material and, so, imagine relations of their own" (279). A local stream called "the burn" is the material site where Orla grows sideways. It is, quite simply, "her own place" (*DD* 73). The burn is described multiple times within the novel's first framing chapter, "The Map." It is a "narrow bold blue-black line meandering in the nervous way of mapped rivers from one edge—the brown triangle hills—to the monoblue sea" (*DD* 2). It is on an "endless journey, endlessly beginning and endlessly ending, endlessly moving and endlessly unchanging" (*DD* 2). The text describes this stream as both linear and circular and then points out the limitations of the linear perspective: "Inside is what you can't see, maker of maps," nor can the figures on the map be seen after they "move out of the picture altogether, over the edge, into the infinity of after the story" (*DD* 2). The burn is represented as simultaneously flowing through a linear, teleological route and through a circular, atemporal route; in the active temporal suspension of their intersection, the burn coordinates an alternate vision of the Irish nation.

One framing chapter, entitled "Washing," ties a queer temporal circuit to the burn. The chapter describes four girls—including Orla and Aisling—sitting in the middle of this stream, washing their clothes, singing a familiar adolescent chorus: "Will I be pretty? Will I be rich? . . . Che sera sera! Whatever will be will be. The future's not ours to see. Che sera sera. What will be will be!" (*DD* 4-5). The narrative then informs the reader that the "future, even of the song, is not theirs to see. But by now their future is their past, an open book, a closed chapter, water under the bridge" (*DD* 5). This opening scene positions young Irish women in relation to a temporal shift. Presently, they shrug away curiosity about the form their futures will take; when their future becomes their present, they will be able to read their past. In 1972, the girls' futures are shrouded; in contrast, by the concluding chapter, "Now," their past is clear. Time, apparently, has clarified their narrative, but only by looping back on itself.

To enact this temporal circuit, the novel employs a form of queer temporal logic, that of the future anterior tense. This tense creates a suspension by inserting a temporal loop, or queer space of imaginative growth, into the distance between the future, recent past, and the present. This form of queer time serves the Republic's new need to understand itself as having *always been becoming* the "new Ireland." My analysis of the grammatical displacement enacted by the future anterior tense is a translation of Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley's theories about queer children to the arena of the nation. Bruhm and Hurley argue that the sexual identity of a queer child is written out of the present by Western culture's insistence "on making child queerness into a story that will not *be*, but will only *have been*." In this sense, the queer child gets displaced grammatically into a different temporal register, a register that will allow the dominant



narrative to consign the child to a cultural unconscious" (Bruhm and Hurley xix). The text plays with this register because it is interested in establishing a mechanism through which it can break from the patriarchal logic of linear progress that governed teleological narratives of the nation's development. Its forward look at looking back anticipates a temporal disruption that it also attempts to suture with the meeting of those looks. The parenthetical temporality offers the assurance that the queer happenings in the center of the novel will be smoothed out, if not made straight, by Orla's horizontal growth.

One passage in particular creates the suspension necessary for *The Dancers Dancing's* sideways growth: the interstice between the chapters "The burn scene five" and "Blood." The narrative creates a loop around this transition by repeating the sentence "She knows what it is" on either side of the chapter divide. "It," in the first instance, refers to an infant skull that Orla uncovers in the mud of the burn that marks the burn as a *cillin*. "It," in the second instance, refers to the menstrual blood Orla discovers in underpants made gray by repeated washing in the burn, blood that marks Orla as reproductively mature. In the space of both historical and personal reconception that is the burn and in the space of this temporal, textual circuit across the chapter divide, Orla proves herself wise; she knows immediately what "it" signifies in both instances.

The novel firmly establishes that Orla's complex social location stands in direct conflict with her claim to innocence, that all-important characteristic of childhood. Rather than innocent, Orla is particularly "cunning and knowing," which is "a burden Orla has been given to carry, because she is a girl" (*DD* 34). Orla's complicated social situation makes her shrewd, worldly, and precocious. Orla is so cunning she can recognize and articulate the discrepancy between herself and dominant ideas about childhood and then

camouflage herself as like other children: "The mantle of innocence and anonymity worn by other children Orla will drape over herself, and hide whatever is underneath. Plenty. Plenty is underneath. But she is so used to hiding things that the decision to do it is automatic" (*DD* 30). The solution to this problem is one that Stockton might predict. In the same moment(s) where Orla confirms that she knows what "it" is, she is made vulnerable. As Stockton observes of "streetwise" or "too advanced for innocence" children, "as odd as it may seem, suffering certain kinds of abuse, from which they need protection and to which they don't consent" can help to square their experience with their youth, so that they "may come to seem more 'innocent'" (298). The *cillín* testifies that Orla is constrained by Ireland's containment culture. Ní Dhuibhne makes the experience of the women and children victimized by Ireland's containment culture personal for Orla; "The workhouse" chapter establishes that Orla is likely related to the skulls in the *cillín*. Orla "dreams" but does "not know" that the skulls mark the burn as a *cillín* used by a woman named Nuala Crilly and as the site of the infanticide for which the apparently unmarried Nuala was tried and executed (*DD* 210). Orla, like other (Crilly) women, is open to victimization by Ireland's architecture of containment. As she grows sideways, Orla comes to understand the circumscribed opportunities available to her in the Irish time and place of her adolescence. Orla envisions her route forward: she, like other "normal" girls, will continue to be compelled to "[d]o things she hates doing, see people she would rather not see, sacrifice herself. . . . That is how it is for girls, in 1972" (*DD* 145). During the 1970s of her adolescence, Orla's opportunity for horizontal growth proves ultimately constrained by the moral culture upheld by Irish institutions of church, state, and society.

When Orla gets "it," her first period, she synchronizes with a life schedule organized by reproduction. Menarche becomes the normalizing pivot in Orla's life. Once Orla's first period arrives, the novel falls into the pattern of dating Orla's sexual awakening to her menarche and, by implication, to her new capacity for the reproduction of Irish children. Panoptical time resumes. Although Orla's reaction to her menarche has more to do with her relationship to other "normal" women than it has to do with her sexual appetites, the narrative of development available within the text progressively casts her as heteronormative and increasingly receptive to male attention. Once Orla's period arrives, her relationships with young men shift from being characterized by convenience, disinterest, and uncertainty to a performance of traditional rituals of heterosexual romance. Alasdair manages to put his arm around her and even attempts to kiss her at a late-night campfire, for example, and Micheál asks Orla if she will attend the *céili mór* (the big dance). It is Orla's relationship with Micheál that dominates the novel's close. By the end, she pines for the native yet exoticized Micheál in a way that evokes the Aisling tradition. She devotes more descriptive attention to his children than to her own. When adult Orla retrospectively narrates their romance and glosses the remainder of her adolescence, she uses her physical development to mark time: "[T]hat second summer I was fourteen, taller, thinner. I'd had my periods for one year" (*DD* 240). Her taller, thinner body serves as a marker of her linear development upward toward "Now." She mentions her children in passing and her husband in a single sentence, establishing that she has become a wife and mother and could be construed as a new manifestation of the nationalist paradigm. What matters for the nationalist narrative is that Orla's first period flags the moment when she stops growing laterally and commences growing up into Irish

womanhood. Orla's gender and nationality inhere; national signification is not an outfit that she can just take on or put off. By the conclusion, she is the embodiment of the nation once more—and more fully so because she no longer needs the now worn out and outgrown flag ensemble that Ní Dhuibhne dressed Orla in to call attention to her significance on a national register. Once she is rendered innocent by her discovery in the burn, Orla's developmental chronology is rearranged into the normative pattern of innocence followed by reproductivity, marriage, and motherhood. The protagonist's adolescent horizontal growth is displaced onto the recent past. The queerness she exhibited remains remanded there, clearing the way for a heteronormative Irish adulthood that has successfully bridged the past and the present.

As Stockton writes, “‘growing up’ may be a short-sighted, limited rendering of human growth, one that oddly would imply an end to growth when full stature (or reproduction) is achieved” (11). Orla may grow sideways only to cross a threshold into normativity, but her lateral growth has expanded the horizon of discursive possibility for Irish feminine development. In order to narrativize Irish girlhood, Ní Dhuibhne's novel makes meanings in nonnormative ways and with nonnormative tropes, such as by depicting a sexual and possibly homosexual child when Western society prefers to view children as asexual and proto-heterosexual. *The Dancers Dancing* harnesses the queerness inherent to representations of children in Western culture in order to articulate a developmental narrative both female and Irish. Ní Dhuibhne does this by playing with the possibilities that develop from the recognition of childhood sexuality, creating space for new, organic visions of Irish womanhood, and by instituting a complicated expression of the novel's temporal form, one that struggles to articulate the complexities specific to the

historical moment of the late twentieth century in the Republic of Ireland. All the while, Ní Dhuibhne's novel of queer female development confronts the issue of reproduction at odds with feminine subjectivity in Irish discourse.

*The Dancers Dancing* bridges the representational gap that plagues Irish girlhood, but it does not—indeed cannot—sustain its bridge, although it offers future narratives temporal space to conceive alternatives to traditional developmental routes. Further, when a child is queered and set apart from her peers by her special symbolic relation to the nation, that nation is also queered. The future anterior tense may banish Orla's queerness from her present and future, but queerness can never have been compatible with a heteronormative national identity. Ní Dhuibhne, it seems, has grown Irish literary tradition sideways, such that the Irish nation will always have been queer.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**“I Am the Way I Am Because My Father Wears a Wig”: The Unnarratable Growing Body in Anne Enright’s *The Wig My Father Wore***

*“I can’t believe it was that simple. ...I wonder if my body might be blank as a sheet, but in the bath I am there, soft and tough, blood and bone, each breast jealous of the other and the kisses it remembers. There is a hopeful glow of pink fighting back through the white where Stephen left his mark.*

*We are shy in the kitchen. I wonder if I might be pregnant. He looks at me in the way you might look at a woman who is pregnant.*

*We drive into work, while my body secretly remembers all the lettermaking on the white sheets. M was one of them, a touching O, an informal kind of R, for Rurple or embrace, a hilarious K which was just too complicated” (Enright, *The Wig My Father Wore* 179-80).<sup>1</sup>*

Through this project, I have been examining how the growing body functions in novels of development written in twentieth-century Ireland. I have identified a key concept at the heart of each novel’s concern with representing the body in the *Bildungsroman*. For Joyce’s novel, this was what I called the absent body, for McGahern this was the body that grew in passing, and for Ní Dhuibhne this was the body growing sideways. These discussions established that representations of the growing body lend a developmental teleology to a narrative of emergence that may transgresses the dynamic developmental trajectory the novel seeks to portray, and that representations of the real, material, growing body can intervene in the symbolic operations of the *Bildungsroman* by indicating where the protagonist’s presumed capacity for control and self-cultivation have been surpassed or curtailed. Further, these discussions have brought the growing body and narratives about Irish national identity into relation, including the narrative

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter cited within the text as *Wig*.

themes of bloodlines and the Irish martyr's blood sacrifice, and also the logic of bodily transformation in Irish nationalist modes that has tended to suppress more organic modes for expressing feminine development especially. It was crucial to establish and explore this last theme before analyzing more radical experiments with it, which is why I discuss Ní Dhuibhne's novel (1999) prior to Enright's (1995).

In my discussion of Anne Enright's experimental *Bildungsroman*, *The Wig My Father Wore*, I argue that her novel concerns the unnarratable body—the body that is, to use Enright's words, an unsayable thing at the center of her text.<sup>2</sup> In Enright's *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist's body grows in the gaps, slippages, and jumps that help to constitute an uncertain way of making sense. Put baldly, the unsayable thing at the center of *Wig* is that the protagonist is pregnant from the first page of the novel. However, putting it this way might be too bald, because the novel's narrative reveals this “thing” through silences, illusions, and slippages, and because the pregnancy cannot be determined with complete certainty; indeterminacy is part of the process by which Enright shows this body to be unnarratable. *Wig*'s protagonist is also the narrator, and she is occupied with concealing this unsayable thing. In conjunction with her silence about the form of bodily growth she is almost certainly experiencing throughout *Wig*, the narrator provides an elaborate, incredible alternative story about her growing body, which she suggests grows in reverse, back to adolescence, with a miraculous pregnancy following afterward, by the end of the novel. That is, this nymphomaniacal character

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<sup>2</sup> In discussing her feminist aesthetic, Enright claims that “Novel narrative is involved in revelation; it's the gap, the awful hole in the text, through which the characters fall. I do think that there is an unsayable thing in the center of a book, and that if you fill it with something too obvious, then you are lost. You have to fill it with something archetypal that has the possibility of being at least two things at once—that energy has to be maintained. [...] When women have been silent so long, you have to read the silences really urgently. The silences and also the illusions and the slippages. Is that madness in my work? Well certainly the gaps, and the slippages, and the jumps, and the uncertain way of making sense” (Moloney 63).

spins a tale about becoming an adolescent virgin and subsequently being impregnated by an angel named Stephen— a story that has especially deep cultural resonance within an Irish context.<sup>3</sup>

Since *Wig* is such a structurally difficult text, it may be helpful to start with a brief and superficial explanation of how the text seems to be constructed and how the plot seems to progress over the course of the book. As the editors of the first essay collection to focus on Enright's work summarize it, *Wig*'s plot opens with "an angel, Stephen, arriving at the door of Grace, the narrator of the novel. Stephen promptly moves in with Grace, who is immediately attracted to him, and his presence has profound effects on her physicality; as he becomes more corporeal, Grace's body reverts to a child-like state" (Bracken and Cahill 2). Previous scholarship on *Wig* has read the plot in a variety of ways. Some call it a surreal (R.F. Foster 170), hyperreal (Schwall 211), or parodic (Coughlan, "Irish" 185) take on modern life, haunted in some way (Mulhall 67; Matthew Ryan 172; Shumaker, "Uncanny Doubles" 107), or characterized by magical realism (D'Hoeker 189; Ewins 131; Hansson, "Beyond Local" 51). Scholars have generally agreed that it is a story of development that depicts, as Heidi Hansson puts it, "a kind of reverse development where Grace regresses from cynical experience to hopeful

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to playing on several articles of Roman Catholic faith involving the Virgin Mary, Enright's use of the name recalls Stephen Dedalus, whom Joyce named after St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. This may be the first of many allusions Enright makes with the angel Stephen to important Irish male writers, including W.B. Yeats (particularly his "Dialogue of Self and Soul") and Oscar Wilde (particularly his *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). For instance, when Stephen describes looking at the pregnant female form (of his Canadian wife), he focuses on "what was inside" her belly, where "he saw things lost, he saw things strewn in the ditches, he saw new grass and things that would rot in the rain" (*Wig* 116). Stephen's vision here is Yeatsian; like Yeats, who, Cullingford argues, "intends to convey a sense of awe at woman's boundless fertility" with his "metaphor of a love-affair with a proud woman as falling into a 'fecund ditch'" Stephen's depiction of "her as damp and smelly demonstrate[s] how easily a focus on the female as body can slide into disgust and contempt" (1). In contrast, Stephen's own image described in this scene is the face of an angel, an allusion to Wilde's work. In his wife's pregnant belly, "he saw his own face there, or some face. He thought that if he could paint he would paint on her belly, stroke by stroke and colour by colour, that face...He would paint a picture of his own face which was, just then, the face of an angel" (*Wig* 116).



innocence and a promise of a new beginning at the end” (Hansson, “Beyond Local” 51). However, what no other critic has distinguished is that there is an opposite, materialistic possibility for interpreting this novel, one that demythologizes all the seemingly supernatural events and reverse development.

Rather than a story of strange and extraordinary adolescent growth and subsequent pregnancy, *Wig* can be interpreted as a plot of pregnancy concealed through storytelling. In other words, I read *Wig* counter to other readings, and as a story about the difficult demands the growing body makes on storytelling, and on the storyteller’s ability to maintain control of her story. If one focuses on the many slippages and obfuscations that Enright builds into the text, it becomes possible to read the plot as unfolding as a series of narrative fragments that accumulate as the narrator creates and re-creates her story so that she does not have to mention what is going on with her body until she has gained a measure of control of it through narrative.

We can read the obfuscation of her body as the female narrator’s way of negotiating impediments to narrating female autonomy and self-definition that she encounters in late-twentieth-century Ireland. Since Enright enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a writer concerned with foregrounding the body in her stories and anatomizing human experiences, claiming that certain ways of being embodied are unsayable for a writer such as Enright may seem bold. Nonetheless, during the course of this chapter, I identify bodies and several varieties of bodily growth within this novel that cannot be told or marked in the text. These forms of bodily growth are not explicitly represented in a text but, nonetheless, saturate it. They play significant roles, particularly as they provide contrast with forms of bodily growth which are rendered in the text but

which are not ordinarily possible—bodily growth that is “marvelous” or “supernatural,” in the Todorovian sense. Making this contrast is crucial because Enright’s strategy for implying that the central character’s body may be growing in unsayable ways is to rely on the reader to apply general frames of knowledge about how the body, particularly the pregnant body, ordinarily grows. She also relies on the reader to have other types of knowledge—knowledge of genre, Irish representational politics, and contemporary Irish cultural events and mores—because she draws on additional frames of reference to cause unspoken bodies to arise and play out in the text. I argue that it is precisely *because* Enright is so invested in exploring the realities of representing the body in literary works that we can discover these unspoken bodies in her work.

