Imagining Constitutions: Citizenship and Narrative Form in Irish Literature since Independence

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Abstract

Ireland officially won independence from British colonial rule in 1922, which instigated a series of constitutional debates. The 1922 Free State Constitution was at the heart of the Irish Civil War and gave way in 1937 to the Irish Constitution. Since 1937, there have been thirty-six proposed amendments to the constitution; these amendments touch on social issues, state policies, and the evolving relationship between Ireland and the European Union. As the constitution defines citizenship, each new popular referendum and amendment brings about shifts in the parameters stipulating the reciprocal rights, duties, and obligations between individual citizens and the state. Since the 1970s, Irish citizens have frequently sought constitutional change as a means of negotiating the gulf between the ideals of the state and human experiences that fall outside these ideals. Since the Irish Constitution goes into great detail about areas of the law such as the family, the workplace, and religion, citizenship negotiates a hypothetical social milieu meant to represent the moral fabric of the nation.

Irish writers have been integral to imagining these negotiations in various ways since independence. The social milieu outlined by the Irish state in the constitution provides writers with a groundwork on which to contest, and explore alternative versions of, ideal citizenship. Novels and short stories focus on characters who occupy, to varying degrees, the place of the permitted citizen operating within definitions of the ideal citizen. Narrative fiction also offers forms through which to imagine constitutional amendments. Open to interpretation and legal amendment, the constitution lends itself to a variety of narrative techniques. Examining a wide range of novels and two short stories, I argue that narrative fiction since independence has been integral to the social impetus for amendments to the Irish Constitution as they affect definitions

of citizenship. Chapter One illustrates how Seán O'Faoláin in "Midsummer Night Madness," Frank O'Connor in "Guests of the Nation," and Elizabeth Bowen in *The Last September* contest state definitions of belonging at the beginning of Eamon De Valera's program of constitutional reform in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Through readings of Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*, and Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River*, Chapter Two establishes the need for narrative fiction to negotiate the equivalent values of citizens in the face of the limitations of the Supreme Court, despite the interpretive powers exercised by the judiciary after the 1960s. The final two chapters of the dissertation turn to intangible qualities of citizenship. Chapter Three examines Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls*, Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* as interrogations of reliable citizenship for Irish women; through acts of unreliability, the women who narrate each novel overcome a status quo of silence in Ireland when it comes to victims of abuse. Chapter Four re-examines the long tradition of emigration narratives through the reorganization of ideals in Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, John McGahern's *The Leavetaking*, and Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*. While citizenship creates the category of the noncitizen, in Ireland a further distinction can be made between ideal citizenship and permitted citizenship. Constitutional amendments reflect an ongoing negotiation of equivalent values amongst Irish citizens as they reframe the ideals of belonging in the nation—a negotiation in which narrative fiction plays an imaginative role.

Abstrait

L'Irlande obtint officiellement son indépendance de la domination coloniale britannique en 1922, évènement qui provoqua une série de débats constitutionnels. La Constitution de l'État libre de 1922 fut au cœur de la guerre civile irlandaise et céda la place en 1937 à la Constitution irlandaise. Depuis 1937, il y a eu trente-six amendements proposés à la Constitution; ces amendements touchent aux questions sociales, aux politiques d'État et à l'évolution des relations entre l'Irlande et l'Union européenne. Comme la Constitution définit la citoyenneté, chaque nouveau référendum populaire et chaque amendement apporte des changements dans les paramètres stipulant les droits, les devoirs et les obligations réciproques entre les citoyens et l'État. Depuis les années 1970, les citoyens irlandais se sont fréquemment tournés vers le changement constitutionnel pour négocier le fossé entre les idéaux de l'État et leurs propres expériences qui échappent à ces idéaux. Puisque la Constitution irlandaise aborde en détail les domaines du droit tels que la famille, le lieu de travail et la religion, la citoyenneté négocie un milieu social hypothétique qui est destiné à représenter le tissu moral de la nation.