To understand *Wig*, it is crucial to recognize the calculated absence of the protagonist’s real (as opposed to fantastic) body among the many bodily elements that Enright renders explicitly. It seems clear (from the refusal of the narrator in *Wig* to narrate the details of her pregnant body in a straightforward and transparent way) that ordinary pregnancy is inadmissible to her current life. Any bodily growth that she would experience from such a pregnancy would be unsayable within her socio-cultural context, representing that which she does not or believes she cannot or should not narrate. Banishing bodily growth from one’s “telling,” however, does not prevent bodily growth from happening. In fact, over time, such growth must encroach on her current life. This fact makes the narratability of the growing body a looming crisis for this narrator. In anticipation of its intrusion, Grace puts her energy into exploring narrative strategies to help manage the role her growing body might play in her story as an attempt to control the meanings it promulgates.

Narrative theorists have provided a number of terms that are useful for discussing Grace's narrative strategies for keeping her pregnancy unsayable until she has sufficiently constructed an alternate, supernatural conception story. Gerald Prince first developed the concept of the unnarratable through his analysis of the "disnarrated," or literary passages that refer to things that do *not* happen, but might have, and passages that do not refer to things that *do* happen.<sup>4</sup> Robyn Warhol extends this discussion by defining several varieties of the unnarratable. These varieties include the *antinarratable* ("what shouldn't be told because of social convention"); the *paranarratable* ("what wouldn't be told because of formal convention") and the *supranarratable* ("what can't be told because it's 'ineffable'") (Warhol 224, 226, 223). Other narratologists have also identified several strategies for marking the unnarratable since Prince defined it, including Brian Richardson, who developed the term *denarration* (presenting things that happen and then denying them); and Martin FitzPatrick, who theorizes subjunctive narration (presenting how things must or might have happened) (Richardson, "Denarration" 168; FitzPatrick 244-5). Enright experiments with an array of strategies for referring to unnarratable bodily growth. By presenting the story of her development in the subjunctive mode and rendering the physical existence of some story elements irrevocably uncertain, the character-narrator succeeds in obscuring those unnarrated changes—changes that almost certainly do happen.

In *Wig*, Enright also uses strategies such as the subjunctive mode to experiment with the realities of representing a fictional version of the self that is not articulated

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<sup>4</sup> Expanding on Prince's work, Warhol defines the "unnarratable" as "that which is unworthy of being told," "that which is not susceptible to narration," and "that which does not call for narration" or perhaps "those circumstances under which narration is uncalled for," and then catalogs a wide variety of "unnarratable" narrative acts ("Neonarrative" 222). See also Mosher; Prince; Richardson, "Denarration"; and Marie-Laure Ryan.

through the body. In order to explain these experiments, however, I must first establish that key forms of bodily growth in Enright's text are illusory—they appear as if they might happen, but (probably) do not happen. To demonstrate that point, however, I must also establish that representations of the growing body that appear in this text are uncertain. And to do that, I must explain the conventions that shape the line of development we expect this novel to follow so that we can see the precise limits of the norms and conventions that she is struggling to expand. The novel's speculative tone engineers conventional expectations about the world of the narrative to lead us into thinking we understand her bodily transformation when we actually do not, and distract us from seeing the bodily growth that (almost certainly) does happen.

Thus, in this chapter, I focus on how this *Bildungsroman* leverages the main character's growing body in and through the plot. In Section I, I characterize the writing of *Wig* as subjunctive, and explain how the cover story operates in relation to the frame narrative. Subjunctive narration is a strategy the narrator uses to maintain the unnarratability of her pregnant growth. Section II considers Enright's representations of female bodies in social context, while Section III considers the novel as a contemporary instance of the female *Bildungsroman*. These sections explore how the narrator challenges the limits of the antinarratable and the paranarratable, respectively. Section IV describes the succession of techniques the narrator uses to maintain the unnarratability of her pregnant growth as it becomes increasingly difficult to prevent her growing bump from surfacing within the text. At the chapter's end, I consider how *Wig* illuminates the limits of narratability relating to the growing body in the other twentieth-century Irish *Bildungsromane*.

Enright's experimental techniques show us that we may not have seen the transformations—individual and cultural—in the Irish cultural texts that we may think we have seen in relation to the body. By examining the unnarratability of the body in this Irish text through a sociostylistic perspective, we can glimpse the limits of the body's role in the (female) Irish *Bildungsroman* as the so-called Celtic Tiger approached its peak.<sup>5</sup> Because Enright is so invested in exploring these bodies and the cultural parameters around them, we are able to use these markers in her work to backlight various cultural impediments to representing the growing body in Irish literary works in 1995.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, the effort to cover over the unmentionably growing body in *Wig* makes the literary norms and conventions of the contemporary Irish novel of development visible.

#### I: GROWING THE BODY IN *THE WIG MY FATHER WORE*

“You make yourself up as you go along” (*Wig* 34).

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, mystery surrounds the main character's growing body because the text holds out the possibility of two things at once. As I intimated above, there are (at least) two fundamentally different ways to interpret how the

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<sup>5</sup> To take a sociostylistic perspective on a literary work is to consider the larger discursive context surrounding the text as well as the linguistic and individual features of a given text, as advocated by Bakhtin and exemplified by Karttunen.

<sup>6</sup> Warhol describes the unnarrated as distinctive markers of genre on the grounds that “[n]arrative genres are known as much by what they do not or cannot contain as by what they typically do contain” and goes on to assert that the “limits of narratability vary according to nation, period, and audience as well as genre, but they also stretch and change as genres evolve” (“Neonarrative” 221). For instance, Warhol argues that in *Ulysses*, Joyce changed “the boundaries of the antinarratable” by explicitly representing bodily functions in a work of literature (“Neonarrative” 224). In chapter 1, I argued that with *Portrait*, Joyce essentially rendered the growing body in the (Irish) *Bildungsroman* “paranarratable,” by placing great emphasis on foregrounding psychological development and subordinating bodily growth. The paranarratable is what Warhol argues would not be told because of a formal convention (“Neonarrative” 226).

protagonist's body grows: either the narrator's bodily growth is incongruous with reality, or the narrator's bodily growth is incongruous with the story she is telling about her body. If it is her bodily growth that is incongruous with everyday reality, then *Wig* is the story of a modern-day Irish woman who conceives a baby with an angel. If it is her representation of bodily growth that is incongruous, then *Wig* is the story of a modern-day Irish woman who wishes she had a different story to tell about how she conceived and who is acting on that wish through storytelling. *Wig* accommodates both of these different stories, each of which offers a very different explanation for bodily transformations that occur in the text.

Because it incorporates these alternate possibilities, *Wig* can be characterized as an example of the literary genre known as “the fantastic.” According to the structuralist literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov, texts in this genre cause the question *is this reality, or illusion?* to enter the field of interpretation—and stay there. For Todorov, the fantastic genre is characterized by the reader's lasting, never-resolved hesitation about whether phenomena represented in a text are supernatural or conform with “reality.” Ambiguity is crucial; if the question is settled, then the text would instead be either a marvelous tale—defined as one in which represented phenomena challenge the known laws of nature (e.g. a tale in which a woman conceiving with an angel can really happen)—or an uncanny tale—defined as a tale that permits seemingly supernatural phenomena to be explained in a way that is congruent with reality (e.g. a tale in which a woman conceiving with an angel is an illusion or effect of the imagination) (Todorov 41). Whether *Wig* is one or the other is indeterminate, and this inability to classify it as either marvelous or uncanny is what makes it conform with Todorov's category of “the fantastic.” The most

widely known example of the fantastic genre may be Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. Like *Wig*, *The Turn of the Screw* was initially received as a supernatural story, or what Todorov calls the "marvelous, the class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural" (52). However, other, more reality-based explanations for events in *The Turn of the Screw* have emerged over time.

Todorov calls texts that provide such rational explanations "uncanny," and these explanations can include accidents, coincidences, dreams and illusions (45). Since its initial reception, James' story has gradually come to be read as indeterminately marvelous or uncanny. That is, critics now generally agree that questions about whether ghosts exist in the story, or whether the governess is hallucinating persist through the story's close. As Todorov puts it, *The Turn of the Screw* "does not permit us to determine finally whether ghosts haunt the old estate, or whether we are confronted by the hallucinations of a hysterical governess victimized by the disturbing atmosphere which surrounds her" (43). The process of recognizing the fantastic—a lasting indeterminacy between the marvelous (supernatural) and the uncanny (natural)—is well underway in the scholarship on James' story. I propose a similar scholarly shift for *Wig*.

What may be a veneer of supernaturalism in *Wig* has largely been accepted without question. Those who have briefly entertained that question of whether *Wig* is marvelous or uncanny have not acknowledged lingering over it in their published work, or, in the case of Shumaker and D'Hoeker, have settled the question for themselves. D'Hoeker, for instance, assigns *Wig* to the marvelous category when she asserts that Enright "is indebted more to magical realism" than to Todorov's fantastic (D'Hoeker

189).<sup>7</sup> However, the question of whether the supernatural elements in *Wig* are real or imaginary remains open, if cloaked in certain ways. For this, we might call *Wig* an “incredulous tale.” As I elaborate below, *Wig* uses an array of camouflaging devices and techniques to discourage readers from entertaining that crucial hesitation. Grace’s narrative techniques make the question covert rather than overt, and make it so difficult to be incredulous of her tale that the question *is this reality, or illusion?* is almost suppressed.

*Wig*’s fraught relation with narratability tends to skew the tale beyond what is generally recognizable as the fantastic. For Todorov, the fantastic has three conditions: the first and third of which are required, the second of which is commonly fulfilled. They are as follows:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character.

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<sup>7</sup> Others, like Shumaker, assign *Wig* to the uncanny, but it should be noted that they—including Shumaker—generally mean “uncanny” in the Freudian sense. Shumaker briefly gestures toward the Todorovian uncanny as an alternate way to interpret *Wig*, and states in a footnote that, “Another way to interpret *The Wig My Father Wore* is as a meditation on the mind’s ability to create and worship a muse, a double who uncannily represents one’s artistic sensibilities. Stephen helps Grace redecorate her house and watches her television program with a critical eye. Grace mimics the symptoms of schizophrenia when she falls in love with Stephen, an hallucination with a voice” (Shumaker 122 fn. 9). However, she does not develop this point further, or reconcile it with her statements that Stephen is supernatural. D’Hoeker refutes Shumaker’s brief analysis, and states that she finds “the evidence on which [Shumaker] calls Stephen Grace’s double rather slight and far-fetched. Moreover... hesitation or ambiguity concerning Stephen’s real or fantastic nature is not really an issue in the text” (D’Hoeker 200 fn. 11).



Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations. (Todorov 33)

Enright complicates what Todorov refers to as the second condition of the fantastic, the only one of the three that he sees as optional for constituting the genre, and she complicates it in a way that may conceal the first condition and lead the reader astray on the third, to not take the tale as literal or representative. That is, she encourages the reader to take the attitude that the supernatural elements are literary. This is precisely what D'Hoeker does, for example, when she takes the fantastic transformations of Grace and Stephen as the "literalization of metaphors and ideas" that "can be described as a process typical of magical realism" (189).

Essentially, because of the way Todorov's second condition impacts the first condition in this text, *Wig* has not always obliged readers to hesitate over whether the supernatural character is an equal participant in the world of living persons like the other characters. While *Wig* thematizes a hesitation, it is less a hesitation over the status of Stephen's reality than a hesitation over how well Grace can explain what happened. That is, rather than hesitating over whether she should believe that Stephen the angel and his supernatural effects are real, Grace hesitates over how well she can tell her story about her (supposedly) ineffable experience. Since Grace does not express hesitation over the question of whether the supernatural is real or imaginary, *Wig* does not have a character whose hesitancy can transfer to the reader. Grace's presentation is matter-of-fact (which helps her narrative to masquerade as magical realism), and her confidence inclines the reader to believe the supernatural is real within the story world. Thus, in *Wig* the burden of proof is toward doubt rather than toward faith. That is, in the world of *Wig*, the reader

is predisposed to believe the supernatural, and it is the inclination toward reality that must be renewed to sustain the hesitancy crucial to the fantastic through the story.

What is left in *Wig* to induce hesitation is the theme of unsayability and the subjunctive mood. Any renewal of the crucial hesitation must occur through a subjunctive frame and other stylistic devices that are designed to recede from the reader's view and consciousness. With these elements, *Wig* gives off the appearance of being a supernatural text when in fact it is (probably) not a supernatural text, and is instead a fantastic, or even incredulous tale. I qualify probably because a characteristic of the incredulous text is a hesitancy of another sort, a hesitancy that, as I will explain, stems from the use of the subjunctive mode. Part of what makes *Wig* an incredulous tale as opposed to a fantastic tale involves how Grace's storytelling actions mask any hesitation she may have. We are finally unable to discern whether she is convinced of the existence of the supernatural at all.

Let us return to the two possibilities for interpreting *Wig*. Interpreting the angel and the bodily transformations in *Wig* as supernatural (marvelous) or as natural/real (uncanny) requires different reading strategies. The first, supernatural interpretation relies on a Christian-inflected mechanism to resolve incongruities related to bodily growth.<sup>8</sup> The second, reality-based interpretation explains the incongruity as an impression carefully cultivated by a narrator who can assume her audience is familiar with conservative cultural mores. This second reading strategy uses the first, miraculous conception story to cover over the bald truth of the character-narrator's unplanned pregnancy, much like the eponymous wig (toupee) of the novel's title covers her father's

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<sup>8</sup> According to Yacobi, such an existential mechanism "refers incongruities to the level of the fictive world, notably to canons of probability that deviate from those of reality" (110).

head. That is, the story she conceives (in the intellectual sense) about how she conceived (in the organic sense) successfully obscures the bald truth about how her body is growing, and how her child was fathered.

In other words, the miraculous conception story functions like her father's wig; it provides a distraction from examining the body parts that her story, like his wig, obscures. Interested to know the story of it, and the story behind it, we lose sight of the part of the body it covers over, similar to how Grace lost sight of her father's head. It is natural to Grace to assume that her father wore his wig because he was bald. Grace believes this until she eventually discovers that, in fact, he was not bald. His hair continues to grow underneath his wig. This discovery that it "hung on and grew, helpless over the years" causes Grace to reflect, "I never really thought about what was under my father's wig. His head, for all I knew, might have been bright green" (*Wig* 173). The narrative's larger concerns begin to emerge when the formerly obscured part of the body receives greater scrutiny. For instance, Grace links the hair that grew in secret on Da's head with a dreadful clot of hair that he once dug out of the family's bathroom drain with a wire clothes hanger. Since wire clothes hangers are sometimes used to induce self-abortions, Enright symbolically alludes to the social and legal convulsions relating to restricted access to abortion, and willed ignorance of open secrets that wracked late twentieth-century Ireland (173-4).<sup>9</sup> These issues constellate the epoch of Grace's emergence, and of her narrative's concern.

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<sup>9</sup> Enright addresses the Irish culture wars of the 1980s when she states, "you could say that all religious wars are fought over women's bodies and of course it was very interesting to come of age in the Eighties when the wars were about abortion, divorce, contraception. And it was very clear what it was all about. Certainly in retrospect, it was extremely clear what it was all about. But I think that extends beyond an Irish or a Catholic context, that ownership of the body" (Bracken and Cahill 22). As also described in chapter 3, Irish citizens' rights to self-determine, including their rights to plan and respond to pregnancies and wield control over their domestic partnerships, featured prominently in Irish public debates, and is now

On these grounds, and unlike other scholars who accept the supernatural element in their interpretations of *Wig*, through this chapter I suggest that reading it as part of a cover story provides a more viable and thought-provoking way to interpret Enright's experimental first novel. Moreover, I argue that, unlike other Irish authors who tether character development to bodily development, Enright loosens the link between bodily representation and the protagonist's processing of self by dispersing bodily representation across time and textual fragments. What's more, she undermines the performative nature of the growing body when it is articulated in narratives of development (an aspect that Joyce worked to avoid and McGahern sought to leverage) because she diffuses the presumed ontological stability of bodily representations by framing their existence within the fictional world as indefinite.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, she creates the possibility that there is no real link between the bodily growth represented in fiction and the advance of the

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reflected in the Irish Constitution. Since the 1980s, successful constitutional referenda include the following: the prohibition of abortion in 1983, specification that the prohibition of abortion would not limit the freedom to travel in 1992; specification that the prohibition of abortion would not restrict some rights to distribute information about abortion in 1992; and the removal of a the prohibition of divorce in 1996. A previous version of this last bill failed in 1986, so the public debate on the topic extended across more than a decade. A major event in the Irish culture war involved pregnant Irish women, their rights as citizens, and the question of determining suicide risk; a legal quagmire had resulted from a cascade of official decisions. In 1992, the Republic was convulsed by a scandal known as the "X case." The anonym "X" was used to protect the identity of a fourteen-year-old girl impregnated by rape. She was prevented from leaving Irish jurisdiction, where abortion is banned, to obtain an abortion abroad after her family approached the *Garda Síochána* ("peace officers" or Irish police force) to inquire if DNA material could be retained as trial evidence. The subsequent Supreme Court case, *Attorney General v. X*, raised questions about the legal definitions of women as Irish citizens with rights to travel and Irish women had a right to abortion if a woman's life is put at risk by the continuation of a pregnancy including, crucially, at risk of suicide. A referendum on constitutional amendments did not clarify matters, necessitating an additional referendum that approved the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Irish constitution. These amendments establish that Ireland's abortion ban does not limit the right of pregnant women to travel and does not limit the right to distribute information about abortion services in foreign countries, respectively. The Twelfth Amendment, which would have negated the X case ruling by exempting "risk of self-destruction" from the definition of "real and substantial risk," was not approved. However, as legal scholar Bacik points out, "Apart from the Chief Justice's words in the X case," which did not provide specific definitions of its terms, "nobody has explained what constitutes a 'real and substantial risk' to life that may justify an abortion, nor has anyone decided how to establish suicide risk" (117).

<sup>10</sup> By performative narrative, I mean something akin to the "performative nature of the articulation of a fictional world" that Richardson calls after J.L. Austin (Richardson, "Denarration" 171). Richardson observes that once "words are written in a narrative fiction, they constitute some of the unalterable facts of its world" and are "simply given... as long as the narrator does not contradict them" ("Denarration" 172).

protagonist's development through plot. Fundamentally, the narrator does this because her body is (almost certainly) growing in a way that she does not want it to grow. *Wig* accomplishes this through first-person female narration—Grace has taken control of her own story, and by doing so, her own body. *Wig* also re-capitulates some conventional attitudes about female development—particularly that of the "liberated" career woman who has a life schedule for herself—linear steps to check off as they're completed—because this "falling off the schedule" is one of the primary reasons that Grace has to re-narrate her life story to contravene the pregnancy.

A second, and still primary, reason that Grace endeavors to re-present her life story is the appeal of the artistic challenge; she creates the work of fiction to see if she can accomplish the artistic feat. Not only is *Wig* a *Bildungsroman* because it deals with the story of Grace's formation, *Wig* can be considered part of the genre's subset of the *Künstlerroman*, or novel of an artist's formation. Enright traces how Grace stretches her technical skills with transmitting images and sounds onto a screen. For her day job, Grace works as a television professional.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, she is the co-producer of a raunchy dating game show known as the *LoveQuiz*, a show that is "a success" and which has "a cosy and dangerous host, fake games, real sex, and a lot of laughs" (*Wig* 9). Through her work on this show, Grace, like Enright herself, has become skilled in the production and communication of moving images. She becomes an expert on "what people do and what we make people do on the *LoveQuiz* which is, after all, a matter for their own free will" (*Wig* 9). More specifically, she becomes an expert in the art of

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<sup>11</sup> Enright was a producer and director for the RTÉ (*Radio Telefís Éireann*, or Irish Radio and Television) series *Nighthawks*, a show Enright has described as "a show set in a bar where anything either fictional or real could happen. It was a very busy mixture of chat and sketches, where anything can happen, sketches and pieces of art or literature. I stayed on it for four years" (Moloney 52).

staging desires, and of signaling fake virginites. On *LoveQuiz*, one woman chooses one of three male contestants to join her for a romantic honeymoon vacation. The show's producers determine who is the most attractive contestant and put him in the third slot because "statistically speaking she will choose 3" to ascend with her into the sky in an airplane where she supposedly loses her virginity to him as the phallic airplane rockets up to the heavens (*Wig* 16). *LoveQuiz* ascensions are as literal as they are formulaic: at the end of each show, Grace tells us, "an ecstatic air hostess waves and lets fall a bloodied sheet onto the camera below (*Wig* 16-17).<sup>12</sup> On the *LoveQuiz*, the bloodied sheet, a millennia-old symbol of lost virginity, serves as uncontested (for who could contest?) proof that both contestants are virgins no more. In this way, Grace's bawdy show transforms a sexualized, bodily process into a discursive act.<sup>13</sup> *LoveQuiz* plays these transformations as spoof, but for Grace, the matter is more earnest, in part because they help her to hone her technical skills. Grace's self-transformation is far more ambitious than the transformations depicted on the *LoveQuiz*. As *Wig* evidences, engineering her alternate conception story to explain her growing body does not come easily to Grace—she has to work to make it happen, and experiment with several strategies and different takes until she finds one that works reasonably well. Conveniently for her, meanwhile,

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<sup>12</sup> Gilling aptly describes how the *LoveQuiz* "conjures its own miraculous ascensions at the end of every show, when the manufactured lovers are led away to enjoy the fruits of their artifice" (18). His use of the word "ascension" is a propos to Enright's allusion to the Ascension of the Virgin Mary after her death and the Ascension of Jesus Christ the third day after his death.

<sup>13</sup> Kelly is among those who have observed that what constitutes the loss of virginity has become highly flexible and largely self-determinable. She usefully summarizes some "facts" about the contemporary views of virginity: "These days, people not only flaunt their virginity, but reclaim it once it is gone, for virginity is often constructed as subject to revision. ... These days, abstinence, for a while or for a lifetime, is often constructed not in opposition to sexuality, but as a point on an erotic continuum. ... those who practice the new virginity, a flexible enough concept to include the born-again virgin, are not necessarily reading (or misreading) Judith Butler. Rather, the desire to revirginize and/or to discount past sexual activity as a 'loss' of virginity arises out of a prevailing popular belief that one can reinvent or construct oneself at will.... Passing, as white, as straight has been an option for a long time; why couldn't one pass as a virgin? Who is to know? Who is to *say*?" (Kelly 120-1).

she has had ample opportunity to practice with “fake games” and “real sex” through her professional work.

In addition to being an expert in transmitting sounds and images onto a screen, Grace is in the position of being the author of her own developmental story because Enright uses first person narration throughout the text. This affords Grace a level of control over her body—narrative control, which allows her to, essentially, shape her bodily growth through her narrative. Grace highlights her exercise of this ability obliquely, often through wordplay with names. For instance, Grace reports that it is her co-worker and fellow television show co-producer, Marcus, who delivers a key statement about the process of subject formation encapsulated in this novel. “I have to admire you,” he says to Grace, “you make yourself up as you go along” (*Wig* 34). Indeed, Grace has a long history of remaking her self, such as when, as a schoolgirl, she changed her name from Grainne to Grace.<sup>14</sup> Grace underscores the overarching truth Marcus voices by affirming simply, “[t]hat’s right” (*Wig* 37, 34). As a product of her family and social situation and as an experienced television producer, Grace has the motivation and skills to make herself up as she goes along. Further, as the first person narrator as well as the main character, she has the freedom to do so. Of course, using the first person presents its own set of issues—the authority of a first-person voice is always qualified, particularly

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<sup>14</sup> Enright’s protagonist states that as a schoolgirl, she changed her name from Grainne to Grace because her schoolmates called her Groin (*Wig* 37). The protagonist’s childhood name may reference the heroine of the ancient Irish myth of Diarmuid and Grainne, in which Grainne refuses conventional marriage expectations in favor of a romance of her choosing. More significantly, however, the name also alludes to the historic figure, Gráinne Ní Mháille, particularly in connection with the name Grace (the Irish pirate’s name was anglicized as Grace O’Malley). Stories about Ní Mháille emphasize that she was involved in the battle of Kinsale during which the indigenous Irish aristocracy lost authority over Ireland to the English; her unruly, female body is often given blame for the transition to English rule. Wife of “The O’Neil”—a last name shared by Enright’s character, Marcus (*Wig* 13)—she became the consort of an English military leader in conjunction with the English victory. Myths surrounding this figure vary; some suggest that she was kidnapped, others suggest that she sought went willingly, in order to separate from her husband. For a more detailed history, see Nic Eoin (273-6).

when that voice is female, as Hansson has pointed out when discussing *Wig*.<sup>15</sup> However, because she is both the main character and the narrator of her life story, *Wig*'s protagonist has a great deal of control over the interplay of growing body and developmental plot. Whether her story is believable is another matter.

The use of a character-narrator is not the only way in which Enright applies unusual fictional and narrative devices to the standard mode of the *Bildungsroman*. Enright refracts the genre further by using the subjunctive mode. A narrative in the subjunctive case presents what is imagined or wished or possible rather than what is certain. That is, it presents information as equivocal, epistemologically insecure and partial (FitzPatrick 244-5). Novels that present information in this narrative case, Martin FitzPatrick argues, deliberately leave questions unresolved in order to explore the point of resolving them or a character's motivation to explore them (245). For instance, much of *Absalom Absalom!* consists of subjunctive narration. Quentin Compson and his college roommate conjure up an extensive, hypothetical story about Thomas Sutpen and his family, but William Faulkner's novel does not reveal why each engages in this process until the end of the novel (FitzPatrick 250). Readers are never able to determine how accurate their story ends up being, but do come to understand that developing this story is a way for Quentin to negotiate "his feelings toward his home, his culture, his heritage" of the American South after the Civil War (FitzPatrick 250, 254). Similarly in *Wig*, Grace is negotiating her feelings toward her respectable suburban home,

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<sup>15</sup> Hansson argues, "even though to say 'I' indicates authority and the right to determine the way events and conditions are presented, it also connotes the particular as opposed to the universal, the subjective as opposed to the objective" and, since the "status of the speaker determines the force and reliability of the message, and whereas women are frequently encouraged to use I-language to assert themselves, the effect is frequently that their accounts are dismissed as merely private stories" ("To Say 'I'" 139). Hansson's own reading of *Wig* demonstrates the effects of subjectivity, as Hansson, like many readers, misrecognizes *Wig*'s narrative complexity. Seeking to salvage a measure of provisional, coherent authority for the female voice in the face of postmodernism's splintering forces, Hansson accords Grace too much reliability.



conservative culture, and Irish heritage. She is also negotiating her potential romantic attachment and physical connection to her fellow co-producer, Marcus, with whom she reveals—in no specific terms—that she recently had a “carnal moment.” As Grace puts it, “Marcus and I have forgotten that we had a carnal moment, or didn’t have a carnal moment or nearly had a carnal moment” (*Wig* 11). A first person, subjunctive *Bildungsroman* that emphasizes the body is an apt instrument for this negotiation of reality in the uncertainty process of narrative. It lets Grace take control of realizing whether, for instance, she wants to allow the equivocal, carnal moment she shared with Marcus to have “marked” her body and her life story.

I provide this reading because the way Grace indicates her body grows in *Wig* is unbelievable—unbelievable either in the sense that it is extraordinary, or that it cannot be credited. Readers can take Grace’s story on faith, or look for the more realistic explanation. As I read it, Grace’s storytelling provides a distorted image of her growing body to her readers and hints strongly that there is a realistic explanation for the deceit. Through misdirecting references, she provides an image intended to support her far-fetched cover story about both when and with whom she became pregnant—or, to use a term that recurs in the narrative, when she sustained a “mark” on her body. Although Grace suggests that the angel, Stephen, leaves the mark on her body, the way that the name Marcus and the noun “mark” reverberate through the text suggests that Grace knows who “marked us” (Grace and her fetus), but that Marcus’s mark is, to her, an unsayable thing. Grace refuses to narrate Marcus’s mark in the indicative, in part because becoming pregnant from a one-night stand with her co-worker would be disastrous both for her personal and professional life. Grace has ample reason to concoct

a miraculous conception story, particularly if she lives in a world in which such a story would be taken seriously.

As the first-person narrator, she is the storyteller and storytellers have creative license to shape and select elements to support their themes and to approach a story from a particular angle as they invent their stories. Grace harnesses this license when confronted by evidence that her body is undergoing organic processes over which she exerts little control and which she does not wish to experience at this point on her life schedule, if ever.<sup>16</sup> Realistically, she is actually pregnant at the beginning of the narrative, far before the point she conceptualizes her cover story about conceiving a child with the angel. During the novel, she begins to develop that story and to live it out, creating and recreating herself as she goes along. As a television producer, Grace is able to use techniques that she has acquired by manipulating that visual medium in order to stage her growing body very carefully through her narration. Grace frames and stages this pregnancy through cropped images, diversions, and slantwise allusions. She screens her frontal region from the reader's view but also coyly (and cryptically) draws attention to it again and again—much in the same way the bellies of television and film actresses are hidden from plain view when they are pregnant in real life. Thus, references to Grace's asymmetrical "breast"—which, according to her cover story, grows oddly lopsided, larger, and firm after the angel touches it, in a chapter called "The Mark"—serve as a decoy for her growing belly.<sup>17</sup> That is, incredulous readers would take "breast" to mean her pregnant woman's "bump." Indeed, Grace tells us that the word "breast" is "the other word I was looking for" when she describes a protuberance on her torso (*Wig*

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<sup>16</sup> As she tells the angel, "I do not want a child... let alone a cherub" (*Wig* 38).

<sup>17</sup> C.f. Tristram's "nose" in Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

127). Readers learn that she attributes a “blind innocence ...[and] lopsided, sinister purity” to this area of her body, and also that when this area of her body itches, it “feels like someone [her fetus?] trying to get out from under a sheet a mile wide” (*Wig* 128,134). Eventually, growth in this area prevents her from wearing a seat belt during her drive to the television studio where she works (*Wig* 131). All the while, seemingly proud of the effect she produced, Grace signals with her thematic choices and interest in tricks of perception that there is something more to see behind the narrative screen she draws around her body.

The bulk of the bodily growth—in reverse, toward adolescence—explicitly alluded to in this novel occurs prior to the miraculous conception scene. Since “these days” Grace has “plenty of time to think...plenty of time to tease it apart and fit it together again,” Grace seems to engage in an extended process of framing and refining her narrative about how her body is growing so that “Stephen” might leave a convincing “mark” on her body, and then find himself irresistibly attracted to her (*Wig* 182). Before he “marks” her body by touching her “breast,” his “care” first takes effect. Stephen’s “care” is most apparently manifested as a reversion of her body’s chronology. As many critics have noted, Grace’s bodily growth seems to become disorganized, and her body begins to grow in reverse. Thus, in one passage, she says her body now looks “pubescent” (*Wig* 126). In another, she tells us that the “body that looks back at me is nine years old, or fourteen mixed with nine, or my own, mixed with all the bodies I used to have. I wonder if I am a virgin again” (*Wig* 137). Her story gravitates toward adolescence, a life stage popularly associated with physical flux and nascent sexuality, and then to take on a sort of childlike purity. Hence, Grace discovers that she is

“beginning to feel the benefit of Stephen’s care” and that his breath on her body has caused her desire for him to dissipate, along with her need to rid herself of physical impurities and bodily by-products, such as urine. She realizes, “whatever he is feeding me, it’s two weeks since I have been to the toilet” (*Wig* 124, 125). The sequence entices belief that Stephen’s touch and his care has rearranged and disrupted the temporality of Grace’s body so that she appears to become more innocent, and, furthermore, that his touch and influence lead her to grow a material sign of virginity, a hymen—the “petal” she refers to in chapter 17, “The Mark.” Once she has her “new girl’s body, whose sweat doesn’t smell anymore,” she figures she “might as well use it” (*Wig* 163). The temporal rewind stops, and, Grace states, “I piss myself, with my new child’s bladder, urgently, easily, back into the flow of time” (*Wig* 167). When time begins to move forward again, it seems that for Grace and Stephen, it will feel “like the first time, every time,” to quote the title of the chapter in which they have intercourse. Grace’s “body seems to have forgotten what to do with it all” in time for Stephen to initiate sex with her by touching her stomach in bed (*Wig* 178).