Les écrivains irlandais ont promulgué une imagination diversifiée de ces négociations depuis l'indépendance. Le milieu social décrit par l'État irlandais dans la Constitution fournit aux écrivains une base sur laquelle se fonder afin de contester et d’explorer des versions alternatives de la citoyenneté idéale. Les romans et les nouvelles se concentrent sur des personnages qui occupent, à divers degrés, la place du citoyen autorisé selon les définitions du citoyen idéal. La fiction narrative offre également une structure permettant d'imaginer des amendements constitutionnels. Ouvert à l'interprétation et à la modification légale, la Constitution se prête à une variété de techniques narratives. En examinant une large gamme de romans ainsi que deux

nouvelles, je propose que la fiction narrative depuis l'indépendance a participé de façon importante à l'élan social quant aux amendements à la Constitution irlandaise qui affectent les définitions de la citoyenneté. Le premier chapitre illustre comment Seán O'Faoláin dans «Midsummer Night Madness», Frank O'Connor dans «Guests of the Nation» et Elizabeth Bowen dans *The Last September* contestent les définitions d'appartenance de l'État tels que spécifiées au début du programme de réforme constitutionnelle d'Eamon De Valera à la fin des années 1920 et au début des années 1930. En lisant *At Swim-Two-Birds* de Flann O'Brien, *The Heather Blazing* de Colm Tóibín et *Down by the River* d'Edna O'Brien, le chapitre deux établit le rôle de la fiction narrative face aux limites de la Cour suprême, malgré les pouvoirs d'interprétation exercés par le pouvoir judiciaire après les années 1960. Les deux derniers chapitres de la dissertation se tournent vers les qualités intangibles de la citoyenneté. Le chapitre trois examine *The Country Girls* d'Edna O'Brien, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* de Roddy Doyle et *The Gathering* d'Anne Enright en tant qu'interrogations de citoyenneté fiable pour les femmes irlandaises; par des actes de non-fiabilité, les femmes qui racontent chaque roman surmontent un statu quo de silence en Irlande dans le cadre de victimes d'abus. Le chapitre quatre réexamine la longue tradition des récits d'émigration à travers la réorganisation des idéaux dans *Mary Lavelle* de Kate O'Brien, *The Leavetaking* de John McGahern et *The Blackwater Lightship* de Colm Tóibín. Alors que la citoyenneté crée naturellement la catégorie des non-citoyens, en Irlande, une distinction additionnelle peut être faite entre la citoyenneté idéale et la citoyenneté permise. Les amendements constitutionnels reflètent une négociation continue de valeurs équivalentes entre les citoyens irlandais qui recadrent les idéaux d'appartenance à la nation—une négociation dans laquelle la fiction narrative joue un rôle imaginatif.

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Introduction:

Constitutional Worlds

In December 1939, *The State (Burke) v. Lennon* was brought before the Irish Supreme Court as an early test to the rights and liberties of individual citizens afforded by the Irish Constitution. Largely the work of the Taoiseach Eamon De Valera, the constitution had only been ratified two years prior to the case, which concerned the definitions of *habeas corpus*. The case centered on James Burke, a man who was arrested one day while he was working in his shop. Without providing any information, the local Gardaí brought Burke to the Military Barracks at Ballinrobe. He had not been officially charged, and he had received no indication that any order or warrant had been issued for his arrest. In the event, he was not given a proper trial. Burke was detained at the Arbour Hill Military Detention Barracks without any clear definition of his crimes or his sentence. Provisions for legal rights were granted to citizens through the Irish constitution, but military jurisprudence was somewhat less clear in terms of its definitions within the newly independent nation-state. Eventually the Supreme Court ruled that Burke's detention was unlawful because unconstitutional; nonetheless, the case raised a number of questions about how to interpret the constitution, a point articulated by Justice Johnston, the only dissenting judge. "The Constitution of 1937 represents a fresh start in respect of the fundamental principles that are to be the guide of this country for the future," Johnston wrote in his decision, "and I do not think that a further Constitution—an unwritten one—was intended by the People of Eire to exist side by side with this written Constitution or even—perhaps it would be more correct to say—outside and beyond the present Constitution" (179). Yet the very process of ratifying the 1937 constitution first required an imagined, unwritten version to

supersede the 1922 Free State Constitution, which was the previous document outlining the fundamental principles of the Irish Free State.

Prior to the Supreme Court case, even prior to Eamon De Valera's drafting of the 1937 constitution, Irish writers had been grappling with the boundaries of liberty and the law that was at the heart of *The State (Burke) v. Lennon*. In Frank O'Connor's 1931 short story "The Majesty of the Law," a local sergeant visits the home of Old Dan Bride. The pair share a drink of homemade whiskey at Dan's kitchen table and exchange a polite, even familiar, conversation about a recent law enacted to ban distilling at home. Both men agree the statute is "hard" but, as the sergeant points out, he has his duty to uphold the law. However, the sergeant has not come to sanction Dan for private distilling. The reason for the sergeant's visit remains obscure up until the point of his departure. While he crosses the threshold of the front door the officer turns to his host and, in an almost offhand way, asks: "I suppose you're not thinking of paying that little fine, Dan?" ("Majesty" 189). Dan, it turns out, had damaged some of his neighbour's property after a dispute. He refuses to pay the fine and the sergeant informs the old man that he has a warrant for his arrest. Dan and the sergeant agree that prison can wait until the next morning; the sergeant leaves while the old farmer begins to gather his things for the journey. The story ends with Dan on his donkey, "[setting] out alone along the road to prison" (191). The odd, ironic tone of the brief story, mostly due to the familiarity of the conversation between the two men, belies the problems in determining the relationship between authority, the law, individual citizens, and belonging that faced Ireland in the years following independence from Britain. Dan and the sergeant maintain a surface of colloquial friendliness, perhaps forged from the shared anticolonial struggle of the war for independence. Yet the sergeant treads carefully, almost avoiding the purpose of his visit altogether; perhaps the two men were on opposing sides of the