Grace’s bodily growth is neither consistent with the principles of verisimilitude, as I have been suggesting, nor is it internally coherent. This adolescent virginity is particularly incoherent, considering that Grace declares as a primary truth, “I never was a virgin,” and the “first fact, fuck it, is that I never was a virgin, never had a hymen, never knew the difference between loss and gain” (*Wig* 45, 45-6). Nonetheless, in Grace’s story, supernatural effects seem to transit this never-virgin into an adolescent, multitemporal state, in which—as some readers believe— Grace might become, miraculously and like the Virgin Mary, a virgin pure enough to conceive with a spiritual

father. However, unlike the Virgin Mary of Catholic tradition, Grace's virginity will not be perpetual, as she will conceive through intercourse with an angel. (I explore Enright's reworking of the Virgin Mary story more fully in Section II).

Grace and Stephen's intercourse, which follows this reversion and incoherent growth, is highly metafictional, calling attention even to the typographic shape of the very letters on the printed page. "The alphabet abandons me," Grace claims, as Stephen's hand "reaches the top of my legs, which quite simply separate as I change from I to Y, though upside down" (*Wig* 178).<sup>18</sup> When Grace describes their intercourse, she does not call it lovemaking, but instead refers to it as "lettermaking." It consists of a series of positions denoted by letters: "M was one of them, a touching O, an informal kind of R, for Rumples or embrace, a hilarious K which was just too complicated" (*Wig* 180). While the M, O, R, K might be read in connection with Marcus (or Mark),<sup>19</sup> Grace claims that "[m]ost of the words made no sense. KORMA for example. There was also DATA, a more reciprocal DATTA, and a very fine HAT of which the T was so distinctive I fell out of the bed" (*Wig* 180). This metafictional turn suggests to the reader looking at *Wig*'s "windows, marvels, and wonders" that the reality of their supernatural, sexual encounter is ineffable (*Wig* 31). To the incredulous reader, the lettermaking passage underscores how the shapes embodied on these pages may signify in more than one way.

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<sup>18</sup> For another reading of the "the conjunctions of their bodies as an alphabet," see Anne Mulhall.

<sup>19</sup> It might also be read as an allusion to the television sitcom *Mork and Mindy*, in which Mork, an alien from the planet Ork, arrives on earth on a small, egg-shaped space ship in some ways similar to Grace's hard, white, globular "breast." On the show, Orks age backwards in time and, when Mork and Mindy eventually conceive, their offspring grows backwards in time as well.

## II: BODILY GROWTH AND IRISH SOCIAL CONVENTIONS IN *WIG*

*“They sing to break your heart, the Flower of Irish  
Womanhood, their eyes true, their hands sweaty,  
their virginity as real as Irish Coffee. (Why not?)”  
(Wig 162)<sup>20</sup>*

Due in part to a great deal of play with signification, *Wig* is a *Bildungsroman* that reads like a comic postmodern romp, as if problematic and radical contradictions are simply the order of the day when, in fact, they are crucial to pulling off the textual prestidigitation that characterizes this novel.<sup>21</sup> *Wig* is written in a playful, wry, frenetic style, and emphasizes the vulgar body.<sup>22</sup> Enright’s prose has been likened to that of masterful stylists like Joyce, Salmon Rushdie, and Angela Carter—the paperback’s blurb characterizes *Wig* as “the Mary Tyler Moore show scripted by Flann O’Brien.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, *Wig* presents itself as a hip, boozy, media-savvy Dublin story—on the surface.<sup>24</sup> However, currents of sincere meaning run just below that surface; as Enright sees it, “whatever postmodern impulse” she has is “an attempt to be more honest” rather than

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<sup>20</sup> Enright plays with notions of uncertainty and authenticity in this passage, since Irish coffee was invented by an Irish-American bartender for consumption by transatlantic passengers arriving at Shannon Airport in Ireland in the 1940s or early 1950s. It was made famous by a cafe in San Francisco. See Nolte; and Foynes Flying Boat Museum, “Our Irish Coffee Heritage.”

<sup>21</sup> Coughlan discusses the conditions of the female Irish self under postmodernity, which, she observes, both liberates and isolates the self and “internalized self-regulation belies the self-proclaimed lightness and freedoms of postmodernist visions” (“Irish” 177-8).

<sup>22</sup> Coughlan describes *Wig*’s tone as “more one of blatant farce than quiet ironic poise. Good manners and polite restraints are resolutely resisted, and we are never allowed to lose sight of the body, which keeps thrusting itself forward in all its manifestations, grotesque, painful, or pleasurable, and in street register: ‘a ride,’ ‘fuck,’ ‘piss,’ ‘bollocks’ are all part of Grace’s routine diction” (Coughlan “Irish” 184).

<sup>23</sup> Comparisons of Enright to Joyce abound; Enright cultivates them, and has called Joyce “a great light” in interviews. Enright describes Carter’s mentoring while she was earning her Masters in Fine Arts in “Diary” (38-9). In addition to Carter, Tague notes Enright’s affinity to Rushdie, identifying Carter’s influence in Enright’s use of thresholds, mirrors, photographs, and recalling Rushdie’s announcement that television “is a medium as much as an angel is. Television is what we now have for archangels.” Tague argues, “Enright has taken Rushdie’s prophetic words to heart in her first novel, *The Wig My Father Wore*.” The Sunday Tribune (UK) quote about Mary Tyler Moore show appears on the 1997 Grove edition (paperback); Jeanette Shumaker notes similarities to Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* (“Uncanny Doubles” 110).

<sup>24</sup> Shumaker highlights that Grace “works within the shifting, shallow milieu of popular culture” and engages with the “technophilic materialism of the contemporary Ireland” (“Uncanny Doubles” 107).

more clever (Bracken and Cahill 18).<sup>25</sup> Deliberately both playful and serious, the story jumps from image to image like a television show; abrupt changes in the angle of vision abound. Enright makes use of fast cutting, a cinematic technique that is in keeping with the narrator's occupation of television producer.<sup>26</sup> Enright quickly jumps from one image to the next as if switching from one camera lens to another, so that the angle of vision shifts constantly. In addition, the novel is intensely intertextual, incorporating references to a number of other literary works and myths in addition to a number of typographical features into the narrative fabric. Typographical features include a television studio production schedule; a list of television credits with names and titles blurred to suggest they roll across the screen at high speed; a page from a television viewing guide from 1969 that was found by "means Angelic" but which has, among the show listings, parenthetical asides from Grace as well as a number of factual inaccuracies; and several scraps of newsprint stories that were used to wallpaper Grace's home, many of which have gaps as if they have been torn down the middle (*Wig* 10, 13, 32, 86-89). This creates a typographic pastiche, in which different fonts signify the variety of cultural sources intermingled within the novel. Throughout, Grace manages to be simultaneously earnest and playful, serious and sarcastic. Together, these formal effects indicate that the wildly creative narrator of this *Bildungsroman* is working to organizing fragments of her story about her body "all in bits" in relation to a fragmented self (*Wig* 178).

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<sup>25</sup> In that same interview, Enright explains, "What I like to do if I can is to get the sense of opening and possibility you get with metaphor under the sentence and not in the sentence. I like to bury my effects and keep it fairly real on the surface, or real is shorthand, but keep it kind of small on the surface, and have the resonance, the potential, underneath it without stating it. But then, that's all bullshit, that would be a very posh way to proceed but actually I'm very involved in the character who is narrating the book and they have a whole other way of describing the world from that" (Bracken and Cahill 32).

<sup>26</sup> Enright has explained, "Some of the book feels as though it is happening in rewind, and the reader might find it disjointed, though you can't write about television without fast cutting" (Moloney 64).

These effects pose a challenge to the reader, who must work to piece together and fill in the gaps that characterize the text. Available chronologies of bodily growth proffer ways to decode the text by organizing the story's events into some kind of temporal order, but prove unstable. We are never able to confirm what happens to Grace's body, despite the preponderance of thematic evidence we can compile. In fact, in this subjunctive narrative environment, readers are not able to establish exactly when Grace becomes pregnant. *Wig* makes it clear that Grace's body transforms, though the nature of those transformations are elusive. Some readers think her body "grows paler, more translucent," and others think her body grows in reverse, so that she progressively "loses her adult body" (D'Hoeker 188; Hansson, "Beyond Local," 63). *Wig*'s thematic emphasis on the body nonetheless indicates that piecing together what is happening to Grace's body is important to making sense of the seemingly jumbled-together plot, but does not make it easy to determine precisely how it is transforming—or, since the text is subjunctive, how she wishes it is transforming.

All the while, the non-linear organizational scheme deliberately confuses Grace's development by jumbling narrative time. Overall, the time scheme ranges from the summer Grace was *in utero* up to the present. The Shandyesque narrative juxtaposes flashbacks to various moments of Grace's earlier life with variations of the same scenes and intermingles them in the present as well. As a result, it is very difficult to determine what sorts of bodily growth Grace experiences and when she experiences them. The narrative plays off the readerly expectation and interest in learning the point of origin for her pregnancy. As much as we want to know the facts surrounding Grace's pregnancy, however, we cannot be certain we see the bodily growth we think we see. This is not just



because determining the precise moment a pregnancy begins is an inexact science, despite the technological advances and the contentious ideological debates surrounding this topic, but also because of the way *Wig* is constructed. Lacking markers of time and conjunctive elements, readers build particularly subjective interpretations, a phenomenon Grace acknowledges when she describes what happened during the live broadcast of her television show: “Because, it would seem, we all saw our own show” (*Wig* 186). “I don’t even know what happened” she states as she frames the narrative, “And here is the best that I can do” (*Wig* 186). She is not quite assuring readers that the show she presents is bona fide, and she’s not quite engaging in deception either, since she never reaches the point of certainty. She seems to hope that, in doing the best she can, she will be able to convince herself as well that her subjunctive story is necessarily correct.

Due to the novel’s demand that readers consider the growing body as they form understandings of the story, attending to the role of bodily growth in this novel is crucial. It becomes even more so when we recognize that the character-narrator is herself puzzling over how to organize what has happened—or, more precisely, how she wants it to have happened—as she constructs her story of her development. “These days I have plenty of time to think,” Grace states during an interlude late in the text; “I have plenty of time to tease it apart and fit it together again, what happened [...] I tie it all together and then I cut the string” (*Wig* 182). Part of reading this novel involves examining how the protagonist’s growing body and *Wig*’s development plot fit together. Amid all the “windows, marvels and wonders” she parades before us, the character-narrator is actively tailoring this story to fit it to her own life schedule so that she can carry on, even if becoming pregnant at this particular moment of her life—when she is single and not in

love—was not a part of her plan (*Wig* 31). Through storytelling, she can take greater control of how her life is unfolding, and can begin again if she is not satisfied with the way it ties together, because it is subjunctive. Thus, there is a strong possibility that this is precisely what she is doing each of “these days” that she swims in the summer sea: she is creating and recreating the world of her story again and again, tying the ends together and cutting off where they ravel.<sup>27</sup> To a far greater extent than the protagonists in previous chapters, this protagonist’s growing body is self-actualized because the character-narrator is able to render that growth indeterminable. If her bodily growth is indeterminable, she is at liberty to make a reality of a different version of her life story than the one her body may tell.

Given the general emphasis on the novel’s fragmentation and jumbled temporality in critical discussions, it is surprising how often critics proceed to read *Wig*’s plot as generally chronological across chapters. The conventional way to read this novel is as follows: an angel named Stephen rings the narrator’s doorbell and invites himself in for tea (page 1). He stays, but rebuffs the narrator’s attempts at seduction (chapter 1). The narrator continues her work as the producer of a television show (chapter 2) and maintains her ongoing, strained relationship with her family, which she illuminates through stories from her childhood (chapter 4). Slowly, influenced by his contact with Grace, Stephen’s body rounds out (Chapter 5), becomes able to bleed (chapter 12), grow

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<sup>27</sup> Such raveling can characterize some texts that employ denarration, as the story collapses into discourse. Denarration can intervene in a fictional world so that it “may start to fissure; instead of observing a fluctuating narrator alter descriptions of a stable world, we will see the world being created and recreated anew” (Richardson, “Denarration” 170). In some cases, “Instead of opposing a list of events from the reconstructed story to the sequence in which they are recounted in the discourse, there will not be much recoverable story at all, but rather a general, undifferentiated conglomerate of past events which may or may not have occurred, within an inchoate temporality that cannot be analytically reconstructed into any sustained order [...] we are left with discourse without a retrievable story. The work’s discourse is determinate; its story is inherently indeterminable” (Richardson, “Denarration” 173).

fingernails (chapter 15) and eventually grows more hair (chapter 17). Influenced by the angel's presence, Grace's body grows more pure, so pure she grows a new hymen, attempts at seduction succeed, and they make love (chapter 17). The angel auditions for and subsequently appears on a special live episode of her television show, but his supernatural powers cause an interruption in the television signal (chapter 29); he vanishes, leaving a pregnant Grace alone and trying to pick up the pieces of her life (chapter 30). Overall, this popular reading accepts a general trend of movement from the beginning of the book to the conclusion, and the angel's entrance in the first chapter is taken as a reliable point of entry into the story. Read this way, the narrative culminates in a climax very near the end of the book, when the episode of Grace's television show with the angel on it "goes live." According to this reading, the main form of bodily growth Grace experiences in the novel, her pregnancy, is foreshadowed when, somewhat like the angel Gabriel revealed himself to Mary, the angel Stephen "revealed himself on the threshold with broad comments about [Grace's] fertility" on the first page and finally indicated in the last chapter through Marcus's worry about Grace "being pregnant and on [her] own" (*Wig* 1, 214). Read in this teleological direction, the novel's time scheme is simply heavy with flashbacks.

In addition to the above plot line, *Wig* contains the other level of story. There is a narrative frame around the main plotline that, if recognized, produces a reading of *Wig*'s plot that diverges significantly from the reading that is currently popular. I suggest that *Wig* unfolds in non-chronological order (if there is a recoverable story at all), and emphasize the import of the narrative frame because recognizing it as crucial grants us access to Enright's substantial narrative experiments with narrator's ability to use the

*Bildungsroman* form to author the reality of her growing body. However, Enright's frame has sometimes been overlooked, in part because it is not positioned conventionally, at the beginning of the novel. Rather, it is withheld until the twenty-seventh chapter. This chapter, alongside the last chapter, highlight that the majority of the novel consists of fragments of subjunctive history that Grace teases apart and fits together in order to craft her story of her life. These two chapters are set decidedly in the present; the twenty-seventh chapter emphatically refers to "these days" and chapter thirty refers to "this morning," respectively (*Wig* 182, 213). These chapters establish that the majority of events presented in the story, though likewise presented as happening in the present, have, in fact, already occurred (*if* they occurred, that is, since they are presented in the subjunctive) and are now being recounted in retrospect.

The novel's tense provides support for the coexistence of the other, more hidden level of the ultimately fantastic story.<sup>28</sup> Enright exploits a grammatical limitation of the English language, the fact that it does not have a subjunctive form designated with present tense verbs. Most of the narrative is operating as if in the present conditional tense, but Enright conceals this from notice so that the text simply appears to operate in present tense. In English, the subjunctive form is not always as distinguishable as it is in Romance languages like French—and in Celtic languages like Irish. This grammatical lack leaves the reader vulnerable to Grace's cover story by helping to obscure grammatical operations that are crucial to her storytelling. This grammatical magician makes storytelling elements practically vanish from view.

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<sup>28</sup> Todorov notes that tense can be an aid to sustaining the hesitation that constitutes a fantastic tale. He highlights the use of the imperfect tense in the fantastic (Todorov 39).

Read in light of the narrative frame, *Wig*'s alternate narrative chronology is as follows: following a casual sexual encounter, the first person narrator learns she is pregnant. Despairing, she considers committing suicide but instead becomes inspired to produce a cover story for her pregnancy. This cover story is the plot I have been calling the conventional reading. As her belly grows, Grace drafts and re-drafts certain key scenes of that cover story until she has developed a fantastic explanation complete with a supernatural angel to impregnate her, and a fake, physical return to a lost virginity so that her virgin birth story will pass as miraculous. She does not want to be at fault for her unplanned pregnancy, and this story leaves her, in a certain way, blameless like the Virgin Mary, whose story she draws on to lend credibility to her cover story.<sup>29</sup>

Read this way, however, any blamelessness that Grace enjoys is, like her angel, of her own making. On a number of levels, bringing the angel into her story and home proves useful and gratifying to Grace. For instance, describing Stephen's body, which begins to grow hair, prompts her to "realize that whatever is happening through the empty door frame, it is not all one way. The knowledge that the hair on Stephen's body is *somehow my fault* leaves me mute and glad" (*Wig* 129, emphasis mine). Grace even begins to call Stephen her "blow-up man" and her "wonderful inflatable angel" as she becomes increasingly confident in the illusion she conjures (*Wig* 41).

Somewhat counter-intuitively, it is her frank juxtaposition of the miraculous and the mundane that implants Stephen in the realm of fact for some readers. Taking a

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<sup>29</sup> Grace is a woman who is eager to call her mother on the telephone to tell her, "we were not to blame" (*Wig* 8). While resonant with feminist revisions of biblical mythologies such as the Adam and Eve story, Grace's motivation to claim blamelessness is personal as well, as I discuss in a later section. The Christian story of the Virgin Birth and Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary are closely related. The Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's own birth without original sin. Being immaculate is crucial to Mary's fitness for giving birth to Jesus Christ while still a virgin. Grace reverses these implications, so that her miraculous conception will affect her mother's, retroactively.

matter-of-fact approach to the tale helps Grace to make it more convincing. Thus, as Elke D’Hoeker points out, “At no point does she question Stephen’s angelic nature or any of his magical features, such as his wings, his almost translucent body or the rope marks around his neck” that result from his 1934 suicide by hanging (D’Hoeker 189). The fact that she does *not* question the angel’s existence should raise suspicions; why would a first-person narrator who admits that she is certain of nothing accept an angel into her home without questioning his existence? D’Hoeker claims that that the angel “cannot be explained away as a product of Grace’s imaginations” based on the logic that he is “visible to other characters and even appears on television” (189). However, it is crucial to recognize that, as a first-person narrator, Grace mediates between all her characters and her audience. Like the angel, other characters’ responses to the angel are the stuff of Grace’s fiction. And she is well practiced in dubbing.<sup>30</sup>

This reading goes some way toward accounting for the lack of coherency sometimes seen as characterizing *Wig*.<sup>31</sup> Rather than generally taking *Wig*’s plot as literally straightforward, it positions many of the scenes that occur toward the middle of the novel to an earlier moment of Grace’s life than the literally straightforward reading would position them because, in the domestic scenes, Grace is not growing backward. Rather, Grace is working out how to position her growing body so that her cover story will have the desired effect. She is drafting and revising. She only seems to be growing less corporeal because she is discovering that the evidence her growing body provides is becoming increasingly difficult to overlook; she counteracts this evidence by acting as if

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<sup>30</sup> As Grace explains, dubbing is the part of film editing process, “where the sound is mixed and you can add things in if you want to like extra applause” or even, I would add, other voices (*Wig* 78).

<sup>31</sup> Hansson states that *Wig*’s narrative “logic is thus one of the sense-making systems questioned in the novel, through Enright’s equilibristic use of language and lack of a coherent plot structure” (Hansson, “Beyond Local,” 59).

she is becoming incorporeal or reverting to a more childlike state.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, she sees to it that the angel, a red herring, is “getting thicker” and is held responsible for the more mystical effects she employs to pull off her cover story (*Wig* 38). When she explains, “He turns potatoes green just by looking them. . . . He has a way, I think, with light” it is actually she who has control over the quality of the color and light cast in the story (*Wig* 38). Read this way, the narrative culminates in a climax in a scene located at the heart of the text, when Grace conceives the idea of telling a cover story, and configuring it so that readers believe they are entering a story world where this is possible because the angel appears on the first page. It may well be that the story “goes live” the moment the angel knocks on her front door.

Failure to recognize the narrative frame leads to an inaccurate view of *Wig*'s plot. Further, any demythologization that Enright may accomplish through the narrative frame is potentially overturned.<sup>33</sup> However, it has quickly become conventional to read *Wig* through a Christian-inflected existential mechanism, a device that “refers incongruities to the level of the fictive world, notably to canons of probability that deviate from those of reality.”<sup>34</sup> This reading reinscribes this old mechanism by likening Grace to the Virgin Mary. According to Christian myth, Mary conceived miraculously, through the power of the Holy Spirit and learned of her pregnancy from the angel Gabriel during an encounter

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<sup>32</sup> This reading explains numerous narrative details as symptoms of Grace's pregnancy and its effects on her everyday life. What we initially take to be relatively accidental facts—the changed color of her nipples, her difficulty buckling a seatbelt—become signals of Grace's condition. Her hangovers indicate morning sickness, her nymphomania becomes the increased sex drive some pregnant women experience in pregnancy. Grace's suicidal tendencies at the novel's outset are explained as her reluctance to continue a pregnancy (she may be considering aborting).

<sup>33</sup> For a conventional reading of *Wig* that discusses this demythologizing more extensively, see Hansson, who claims in her reading of *Wig* that the “conventions of realist narration are cancelled from the very beginning, but so are those of myth and legend. . . . Enright counters the tradition of representing suicide as a sin by describing angels as ‘ordinary men who killed themselves once when times were bad’” (“Beyond Local,” 58).

<sup>34</sup> For an outline of various interpretation mechanisms that can exist simultaneously within a text, see Yakobi.

known as the Annunciation. The readings of *Wig* that employ this existential device accept the story that Grace conceived with a miraculous figure, an angel, though through an act of textual/sexual intercourse rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. These readings are a testament to the continuing strength of Christian mythology in the Irish cultural context. Enright subverts religious debates and discourse that have continued to hold public interest in Ireland.<sup>35</sup>

Paradoxically, part of the success of Grace's cover story owes much to the demythologizing it undertakes. Enright modifies the myth and reduces its force to a level that it seems sufficiently realistic to contemporary readers.<sup>36</sup> For instance, the supernatural father in the cover story is not an Omnipotent God-the Father but a Canadian bridge builder who committed suicide 1934. As in the classic Christmas film *It's A Wonderful Life*, in Grace's Ireland, angels are "ordinary men who killed themselves once when times were bad [and who] had to walk everywhere, setting despair to rights, growing their wings" (*Wig* 2, 1).<sup>37</sup> *Wig* recognizes that by end of the twentieth century, religion has been severely undermined—Grace's first question to the angel is, "So what's it like since God died?"—but *Wig* also maintains that Christian mythology continues to be a powerful element of Irish culture (*Wig* 2). Grace's mother, for instance, habitually dips her head when *The Angelus*, "with its picture of the Angel Gabriel and its electronic bell" comes on the television every night at 6:00 before the 6:01 evening news (80).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Some Irish authorities have sometimes exhibited a tendency to take magical thinking as earnest. For instance, during the 1984 "Kerry Babies Scandal," the unrealistic possibility of superfecundation ("a rare process whereby a woman is impregnated by two different men within a forty-eight-hour period") was actively put forward during Joanne Hayes' trial. See Maguire (347).

<sup>36</sup> See Hansson, "Beyond Local" 58 and D'Hoeker 186.

<sup>37</sup> I thank James M. Smith for making this connection.

<sup>38</sup> *RTE* airs *The Angelus*, a Catholic prayer honoring the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, twice daily at noon and 6:00 p.m., prior to the 6:01 evening news. It has done so in its radio broadcasts since 1950 and



While *Wig*'s reworking of Christian myths raised little comment and sometimes less scrutiny when it appeared in 1995, earlier in the century, a reworking of the Virgin Mary and Annunciation story similar to Enright's met with scandal. Lennox Robinson's short story, "The Madonna of Slieve Dun" caused trouble when Francis Stuart, W. B. Yeats and other figures involved with the literary magazine *To-morrow* republished it in 1924. Robinson's story offended the rigidly Catholic sensibilities of the emerging Irish nation-state, leading to the journal being printed in England.<sup>39</sup> It is illuminating to compare the two works because both present the stories of Irish women who announce that spiritual fathers impregnated them. Coming most of a century after Robinson's, Enright's story suggests similarities across their Irish communities, which demonstrate willingness to believe the women's tales.

As in *Wig*, the main character of Robinson's short story tells a convincing tale that the child in her womb has a supernatural father. In Robinson's short story, a young Irish girl named Mary Creedon who wishes for the Christ child to be born again in her village of Lisree soon finds herself pregnant. The pregnancy results from an encounter with a tramp on a deserted road: she meets as she is walking home, faints, and is raped. Unlike the readers who know otherwise, Mary believes her pregnancy to be immaculate; she has been chosen by God to carry the "Blessed Child," and her manner and story convinces Lisree's population of the same—for a time, until the child is born female. The story ends on a conversation in the local pub; the tramp Mary Creedon encountered

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on television since its inauguration January 1, 1962 (Raidió Teilifís Éireann). *Wig* references this in the typographically-rendered television listing for July 19, 1969 and calls it Stephen's "favorite show" (32, 33).<sup>39</sup> McKenna makes this observation in "Yeats, 'Leda,' and the Aesthetics of To-Morrow, concluding that the controversial *To-Morrow* journal "contributed toward creating a climate of public opinion that made the Censorship of Publications Act of 1928 possible" (34). As discussed in Chapter Two, this Act resulted in the banning of works like McGahern's *The Dark*.

on the road asks the population of Lisree whether they now believe that he fathered Mary Creedon's child. Since the birth does not go as Mary Creedon prophesied (she believed the child would be born male), the village now accepts the tramp's story. If she had conceived a son through rape, which, realistically, was just as likely as conceiving a daughter through rape, the village may not have been swayed to the tramp's more earthly version of the conception. Robinson's story implies that the local Irish population—even a village as notorious as the fictional Lisree—is vulnerable to virgin birth tales that are fake. Further, since "The Madonna of Slieve Dun" draws heavily on the story of the Virgin Mary, Robinson implies that the Virgin Mary's son may also have been conceived through more earthly means as well. However, since readers know that the tramp is the father all along, the story allows the reader to feel less duped than the fictional characters. *Wig*, in contrast, implies that the fictional characters that represent the contemporary Irish population are sometimes willing to accept stories about pregnancies that they know are false for the sake of social convention. For instance, Grace "grew up with a secret that everyone knew. Even the cat knew and stalked it" (*Wig* 26). When it comes to knowing the truth about pregnancies, it is *Wig*'s readers who face difficulty in determining the difference between reality and illusion.

In some ways similar to "The Madonna of Slieve Dun," Grace transforms cultural elements into a notion of encounter with the divine. Like Mary Creedon, Grace experiences a catalytic moment that transforms the cultural elements around her so that she might experience a relatively plausible encounter with the divine.<sup>40</sup> For Grace, the

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<sup>40</sup> In relation to Robinson's story, McKenna argues that the "culture into which Mary Creedon was born encouraged her to blame herself for the violence in the society, to anticipate violence in return, and to associate that violence with both divine justice and the birth of a child. All the components for Mary's efforts to transform her violation into a divine annunciation were in place, even before the rape; the rape

catalyst is an episode of Oprah Winfrey's the popular foreign television show, specifically an episode featuring women who tell Oprah incredible pregnancy stories. The talk show hostess converses with women who "gave birth to babies they didn't expect, who thought they had indigestion until a little bald head popped out" (*Wig* 84).<sup>41</sup> These women's stories are spectacular because they radically compress the usual time lag between confirming a pregnancy and giving birth. Because of their bodies and the way they experience them, Grace thinks these women were able to overlook, explain away, or willfully ignore the symptoms and indications of their pregnancies. "Fat. [She] think[s]" when she looks at the television, "Too fat for shorts. Too fat to know what was going on in there" (*Wig* 84). Watching these women, it dawns on Grace that she, too, could act as if she does not know what is happening to her body. Specifically, given the intense religiosity of her culture, she quickly realizes that she could act as if she is too enraptured with the divine to know what was going on with her growing body.<sup>42</sup>

Grace seems to have a great deal of experience with her society's knowing acceptance of stories that provide a veneer of middle class moral propriety to the parties involved. *Wig* implies that Grace's family may hold one such story dear, and that her struggle with being unmarried and pregnant may stem from the conditions of her own birth. That is, Grace's struggle seems fueled by a pregnancy-related family trauma. As

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simply catalyzed her thoughts. Robinson lays bare her psychological processes, and the injustice of a society that imposes punishment on the innocent and associated punishment with the sexual act of creation. By doing so, he exposes the repression embedded in Irish society" (29).

<sup>41</sup> Enright similarly takes up this theme in *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*, in which she writes, "there are many cases of women who do not now that they are pregnant until they go into labor. There are cases of woman [sic] who 'know' that they are pregnant, but who are not... In Ireland the imagination is still held in high regard. 'Making things up' is a normal and often social activity" (11-12).

<sup>42</sup> This realization occurs in a middle chapter entitled "Yellow Eyes," and I will discuss it more fully in Section IV. I mention it here in order to establish that Grace goes into a creative frenzy "feeling bilocated" and comes out of it with, literally and figuratively, a whitewashed domestic interior and an angel in her living room (*Wig* 82, 91).

the *LoveQuiz*'s scrolling credits suggest, the novel's protagonist may have begun as "Grace oops"—the result of an unplanned pregnancy (*Wig* 13).<sup>43</sup> The "oops" suggests that her mother, too, was once unmarried and pregnant—and the novel provides Grace no other surname. If Grace's mother was an unwed pregnant Irish woman in the early 1960s, her situation would have caused moral outrage and social scandal if Grace's Da had not found himself, to use Enright's words, "lured up the aisle" (*Wig* 26). Grace describes this period as "the days when a man was allowed to be stupid [...and] do the wrong thing to get the girl and then find that it was the right thing after all" (*Wig* 26).<sup>44</sup> Grace's parents apparently attempted to cover up the unplanned pregnancy by marrying quickly and pretending Grace was conceived subsequently.

Given the predictable ways in which a typical pregnancy progresses, marrying quickly would have contained the social scandal, but would not have dispelled it. If Grace was born less than nine months later, the cover-up simply made the impetus for her parents' marriage an open secret. It is little wonder, then, that chronological narration does not appeal to Grace and that she instead uses more flexible modes when telling her own life story. Like with Grace's birth, when she becomes pregnant, her growing body thwarts her preferred life narrative, and impacts her willingness to present her story in a clear, linear fashion. Grace seems to articulate the problem of the date of her birth when she likens it to the process of replaying videotape: "Here was disaster on a loop, the gash we had made in time. The problem was more than political. I had scratched the record and made it jump. I had dug a hole we could not get past, nor stitch up" (*Wig* 93). That

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<sup>43</sup> The show's closing credits are presented as blurred, typographically, as if they scroll across a television screen almost faster than they can be read (*Wig* 13).

<sup>44</sup> Levine encapsulates this the atmosphere at the time with her comment, "having a baby outside marriage was regarded by some as more shameful than being tried for manslaughter" (91, qtd. in Ingman 19).

is, the “disastrous” timing publically reveals that Grace’s family origins—and Grace herself—are tinged with “illegitimacy” and the related discourse that “illegitimacy” plays itself out across generations. It seems likely that Grace’s conception was not in accordance with accepted social standards dictating the timing between marriage and parenthood. This is further evidenced by the novel’s refusal to ever reveal the paternal surname Da provided to Ma and to Grace.

If Ma was pregnant, Ma and Da’s speedy marriage would be socially necessary due to the predictable schedule of bodily growth that would belie the ruse. However, the novel engages with the fact that predictable patterns of bodily growth can invalidate certain social stories intended to rearrange events in time. In other words, bodily evidence can contradict the stories we tell despite ourselves. For instance, fearing scandal and seeking respectability, it seems that Grace’s mother delayed giving birth to Grace as long as she could in order to help postdate Grace’s arrival in relation to the marriage. As Grace puts it, “Mine was a slow, angry delivery. My mother held on to me like a pervert” until Grace was born “three weeks overdue” (*Wig* 170). Ma would be only partially able to mitigate the evidence provided by the predictable schedule of pregnant growth. Without their “premature understanding,” the timing of Grace’s birth held the potential to undermine the family’s claim to the respectability that was central to Irish middle-class identity (*Wig* 170).

The ability to obfuscate the relationship between the timing of the marriage and that schedule of bodily development to the greatest extent possible would be, for Grace and her family, a necessary social survival skill because otherwise the rumor mill would continue for years. Their world is one of “neighbours whispering over cups of tea with

the door shut” (*Wig* 150). Grace demonstrates that she has gained fluency with this skill when she points out, for instance, “I am already in her tummy” in her parents’ honeymoon photographs while remaining silent about whether her statement has its basis in visual evidence (i.e., whether Ma’s belly is already englobed) or deductive reasoning (i.e., inferred through relation of Grace’s birthday and her parent’s anniversary on the calendar) (*Wig* 27). Many of the unspoken family rules and resulting unresolved tensions between Grace and her parents are rooted in the inexorable body and in bodily histories which are not allowed to surface but which break through as shadows in *Wig*’s narrative. As she tells the angel, she knows “about looking back. How you lose what you look at. How you turn to salt” (*Wig* 40).<sup>45</sup> The unresolved parent-child tensions that characterize *Bildungsromane* abound in *Wig*, manifesting as the family’s tendency to repress the past for the sake of polite appearances. As a consequence, Grace has developed coping mechanisms that allow her to uphold the ruse surrounding her origins, which she was powerless to affect in the first place (but which she can effect through storytelling). It is in large part because Grace grew up in this environment rich with antinarratability (that which should not be told because of social convention) that she is generally capable of sustaining her own cover story, and constructing her own *Bildungsroman*. Her need to occlude her family’s past also ensures she is accustomed to manipulating the paranarratable to her own ends.

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<sup>45</sup> For a reading of anamorphic spots as a “spectral feminine space that is other than the Real,” see Mulhall, who argues that the perspective on signification in Enright’s work as aligned with Slavoj Žižek’s reading of anamorphic looking, in which “‘a detail of a picture that ‘gaz’d rightly’, i.e., straightforwardly, appears as a blurred spot, assumes clear, distinguished shapes once we look at it ‘awry,’ at an angle’” (82).

III: ANGELS AND ATTICS IN THE 1990S IRISH FEMALE *BILDUNGSROMAN*

“Stephen was painting the attic... And it is quite a trip, quite a picnic, up among the raw wood joints, the splinters and the dust. Light comes in from under the eaves and we lie down and look at the road from a funny angle. We look through the hole in the floor and see my bed, the duvet stiffened with paint” (102, 106-7).

I have stated that the narrative of development in *Wig* is far from straightforward in several ways. That is, due to the fast-cutting movements and jumbled chronology that characterize the novel, the story proceeds on a recursive, illusive, tangled and associative path. This serves Grace’s story because a more straightforward mode of telling would not work at all for this narrator because she must “swerve” around the topic of her growing body.<sup>46</sup> A heroine’s “swerve,” to use a term Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar employ, often tropes concealment (74).<sup>47</sup> It allows a narrative path to circle around or switchback across sensitive topics such as, in *Wig*’s case, Grace’s unplanned pregnancy; the abruptly swerving story and writing allows the narrator to evade looking at her body while it grows. In order to see what is happening with Grace’s body, what the first person narrator swerves around with her storytelling, readers must be prepared to “see meaning in what has previously been empty space” (75). Owing to works such as Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, which have done much to delineate the formal conventions of the

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<sup>46</sup> Traditionally the *Bildungsroman* follows an essentially straightforward, chronological pattern of education, experience, and setting out into the world. This pattern, as feminist scholars (e.g. Fraiman) have been pointing out for several decades, is traditionally more accessible to male characters than to female characters in western society.

<sup>47</sup> Broadly speaking, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that a male hero may “swerve,” but does so in order to highlight his “struggle against his precursors” more clearly. Gilbert and Gubar observe that for a male text, a swerve is “a motion by which the writer prepares for a victorious accession to power” (74). In contrast, for a female hero, a “literary ‘swerve’ is ... a necessary evasion,” a “strategy born of fear and dis-ease” (75).

female *Bildungsroman*, contemporary readers are now often well-prepared to read into the spaces concealed within women writers' texts.<sup>48</sup> *Wig*'s character-narrator makes a familiar pattern work for her ulterior ends.

Enright's use of strategies such as the swerve suggests that she is drawing on earlier female *Bildungsromane*, generally by non-Irish women writers. Dating back to at least the nineteenth century, women writers have established a pattern of revising the generally straightforward developmental process of the *Bildungsroman* plot. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland identify in their important 1983 study *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* that plots of female development, including American and British texts such as *The Awakening*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Summer Before the Dark*, often proceed in other than straightforward ways. In many such texts, they observe, "development may be compressed into brief epiphanic moments. Since the significant changes are internal, flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of an action" (12). For instance, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place one day in June, but covers much of Clarissa's life through a series of flashbacks. *Wig*'s two frame chapters establish a time scheme that is notably similar to Woolf's novel in that it, too, takes place on a summer day, and covers much of Grace's lifetime (through the story she tells that day). In addition to *Mrs. Dalloway*, Enright's novel also suggests comparisons between Grace and the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper;" Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier; or even the Sylvia Plath of *Ariel*. One of the strongest resemblances is to Woolf's character Judith

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<sup>48</sup> Gilbert and Gubar quote Showalter, who argues that feminist literary scholarship has taught us to see that when the "orthodox plot recedes... another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint," (435).



Shakespeare from *A Room of One's Own*.<sup>49</sup> Also for instance, through the theme of madness and climbing up into her attic to be with Stephen, Enright refers to several important works by women as well, including Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (102).<sup>50</sup> Because of the subjunctive mood, readers can never fully determine whether Grace really thinks she has an angel "painting the attic" (*Wig* 102). She could also be, like Enright, possibly able to completely manipulate this tradition of schizophrenic female authorship. It may be that she is a "madwoman" or that she is a woman who is actively creating a new version of her story—one that she is aware is just a story.

These many intertextual references to the feminist literary tradition demonstrate that this protagonist has the advantage of a literary education. In a number of widely known novels of female development, awakenings frequently manifest themselves as a result of women's unequal access to key elements of power in a social system. Abel, Hirsch and Langland attribute, for instance, Rachel Vinrace's "delayed" awakening in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* to her "inadequate education" (11). Contrastingly, in *Wig*'s time and place, education was a national institution for both female and male

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<sup>49</sup> In an interview, Enright says that the Irish in the twentieth century would have treated a creative genius who was female much in the same way that Woolf speculates the English would have treated Judith Shakespeare centuries before. Enright states, "I always say that if Joyce was a woman she would have been locked up for writing psychotic, scatological gibberish; for sleeping with the serving classes and getting herself pregnant; for fleeing her native place in a state of hysteria; and all the rest. And when they had locked her up they would have looked at her scrawlings, and if they bothered to decipher them, might have muttered 'Hmmm. Pity. Some of this stuff is almost good you know. Some of it has An Effect.' This has changed since Joyce's time: women in Ireland no longer get locked up for having sex. I can't vouch for anything else" (56).

<sup>50</sup> In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Gilbert and Gubar argue that a "female schizophrenia of authorship" is central to women writer's representational strategies (78). They suggest that the twentieth-century descendants of the groundbreaking nineteenth-century authors they examine include "Virginia Woolf (who projects herself into both ladylike Mrs. Dalloway and crazed Septimus Warren Smith), Doris Lessing (who divides herself between sane Martha Hesse and mad Lynda Coldridge), and Sylvia Plath (who sees herself as both a plaster saint and a dangerous 'old yellow' monster)" (Gilbert and Gubar 78).

students. For young women like Grace, access to education was not typically the problem; the Irish education system had been ambitiously reformed in 1967, so Grace would have been among the first who benefitted from free public education in Ireland.<sup>51</sup> Irish feminists such as Boland have argued, however, that Irish women have been prevented from attaining socially powerful positions because they have been schooled to accept that their social role is symbolic (76). It is, Boland asserts, the Irish literary tradition that establishes a hurdle for women writers. Enright's feminist work sympathizes with this view, and is primarily interested in exploring the body's role in triggering an awakening and in exploring how the growing female body manifests in the Irish symbolic system.

Grace's relatively empowered social position is often considered a goal of a traditional *Bildung* plot. In *Wig*, it is a source of creativity-generating conflict. Like the protagonists of many female *Bildungsromane*, this novel begins with a woman who seems to have already fulfilled the "fairy-tale expectation[s]" of her society, at least on the surface (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 12).<sup>52</sup> In *Wig*, Readers are gradually able to piece together that Grace is living a 1990s Irish version of "happily ever after." Grace is the smart, educated product of a middle class, suburban Dublin, two-parent home. She has a career, lives independently, and has contributed meaningfully to society; she helped to create and now produces a television show that is said to be "helping to build a new Ireland" (*Wig* 12). She is a generally self-reliant, liberated woman who can support herself financially and who has taken charge of her sexual life. While her circumstances

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<sup>51</sup> For an overview of these reforms, see Terence Brown, *Ireland* 236-44.

<sup>52</sup> Edna Pontellier, the bourgeois wife and mother "who was forced to admit that she knew of none better" than her husband exemplifies this category for Abel, Hirsch and Langland (Chopin 9).

are different from Chopin's protagonist, the underlying sensation of being unsatisfied remains the same for Grace.

Career and independence, primary areas of concern in *Bildung* plots, seem to have come at a cost to Grace's domestic life and personal relationships, areas of primary concern to conventional romantic plots. Tension between these plot types has long been a signature of many female plots of development; as the editors of *The Voyage In* observe, female protagonists often struggle to chart a course between the Scylla of *Bildung* and the Charybdis of romance.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Grace's adult life has its challenges. Grace pays for her own home, but lives there alone. "I needed anything I could get," she tells us in the opening line, "apart from money, sex and power which were easy but hurt a lot" (*Wig* 1). Perhaps most crucially, Grace does not have love.<sup>54</sup> She has had casual sexual encounters but has not enjoyed an intimate, companionate relationship in some time, if ever.<sup>55</sup> She feels she is "stuck with a couple of one-night-stands" and, perhaps most wrenchingly, understands "the difference between sex and love, between love and the rest of your life" (45). The people closest to her are her coworkers and her family, though those relationships are superficial, unsatisfying, or are threatened in various ways. They do not promise much in the way of romantic love. For

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<sup>53</sup> "Repeatedly, the female protagonist or *Bildungsheld* must chart a treacherous course between the penalties of expressing sexuality and suppressing it, between the costs of inner concentration and of direct confrontation with society, between the price of succumbing to madness and of grasping a repressive 'normality.' [Virginia Woolf's character in *The Voyage Out*] Rachel Vinrace's truncated life poignantly illustrates these diverse tensions. Marriage and community mean sacrificing integrity and work; sexuality focuses the frightening relations between men and women and spells the loss of a nurturing female bond. Yet withdrawal to the inner life leads to fever, hallucination, and death" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 12-13).

<sup>54</sup> As John Tague puts it, "Grace trades in love in its most crassly commercial and casual forms on the game-show *LoveQuiz*, but she is taken with the question of the most problematic and precious kinds of love: that between children and parents (particularly between daughter and father) and that between lovers."

<sup>55</sup> Grace cryptically alludes to a past love affair with an Englishman, a coupling with obvious implications in terms of national allegory (*Wig* 56-58).

love, then, Grace takes a voyage in; she turns her focus inward, to her own resources, which include the ability to take narrative control of her story. More specifically, she creates the illusion of an angel she finds sexy and turns to him for love as well as to provide an alternate history for a pregnancy that likely resulted from sex without love, an explanatory cover story that will impact the rest of her life.

Enright updates the female *Bildungsroman* tradition for the 1990s, an era in which many gains have been made in women's rights—and in which others remain contested. From certain perspectives, advances for women identified with feminism in other Western countries have tended to lag behind in the Irish context.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Enright creates a female protagonist who may be a madwoman *with* an attic and also a professional career in techno media. But her female protagonist is going to be highly anxious about concerns which have been in the Western mainstream for some time, though remain far from worked out, particularly in the Irish context. Not coincidentally, then, as the paperback blurb points out, Enright's protagonist has a professional life that looks a lot like the life of another classic career woman, Mary Richards, the protagonist of a groundbreaking and 1970s television series, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Like Mary Richards, Grace is a television producer who lives in a Victorian-era house with an attic and, also like her, Grace's creative, professional energy stems from a recent romantic failure.<sup>57</sup> The shell of Enright's story may reflect the feminist and techno-media advances of the late twentieth century, but longstanding concerns about single women,

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<sup>56</sup> As Enright puts it in an interview, "you do wonder whether Ireland ever had a proper feminism, to have a post-feminism so quickly. Irish feminism had to fight so hard to claim control of the female body, that it didn't have time to fight for the female career. It was never as involved with money as British or American feminism" (Bracken and Cahill 17).

<sup>57</sup> On the television show's pilot episode, Mary Richards moves to Minneapolis because her relationship with her boyfriend has recently failed.

even one with a budding career, remain at its core. Whether this young television producer is, to quote the classic sitcom's opening credits, "gonna make it after all" is far from certain.<sup>58</sup>

Grace's focus on activating her own resources comments on the conventional female *Bildungsroman* plot. As Abel, Hirsch and Langland might predict, her intense concentration on the possibility of creating an illusion with her cover story may lead to her unraveling as she withdraws from reality in order to nurse the illusion—and herself—more fully into being. Such a withdrawal is a classic theme of female *Bildungsromane*, and is often dangerous for female protagonists. "Confinement to inner life, no matter how enriching, threatens a loss of public activity; it enforces an isolation that may culminate in death," write the editors of *The Voyage In*. Able, Hirsch, and Langland support their observation by pointing to *The Awakening's* Edna Pontellier and *The Voyage Out's* Rachel Vinrace, both of whom die at the end of the novels, (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 8). Although these protagonists do not survive to tell their life stories, these protagonists do achieve some individual, unconventional measure of fulfillment, despite the "crippling dichotomization" of their inner and outer worlds (Hirsch 48). Grace, unlike the subjects of some female *Bildungsromane*, is far from passive.<sup>59</sup> The narrative tension driving *Wig's* cover story may be the reader's desire to find out what will happen to Grace, but the tension driving the novel's more crucial story is what she may bring about, and whether she can sustain it. As the "narrative I" in this story, Grace

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<sup>58</sup> The Mary Tyler Moore show aired from 1970-77; Paul Williams composed the opening son "Love is All Around."

<sup>59</sup> Rosowski observes that "like many other protagonists in the novel of awakening, Emma Bovary is essentially passive" in her discussion of prototypical novels of awakening (50).

owns and embodies the whole of it—vocally, discursively, and physically. She is responsible for its success—or its failure.

In order to produce a personal history she can live with, Grace struggles to organize and author a self that is frustrated, fragmented, and yet still invested in authoring “herself.” To develop, Grace responds to impediments, and crafts a personal history from her remembered stories, exploring them in different ways and altering them to suit her wishes as she finds necessary (this is, after all, subjunctive narrative). Her story takes her personal history as its basis, but regards memory as deceptive. Early on, she pronounces, “tricks of memory do not distress me. I always knew that the picture of my father at the door [wearing his wig for the first time] was more miraculous than true” (*Wig* 31). The creative work of crafting the narrative is more important than either the miraculous subject matter or the truth. The real magic in *Wig* is in the narrator’s textual prestidigitation, including the use of the primacy effect on page one, when the narrator pulls off a key manipulation of her audience. As the reader begins to orient herself within *Wig*’s story world, Grace’s story situates the angel in the reader’s mind as reality rather than illusion. Because she remains unsure if she can keep up the charade of the cover story she is conjuring, even to herself, that angel is there to be on suicide watch. For Grace, seeing the miraculous as a living narrative possibility is not the difficulty—the difficulty for her is in finding the edges, fitting pieces together, and sustaining the story beyond a first impression.

Through the concern with sustaining the life of a woman who is awake to the “art of living” her life and protecting her from despair, *Wig* revives a particular mode of the female *Bildungsromane*, the “novel of awakening,” and shades it into being a novel of

artistic development (*Wig* 2). Abel, Hirsch, and Langland point out that novels in the awakening mode often focus on women as development “blossoms momentarily, then dissolves,” often with the protagonist’s death or an equivalent (Able, Hirsch and Langland 11). This pattern is so-called after Chopin’s *The Awakening*, a text that ends with the newly awakened Edna Pontellier’s suicide at sea. Indeed, *Wig* alludes to Chopin’s novel through the morning swim Grace takes in the sea on her storytelling day—and every day, “these days.” Much like Edna Pontellier, Grace feels the call of the sea. She states, “I feel the suck of the wave in the morning and water seduces me all day” (*Wig* 214). However, she does not answer the call of the sea the way Edna does, by pouring out her strength and swimming until it is gone. More talented an artist than Edna, Grace instead wants to use her response to that call as the basis for her work of finding “the edge of myself, which is why I have to be inside things now, so that the walls will hold me in, so that I can lap into corners and seep into carpets and carry like a bowl the noise of the sea” (*Wig* 182). Grace determines that she must keep herself contained in order to survive and continue to produce creative work such the narrative self-portrait of her story about how she came to be pregnant, or the movie she plans to make with Marcus (*Wig* 214). This determination spurs her to craft her story. Storytelling becomes an asylum for her—it offers her shelter, support, and “time to tease it apart and fit it together again” (*Wig* 182). This determination is critical to the formal intervention into the *Bildungsroman* that *Wig* undertakes; as the character-narrator, Grace seeks control over her story and her body’s role in her story so that she, much more than her society and also her biology, gets to determine “what happened” (*Wig* 182). She has

moved from being the subject of a *Bildungsroman* to authoring her own life, though she remains anxious about her need to keep herself contained in order to sustain it.

#### IV: NARRATING THE UNSAYABLE BODY IN *WIG*

“How could I do all that milk-white budding breast stuff, eye-gazing, eye-diving and parting your hair six different ways?” (*Wig* 109)

In the close reading I offer in this section, I presume that Grace is pregnant not only at the end as others have interpreted it, but throughout *Wig*. As the first person narrator, Grace can, to some extent, and for the limited time, make her body grow how she wants it to grow realistically, so long as she retains control over the narrative perspective. Ultimately, her storytelling project cannot hold, however, because her growing body will eventually betray this process of deliberate construction. If she is pregnant, her story becomes increasingly difficult to hold together as her belly grows and provides evidence contrary to her story until there is a preponderance of evidence—if not definitive proof—that she is pregnant. Although it is impossible to be certain that she is pregnant due to the subjunctive tense, cryptic evidence that she is pregnant appears through the entire novel. I think that Enright puts this evidence in the novel to deliberately create significant certainty, and then subtly undermines that certainty through a narrative mood that rules out absolute certainty: the subjunctive. Grace’s pregnancy is clearest—or least in shadow—when certain statements surface in the text, such as when Grace deadpans, “I am late” (idiomatically indicating that her usual menstrual cycle might be disrupted) or when she later pronounces, “I do not want a child” (*Wig* 20, 38). In moments such as these, Grace’s body comes closest to betraying her pregnancy at the



surface level of her prose. As with memories, the prose in *Wig* is enchantingly susceptible to the “kind of misalignment of the pixels, the shadow of another channel breaking through,” a distortion and partial occlusion that Grace describes as a property of memory and storytelling, but which is also a way of characterizing the unnarratable, which also has an ambiguous ontological status (*Wig* 31). The evidence for that other channel is thematic, textual, and circumstantial. The shape of their sum is not fully clear, but the meaning of that sum is rich, and is kept on the agenda.<sup>60</sup>

At first, it seems that Grace conceals her growing pregnancy by framing her body through a series of mechanical manipulations. One of these is using optical geometry. She attempts to view her growing body through the lens of her bathwater that “sets pockets of light shimmering on the ceiling” and also bends the light that enters the water (*Wig* 125). While she bathes, Grace notices how the interplay of light and water facilitates optical illusions. “I can see the picture of myself, with lilies on the floor and on the windowsill...Why not?” (*Wig* 125). She convinces herself to look at her body through the frame of the bathwater. This is what she tells us she sees:

So I look at myself and everything seems changed under the broken angle of the water – paler, new. My front no longer breaks the surface to look at me like a quiet brown frog. My nipples have faded and there is something wrong with my stomach. For one thing, it doesn’t seem appropriate to call it a stomach anymore. It is a smooth white belly with obscure functions and an iridescent perfect glow. Smug, that’s one word for it. (*Wig* 125)

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<sup>60</sup> While the reading I present is premised on Grace being pregnant, I accept that the intentional misalignment of her pixilated prose means that her pregnancy remains in shadow and is, thus, uncertain. It remains possible that, alternatively, she might be just playing out a thought experiment.

Grace is satisfied with the temporary image she produces on the screen of this water. Under the water, her nipples appear lighter than their actual shade. Since darkened nipples are a common effect of pregnancy, she may be currently more likely to notice the variation. Note that she can see her belly but cannot see her “front,” her pubis, protruding from the water—perhaps her belly obstructs it from view. We cannot be sure, however, for she does not describe the shape of her belly. Instead, she deflects, offering color and texture. However, her adjective, “smooth,” conveys a sense of firmness related to the “obscure functions” within, functions that she pretends to obscure, that are not digestive but which, suggestively, effect a “glow.” The rectangular bathtub mysteriously frames Grace’s body as she plays hide-and-seek with its functions in the wavy shadows of the water. So long as she remains in the tub, she can gaze upon her body and see it distorted by the water. No wonder she is smug; she has obscured the fetus snug inside.

Once out of the bathwater, however, Grace faces greater difficulty in obfuscating how her body has grown. When Grace finally rises from her bath, she encounters the bathroom mirror. A complicated interaction takes place among Grace, parts of her body, and the mirror; the “usual conversation between the brush and my teeth and my eyes in the mirror” occurs before Grace lifts her eyes to her image (*Wig* 125). As Grace informs, she plays out “all the parts” (*Wig* 126). As she prepares to describe her image, Grace’s focus sweeps around and over her body. In fact, her narrative circuits through and around her body as if it is a transceiver tuning in to receive the signals transmitted by the mirror. Her body vibrates as she muses. “Hum goes my throat. Hum hum hum” (*Wig* 125). Notably, the sound of the toothbrush’s “Tap Tap” against the sink activates her memory of a man who made that same sound with his toothbrush “on his way to

[Grace's] bed, a good man, though [her] body remembers him in its own way" (*Wig* 126). Here, her conscious memory and her body's way of remembering become separate processes. The latter is not under Grace's volition. One way a woman's body may remember having had a man in her bed (a euphemism for sex) is to expand and grow increasingly distended with his offspring.

Unlike the women Grace sees on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, for most women, pregnancy will become increasingly obvious, given time.<sup>61</sup> Even for a woman who wishes to avoid and delay this moment, there will likely come a tipping point at which it is no longer reasonable to deny that her body has grown distended. Grace seems to reach such a tipping point following her bath, at "which time [she] has no excuses left" (*Wig* 126). Grace steps "back and lift[s] her eyes to the mirror. O Jerusalem!" (*Wig* 126). We assume from her exclamation that what she sees there are the "white breasts, uncomfortably high, the long, pubescent slope of the belly" she then describes, the adolescent signal she transmits (*Wig* 127, 126). At this point, her strategy shifts toward a different, more manic strategy, perhaps to sustain her denial.

Almost before the reader can process the detail of the "long, pubescent slope of the belly"—isn't the female pubescent body typically one of curving waist and widening hips?—Grace distracts us from that process by the ultimate denial of reality, breaking her mirror. With this shift, we are led to neglect these details and the relation among Grace,

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<sup>61</sup> Writing as medical scientists, Friedman, Heneghan, and Rosenthal summarize three types of denial of pregnancy: "1) pervasive denial; 2) affective denial; and 3) psychotic denial. Pervasive denial 'occurs when not only the emotional significance but the very existence of the pregnancy is kept from awareness.' ... Weight gain, amenorrhea, and breast changes may not be present or may be misconstrued; even labor pains may be misinterpreted....Partners and families may also fail to notice pregnancies....Women with 'affective denial' are intellectually aware of their pregnancy; however, they make little emotional or physical preparation, and 'continue to think, feel, and behave as though they were not pregnant.' ... Last, 'psychotic denial' of pregnancy may occur in women with psychosis and a history of loss of custody of other children" (117).

her body, the mirrored image she has just described, and begin to process whether Grace is becoming unstable or possibly hysterical. Telling herself, “I don’t mind my body going [...] it’s my sanity I miss,” Grace swiftly moves to break her looking glass because it fails to reflect the bodily image she wants to see: her body not pregnant (*Wig* 126). She interrupts the process of making sense of these details by implying that processing *how* her body has grown is madness. She *does* in fact mind that her body is going, because its growth is impinging on her ability to deny that she is pregnant.

Grace’s strategy in the bathroom scene is akin to the one she employs in the “Yellow Eyes” chapter, in which she denarrates insanity by presenting herself as going into a mad frenzy and then negating it. She deploys the strategy while watching the episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on television that features women who were surprised to learn they were pregnant. Apparently inspired, she suddenly redirects her (and our) attention from her television to the wallpaper of her home. She moves to the wall, and begins picking at the paper. Grace tells us, “[o]ver the last month or so, the paper has started to come away from the wall,” a claim that is significant on literal and metaphorical levels, and which can also be read as a suggestion that her motivation can be traced back to a temporally determinable event, an event which happened a month “or so” prior to this scene (*Wig* 84).

Her actions allude to those of the main character of Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.”<sup>62</sup> Grace turns to the walls of her house, which she describes with bodily

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<sup>62</sup> Gilbert and Gubar have made note of how as Gilman’s short story ends, “The woman from behind the wallpaper creeps away...creeps fast and far on the long road, in broad daylight. ‘I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country,’ says the narrator, ‘creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind’” (Gilbert and Gubar 91). They call her “escape from the numb world behind the patterned walls of the text” a “flight from dis-ease into health” (Gilbert and Gubar 91). Gilbert and Gubar claim that the woman’s creeping demonstrates that Gilman “knew that the cure for female despair must be spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as social. ... that even when a supposedly ‘mad’ woman has been

metaphors. “In the corner of the room, on the outside wall, a seam of wallpaper has buckled and come adrift, seductively, like a button undone, or a scab waiting to be picked. I pull at it in an experimental kind of way. Once you are started it’s hard to stop. The paper is thicker than I imagined” (*Wig* 85). At first, Grace peeks under these layers, then picks at them. Angered by what she sees, soon she is moving “along the wall with an angry rhythm, feeling like I have been fooled and the paper comes with my hand in scraps or swathes,” much in the way that Chopin’s character moves in “The Yellow Wallpaper” (*Wig* 86). Unlike the woman with the yellow wallpaper, Grace has wallpaper that is a “wet dream of orange cartwheels—some designer dreaming of Tibet, ending up in Chiswick,” a wallpaper pattern which is simultaneously fantastic and mundane (*Wig* 85).

As in Gillman’s work, the matter behind the wallpaper is significant. A paper pastiche of Irish religious and economic culture lies beneath Grace’s wallpaper. Grace proceeds to metaphorically and literally “strip the walls of the tatty, acid chintz and find the newspaper that was used for lining underneath. There are layers of the stuff, glued so hard and dry together you wonder what they were trying to keep out” (*Wig* 85). The layers of paper include theater advertisements, butchers’ receipts, recipes, shopping lists, postcards, cornflakes packets, and religious advertisements. The novel visually reproduces a series of several typographical fragments. Most have a typographical split running through them as if a strip of paper has been torn from their center. In her discussion of *Wig*, Coughlan summarizes these layers as a “kind of anthology of Irish culture, especially in its devotional aspect, from the previous hundred years, these include

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sentenced to imprisonment in the ‘infected’ house of her own body, she may discover that, as Sylvia Plath was to put it seventy years later, she has ‘a self to recover, a queen’” (Gilbert and Gubar 92).

promises of a ‘Medal for Every Catholic!’ and ‘Brown Scapular or An’ (sic), whose miraculous powers are detailed though half of the sentence is missing” (*Wig* 86-89, qtd. in Coughlan, “Irish” 185). Coughlan writes,

These fragmentary signals keep breaking up, allowing Enright to play significant games with bodies, food and chopping up... a kind of Last Supper for lunatics, this exploits overtones of the symbolic cannibalism underlying the Eucharist meal. The need to cleanse the body of impurities and to ‘rub’ away and ‘clots of blood’ is a displaced version of sexual prudery and, with the insistent injunction to cover, of the whole unease with the body which characterized Irish life and which stunted emotional development. (Coughlan, “Irish” 185)

For Coughlan, in this scene, “There are strong symbolic links with the idea of the covering wig: the anxiety about nakedness, comically focused on the bald head in turn indicates fear of the baring and potential loss of self in inter-subjective attachment” (Coughlan, “Irish” 185). I agree with Coughlan that the scene is related to Grace’s father’s wig and Da’s bald head that it covers. But I would also point to another bald head as a stronger motivation for Grace’s impulse to strip the wallpaper, the kind of bald head that Grace heard the woman describing to Oprah. At the beginning of this scene, Grace has perceived a means of producing a narrative illusion that will aid her survival. Grace has just alighted on illusion as a way to symbolically code a pregnancy. Her pregnancy.

The wallpaper-stripping scene climaxes with an image of Grace running a garden hose into her living room, and turning it on to spray the room. She sees the water “shoot

out, hit the floor, bounce back off in a shower of correction marks and soak the television, which blew up, while two hundred and twenty volts arced back along the stream of water to Stephen, who also exploded. Two vacuums collapsing at once made the air feel suddenly thin” (*Wig* 91). The chapter closes the next morning, after a pause and a restart (similar to a commercial break). When Grace gets up, “the room was beautiful. Stephen had finished stripping the paper and had painted the walls white, working by the light of the moon and the light of the paint and by the glow that spreads across his face, whenever he gets a brush in his hands” (*Wig* 91). In contrast to the end of “The Yellow Wallpaper” where a woman can be seen “creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind,” “Yellow Eyes” ends with a woman getting out of bed to encounter an angel whitewashing her walls.

However, between the paragraph describing the television explosion and the paragraph describing the next morning, there is a one-sentence paragraph that reads, “No of course not” (*Wig* 91). The sentence is instance of denarration (stating something in a text and negating it), and it indicates the scale of *Wig*’s uncertain way of making sense.<sup>63</sup> The scale of the denarration is characteristically ambiguous; it is unclear whether Grace is denying the explosive climax of this scene that occurs in the previous paragraph, the wallpaper scene in its entirety, Stephen’s explosion, or even Stephen’s presence as a whole. Perhaps it refers to each of these. If Grace is indeed continually reinventing the world she inhabits with each draft of her story she presents, Enright’s denarration may approach the limits of denarration, in which the effect of the denarration is “global and

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<sup>63</sup> As Richardson has observed, denarration, stating and denying something in narrative, can have a spectrum of effects when deployed within a text: “It can play a relatively minor role in the overall text, or it can fundamentally alter the narrative and reception of the story” (“Denarration” 168). In *Wig*, the effect falls into the latter category.

undermines the world it purports to depict; very little (if anything) is left over after the assaults of textual negation the narrative performs upon itself” (171). Given that Stephen will later be, apparently, assumed into the television or the television camera during the live broadcast of the *LoveQuiz* television show, his vacuum explosion just prior to the denarrating paragraph can be read as Grace’s trial narration of his assumption, a trial run she aborts with the denarration. She undoes this trial run in addition to some of the novel’s most clear evidence that Grace may be, like Chopin’s character, wholly unreliable.

It is as if she is unsatisfied with the direction in which this draft is headed, and decides to turn to the miraculous instead. Ultimately, faking a miraculous conception story seems more appealing than falling into madness. If the women on Oprah’s show could live through entire pregnancies without being aware of what is going on with their bodies, Grace seems to believe that she can follow suit. Grace determines that she can tell a story of being too enraptured by the presence of an angel to know what is going on with her growing body.

Taking a sociostylistic perspective on Grace’s phrase, “no of course not” can further illuminate how her denarration functions in this context. Laura Karttunen has made the convincing case that in literature, negatives “clue us in on the *social norms* of the text’s setting” (425). Karttunen argues that negatives and the disnarrated make explicit the “cultural discourse that is usually taken for granted, allowing people to disagree with it and dispute it” (424). Read with this observation in mind, we can see that with her “no of course not,” Grace is informing us that, as a contemporary, female Irish subject, she might be expected to tear down or wash clean these emblematic layers



of paper and blood, and explode her television and her angel as she literally and figuratively remodels her personal/political domestic space.<sup>64</sup> The metaphor of washing dirt and blood away has long been overdetermined, particularly in postcolonial spaces.<sup>65</sup> Not coincidentally, it is also a metaphor with powerful implications for sexually “impure” women, including unwed mothers, which had particularly powerful resonance in the 1990s.<sup>66</sup> It is thus highly significant that Grace does *not* wash the layers of wallpaper and newsprint from her home, and that this is a fracture point in the text.

Grace works earnestly to handle such fractures, and completes multiple drafts of her miraculous conception story so that it becomes increasingly successful. Ultimately, she determines to deliver a story that her body grows in unusual ways. For instance, she cultivates the belief that before she conceives with this angel, his presence and “care” has significant effects on her body, as if she is purified in preparation for sex with an angelic being. These purifying effects take shape gradually and cumulatively. By the novel’s midway point, she tells us, “I am beginning to feel the benefit of Stephen’s care, his breath over my shoulder, the fact that he is clean,” (*Wig* 124), and, by the time Stephen finally agrees to intercourse with Grace, he has decidedly “left his mark” on her body through the touch of his hand to her torso in a gesture that is part blessing, part sexual caress (*Wig* 180). The mechanics of this process remain ambiguous because the success

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<sup>64</sup> The blood is on the wallpaper: “there is blood on the piece of paper, dried to a smeared brown” (*Wig* 86).

<sup>65</sup> McClintock argues that “Both the cult of domesticity and the new imperialism found in soap an exemplary mediating form” in the Victorian era because the “emergent middle class values—monogamy (“clean” sex, which has value), industrial capital (“clean” money, which has value), Christianity (“Being washed in the blood of the lamb”), class control (“cleansing the great unwashed”) and the imperial civilizing mission (“washing and clothing the savage”)—could all be marvelously embodied in a single household product” (208). See esp. “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising” (207-231). For discussion of compensatory formations of masculinity after colonialism, see Nandy.

<sup>66</sup> The stories of the women who were concealed and confined within the institutional culture of the Catholic Magdalene Laundries were beginning to be told in the 1990s. See James M. Smith, *Architecture of Containment*.

of Grace's story depends upon that ambiguity. It allows her to pass off various effects of her pregnant growth as something very different.

To see these effects, we must look closely at Grace's body, attending particularly to how it "grows" in the scene where Grace makes it appear as if her virginity has been transubstantiated. Specifically, Grace suggests that her body is growing in a way that is supranarratable (i.e., ineffable). Just after rising from a bath that the angel, Stephen, has drawn for her—a sort of baptism—and then breaking the bathroom mirror, Grace presents the conclusion that Stephen's "care" has changed her body (*Wig* 124).

Specifically, she intimates that it has caused her to grow new tissue. "A thought occurs to me," she says. "I check between my legs and find that something ineffably floral has happened down there, something to which you could apply the word 'petal'" (*Wig* 127).

It seems that Grace has found bodily tissue often thought to resemble a petal: a hymen.

We might even say she has discovered the 'Flower of Irish Womanhood' mentioned elsewhere in the text for, euphemistically speaking, it seems Grace now has, for the first time, the potential to be "deflowered."<sup>67</sup> If Grace had intercourse and conceived, the conception would be maculate.

The suggestion that her body is growing in a supranarratable way is a convenient one for Grace; suggesting that language is inadequate to describe what is happening allows her to gloss over her need to provide another explanation for the forms of growth she is experiencing and which would be increasingly difficult to keep shadowed. For instance, it allows her to suggest that she has, inexplicably, grown a hymen. However,

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<sup>67</sup> Grace has already denied that she was ever a virgin, even prior to adolescence. "I never was a virgin," she declares (*Wig* 45); "The first fact, fuck it, is that I never was a virgin, never had a hymen, never knew the difference between loss and gain" (*Wig* 45-6). Thus, the narrative appears to transit this never-virgin into a state where she is questioning whether she is now, miraculously, a virgin.

we do not actually see what has happened between Grace's legs. She suggests something has happened with her actions and her intimations, but she leads us to this conclusion without positively stating she now has a hymen. It exists as an implied textual object, and nothing more. It is not as if readers could see her hymen. For one thing, since this is a work of fiction, there is obviously no hymen to show. Second, Grace cannot show us a hymen because the virginity a hymen can sometimes stand for is not subject to such proofs.<sup>68</sup> There is no ontological security attached to virginity and, moreover, to verify the virginity a hymen can stand for with a manual exam can only threaten its loss.<sup>69</sup> We can only accept or reject Grace's controlled signals that a transubstantiation of the elements of her virginity has occurred. It seems that what was lost—or never existed in the first place—has been found, now that she has bathed in holy water and been baptized by Stephen's care. Growing an ineffable hymen paves the way for Stephen and Grace's intercourse in chapter 26. The scene's sexual climax serves as a turning point in her creative project because it releases that narrative tension, and finally allows her to explicitly raise the possibility that she is pregnant; the next morning, she is finally able to state, "I wonder if I might be pregnant" (*Wig* 180).

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<sup>68</sup> "Virginity is difficult to define or pin down: in the discourse of the church fathers, as [Kathleen Coyne] Kelly writes [in an article published in the same collection], 'chastity is best maintained by a deliberate non-play of signifiers: by absence and silence'. A virgin described and seen is thereby no virgin. Virginity has no ontological security. Physical tests for women's virginity are widely distrusted as destroying what they seek to confirm" (Salih, Bernau and Evans 5).

<sup>69</sup> Grace's checking between her legs reenacts the doubts that have been used to justify many a virginity test. Like Salome, who demanded perhaps the most infamous of these, the midwife's examination of the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, Grace requires a manual exam. To successfully perform this experiment on her self, Grace simply contorts her body and then tells us she straightens up again with "eyes more than ever sea-changed" (*Wig* 127). Enright references Ariel's song from *The Tempest*, which, Kaplan suggests, announces "that positive transformations have been enabled by its many sided assault on the meanings and practices attached to patriarchal authority (1).

V: THE GROWING BODY AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP IN ENRIGHT'S *BILDUNGSROMAN*

“And here is the best that I can do” (*Wig* 186).

On one level, this character-narrator is literally determining her bodily self. To the extent that the reader believes that an angel appears on her doorstep and becomes her roommate, eventual lover, and father of her child—as many readers have—Grace succeeds in suggesting the “reality” of her body to the reader and altering its narrative use to serve her purposes.<sup>70</sup> However, Grace must go to great lengths to make this narrative configuration work. Since Grace turns to the miraculous to provide a satisfying resolution to the discrepancies between the story she wants to tell about herself and bodily evidence that contradicts her story, *Wig* simultaneously underscores how the protagonist of a realistic narrative cannot cause her body to grow and to signify only in ways she cultivates. This fact—that bodily growth is not realistically self-determinable—is of deep concern to the *Bildungsroman* genre because the genre has been thought to be invested in the trope of self-determination and because the growing and maturing biological body can function as a signifier of development. In real life, an individual’s ability to determine the way her or his body will develop is limited. In *Bildungsromane* by Joyce, McGahern and Ní Dhuibhne, bodily growth can be both an element of human experience that *Bildungshelden* struggle to control and can also be involved in establishing the character’s development within a *Bildungsroman* plot.

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<sup>70</sup> Shapira’s work informs my point here. Through her reading of Margaret Atwood’s short story, “Hairball” (a work that Enright references in *Wig*), Shapira argues that “while the congruence of body and narrative has been the mechanism that generated the traditional ideological message, it has also functioned as a site for contemporary intervention and revision. It is precisely by ‘tampering’ with the fit between body and tale, prying them apart and examining what each means in a modern-day context, that contemporary women authors like Atwood challenge and complicate the legacy of the body’s use as a storytelling asset—a legacy that nonetheless remains even today heavily weighted with its own misogynous past” (55).

Enright's work confronts the paradox that in fiction, representations of bodily growth can both confirm and, in so doing, undermine plotted movements of an identity-in-process through a literary text.

To interrogate this paradox, Enright juxtaposes the *Bildungsroman*'s thematic concern with the growth of an identity-in-process with the fact that realistic characters have limited control over how their bodies grow and how others interpret that growth. Moreover, she tests the body's ability to corroborate stories of development at all. *Wig* recognizes that the biological body—particularly the female body—continues to be taken as offering ontologically stable evidence about the developing subject, even though the two are not necessarily related and even though the subject has limited influence over the evidence the growing body provides. *Wig*, then, is a novel that explores how the attachment of meaning to the body is flexible and subject to re-vision but at the same time, also underscores that those attachments continue to impact constructions of identity. Those attachments impact the distance that can be put between how things are (the indicative) and how they must or might be (the subjunctive). Another way of putting this would be to suggest that they impact the very distance between fact and fiction. Enright's novel shows the central identity-in-process attempting to respond creatively to and reject the implications of bodily growth to her character and status as a woman in late-twentieth-century Ireland.

The ability to narrate the story of her body is key for this protagonist. Other *Bildungshelden* examined in this dissertation have struggled to attain control over their bodies, some more handily (e.g., Stephen Dedalus) than others (e.g., Young Mahoney). These efforts have proven to be related to the narrative point of view. Since Joyce uses

free indirect discourse, perspective in McGahern's novel is unstable, and Ní Dhuibhne's protagonist only assumes the first person in the last chapter, none of the other narratives are ever so wholly located in the first person as *Wig*. Joyce's novel accessed some psychological elements associated with first person, but maintained an authorial perspective through the text, moving to a more personal—yet still mediated—journal voice (i.e., from third person to first person) at the end of *Portrait*. McGahern alternates among first, second and third person throughout *The Dark*, never settling into any one of them anymore conclusively than Young Mahoney settles into himself. Ní Dhuibhne's narrative uses first person narration in the last chapter of *The Dancers Dancing*, so that Orla grows sideways across an unbridgeable gulf of time and space that has inexplicably become bridgeable. Though Enright's Grace is similarly subject to the same realities of human biology as these other protagonists, this protagonist has narrative latitude because she controls the narrative perspective with her first-person narration. None of the other protagonists are as able to have such an effect on the growing body's function in relation to the "set of interpretive signposts" that generate traditional ideological messages (Shapira 55). Because Enright uses a first person narrator, the protagonist can tell it like it is—or how she wishes it to be, and there is no "objective" third-person narration to contradict her story. More than sometimes meets the eye, then, *Wig* meditates upon the narrative possibilities that arise from telling the story of one's own development and explores the use of the body in narratives of development and in the act of storytelling more generally. Indeed, an aura of possibility surrounds both storytelling and the body in this novel precisely because the first person narrator has some freedom to make herself up—to invent her story, and to let her readers believe what they may.

## CODA

**“A Boy Built to Carry the Weight of the World”: Growing Bodies in Irish Coming-of-Age Stories at the Turn of the Millennium**

Published in 1999 and set at the beginning of the twentieth century, Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry* bookends the period I have examined to this point. In this *Bildungsroman*, Doyle confidently presents a revised account of the Irish war of Independence as experienced by the Dublin slum-born IRA fighter, Henry Smart. With its confident assertion of a maturing, individual consciousness living through what have become the stereotypical experiences of an early twentieth-century Irish childhood (Dubliners in extreme urban poverty, alcoholic mothers with a passel of children living in wet, rented rooms) and becoming “one of the legends, one of the survivors of Easter Week... a walking saint,” Doyle’s narrative at once draws its force from and serves as a comment upon the solemn treatment that Irish coming-of-age stories received for much of the twentieth century (174).

Doyle’s text lightheartedly mocks conventions, including the literary convention of linking the protagonist’s growing body with the shape of the story. Henry’s tales of his bodily growth correspond to his ego. Unlike other authors who shift to the first person perspective to help resolve a coming-of-age story, Doyle employs first person narration throughout his protagonist’s life story. Doyle’s use of the perspective means that Henry never needs to undergo a significant struggle or transformation in order to claim the “I” pronoun. This protagonist has a mature sense of self from the start. In fact, Henry’s individual consciousness is so outsized that he assumes the role of narrator even

prior to his birth. For instance, the narrator reveals that he became a “local legend within hours of landing on the newspapers” his mother birthed him onto, and was rumored to be “born with the teeth already in his head” with “enough meat on him to make triplets” (Doyle 24). Fellow slum-dwellers called him “the Glowing Baby,” but, he likewise admits, that was “all [he] was, a healthy, good-sized baby,” the likes of which the women of the Dublin slums simply had not seen before (24-5). Thus, in contrast to the sense of delayed or suppressed growth that characterizes some other Irish coming-of-age works, we learn from Henry that he began his life either in an already-advanced or a typical state of growth. Through the text, Henry’s rather incredibly robust growth continues apace with his story: by the time he barricades himself inside the General Post Office (G.P.O.) alongside James Connolly and Padraig Pearse during the Easter Rising, he is practically mythic in proportion: “I was fourteen. None of the others knew, or would have believed it. I was six foot, two inches tall and had the shoulders of a boy built to carry the weight of the world. I was probably the best-looking man in the G.P.O. but there was nothing beautiful about me. My eyes were astonishing, blue daggers that warned the world to keep its distance” (Doyle 91). Although he describes himself as a man who was “tall and broad with the skin and hair born of sound blood and clean living,” the living conditions Henry faces in Dublin as a street boy, fighter, docker, and revolutionary killer—all by the age of twenty—undermine the credibility of his claim (Doyle 110). While it is certainly possible that a heartthrob such as Henry could have emerged in late colonial Dublin, it seems likely that this first person narrator may be fabricating such a build for himself as he tells his story.



Thus, as in the other works I have examined in this project, the growing body in Doyle's *Bildungsroman* relates closely to the author's overarching themes and the individual story of development being cultivated within a coming-of-age text. In this *Bildungsroman*, however, the connection comes across as consciously artificial rather than integral to the plot of self-cultivation. In *A Star Called Henry*, Doyle essentially parodies the way in which descriptions of a character's "beards and inches" (to use Joyce's phrase) can indicate the advance of a protagonist in his development and, moreover, indicate the vigor of the national epoch he is helping to bring to pass. For this reason, Bolton has called *A Star Called Henry* "a major novel in the canon of Irish *Bildungsromane* because it inaugurates a new phase in which many of the serious problems of Irish life—poverty and classism, patriarchy and domestic violence, religious and sexual oppression, and political violence—that were addressed so persistently and tragically by its antecedents are used as a source of humor" (224). Bolton goes on to claim that Doyle's novel "celebrates progress," while also noting that the thriving "Celtic Tiger" economy occurring when *A Star Called Henry* was published is no longer in effect (224, 251, fn 14). Even before the bubble burst, however, Henry's somewhat overstated body suggests that to Doyle, any such notion of progress may be similarly exaggerated.

With his use of a swaggering first person voice to provide a fictional perspective on historical events in *A Star Called Henry*, Doyle shows himself fluent in what Cleary calls the "neo-naturalism" that has emerged in many contemporary Irish works. Such texts "exploit the same emotional territories charted by the earlier naturalists" and deploy naturalist conventions with a "self-reflexive tongue-in-cheek irony" (Cleary 235, 175). Some *Bildungsromane*, like Doyle's, may find enough distance from their material to do

so. For others, including Enright, the mode can be revealed to be a façade covering over more sincere challenges to self-cultivation. Doyle may be able to project Henry's consciousness with less narrative modulation than other authors, but his representation may be less subtle for it.

Notably, Henry lacks the strong autobiographical connection to Doyle that authors of *Bildungsromane* often exhibit. Whereas Joyce, McGahern, Ní Dhuibhne and Enright exhibit a substantial autobiographical impulse in their selection of time and circumstance—an impulse also addressed by the boom in contemporary Irish memoirs seen since the 1990s—Doyle revisits scenes from the youth of his nation's history rather than scenes resembling his own youth. Unlike the other four examined novels, which were each their respective authors' first or second full-length efforts, usually following success with the short story form, *A Star Called Henry* is not the author's first full-length effort, or even his first *Bildungsroman*; Doyle already published another *Bildungsroman*, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, in 1993. Having found success with his earlier first-person coming-of-age novel and having come-of-age himself as a successful writer in the 1980s and 1990s, Doyle returns to the form to mount a wider critique of the Irish nation across the twentieth century. Doyle, then, like other authors, critiques the Irish social environment through his representation of the protagonist's growing body.

Addressing the role of the growing body may constitute a necessary aspect of a development plot for some authors—the growing body might be something authors negotiate as they voice their individual themes, styles, and perspectives. Once an author has established a role for the growing body in the *Bildungsroman*, as we saw with Joyce, the author may find it less interesting to pursue in subsequent works, or, as we see with

Doyle, it becomes an aspect to explore and exaggerate. For some, the lived experience of the growing body, with its various grotesqueries, may constitute a looming topic needing resolution, as with Ní Dhuibhne and McGahern. Or, as we saw with Enright, authors can also use representations of the body to confront the classical *Bildungsroman*'s investment in the trope of self-determination and seemingly predictable developments of an identity through plot.

Various techniques for representing the growing body thus continue to appear frequently in twentieth-century narratives of development. In 1904 Joyce was already remarking upon this technique as common in portraits of adolescence, and this still holds true at the other end of the century. In 2001, we can, for instance, see the majority of coming-of-age stories in Gordon Snell's edited collection, *Thicker Than Water: Coming-Of-Age Stories by Irish and Irish American Writers*, carefully staging the growth of the protagonist's developing body. Almost all of the dozen stories in the collection display a new conventionalism of charting a character's stage of pubescence by remarking upon bodily growth and phenomena related to incipient reproductivity, or to attach precise ages to characters, which is an even more shorthand way of doing so. Dramas involving the growing body are a main theme of the collection. Emma Donoghue's title story, "Thicker than Water," for instance, centers around the protagonist's younger sister starting her period at an inopportune time. Somewhat similarly, Jenny Roche's story, "Dot on the I," pointedly reveals that the young protagonist has grown a "fine arse" under her school uniform when it becomes momentarily visible as she steps out of a car (34). Shane Connaughton's "Watery Lanes" attributes a significant portion of the story's events to the protagonist being sixteen, an age at which "the testosterone starts blowing

your lid off' (1). Overall, *Thicker Than Water* demonstrates that the growing body remains a salient theme in Irish coming-of-age stories, often playing a key role in the intimate rites of passage and changing familial and social relationships that they often depict.

I have found that examining the growing body in the *Bildungsroman* demands close and extensive attention to individual texts and contexts. With the facets of the growing body now constellated, some more general patterns may be discerned more readily, or some other facets may emerge, particularly as new Irish voices emerge. As *Thicker Than Water* shows, various conditions of Irish culture brought questions of the body to the surface in the 1980s and 90s. The collection, which features many writers whose reputations were established during those decades, testifies to the import of these themes to that generation of writers, the members of which have now largely found their ways into the literary world. In contrast, with increasing economic instability leading to the crisis of 2008, Ireland's economy has taken a significant tumble, and the themes of economy, migration, and multiculturalism have been predominant in the new millennium. It is yet to be seen what the young writers of Ireland will find necessary to write about in the changed climate of post-boom Ireland, or how those themes might intersect with representations of the growing body.

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