civil unrest that followed independence. Dan ultimately decides to take himself to jail instead of going on the lam, perhaps because he recognizes that the authority he once fought for has now become the legitimate order of the independent state. These motives are all hypothetical because in the world of O'Connor's story there is an underlying danger in making them explicit.

Both the Supreme Court case about *habeas corpus* and O'Connor's story reflect the contingency of authority and the tenuousness of belonging in Ireland in the wake of the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War. Peter Hart's account of the civil war period emphasizes the way that guerrilla warfare divided communities into ever smaller pockets of loyalty, so that "individual identities were irrelevant in the face of politically imposed labels and the ever-widening division between 'us' and 'them'" (17). The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which ended the War for Independence, resulted in the 1922 Irish Free State Constitution. This constitution was at the heart of the conflict that pitted neighbours against one another. Eamon De Valera, who led the Irish Republican Army against the Irish Free State forces in the Civil War, entered the Dáil in 1932 with a program of constitutional reform. In 1937, De Valera succeeded in replacing the Free State Constitution with the *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, known in English as the Irish Constitution. While trying to maintain the weight of the law and of sovereignty, the succession of constitutions nonetheless highlights an implicit awareness of the fictive nature of foundational documents on the part of those in power.

The State (Burke) v. Lennon foregrounds the importance of interpretation in the law when it comes to the rights, obligations, and duties of citizenship, but stories like O'Connor's "The Majesty of the Law" indicate the fictiveness of a constitutional world that establishes official definitions of belonging. If definitions of citizenship can bend and change with time, what instigates that change in the law and in policy? Depending on the policy and on the particular

branch of the law, any number of instances and events can prompt reconsiderations from the state.[1] Citizenship, although a legal category, taps into a range of emotional and experiential qualities that do not normally fall within the purview of the law. Since being passed into law in 1937, the Irish Constitution has had thirty-six proposed amendments, most of which were contested after 1970.[2] Changing social attitudes and international relations, especially joining the European Economic Community (now called the European Union) in 1973, have prompted a series of major alterations to the constitution of Ireland. Contrary to Justice Johnston's judgement, amendments necessitate imagined and as yet unwritten iterations of the constitution. Irish writers, like O'Connor, help identify the reasons why official definitions of belonging and citizenship might require changes in order to better articulate the experiences of individual citizens.

I argue that formal aspects of narrative fiction translate emotive qualities within social desires for change into a legible world for official definitions of citizenship. Prior to the 2015 referendum on marriage equality, author Colm Tóibín was asked in an interview with Channel 4 whether he thought the amendment recognizing same sex couples had a chance of passing. "This time round something has lifted," Tóibín responded, "the society has had the imagination to change" ("Catholic Church"). Of course, the imagination to change has manifold sources, though one might guess that as a novelist Tóibín figures narrative fiction plays some role in these social

[1] The first amendment to the Irish Constitution, for example, was the result of the official policy of Irish Neutrality during the Second World War. Initially, the state could only circumvent legislative hurdles to censorship in the case of martial law during armed conflict. Because Ireland was not directly involved with the war, but still needed to maintain a tighter control on the dissemination of information with British and Nazi propaganda coming in through the airwaves, the First Amendment extended the provision for a state of emergency "to conflicts in which the State is not a participant" (Irish Const. Amend. I).

[2] Of the thirty-six proposed amendments, thirty-one have passed while five have been voted down.

shifts. Irish literary critics have long understood the roles that writers have played in forming conceptions of Irishness, both within Ireland and without. The more particular question broached in this dissertation regards how Irish novels and short stories imagine constitutional amendments that effect the definitions of citizenship.

With its involvement in the milieu of everyday life, the Irish Constitution, perhaps more than other democratic constitutions, opens itself to consistent demands for alteration. Seán O'Faoláin once criticized the Irish Constitution for being circumscribed—too long, too full of asides, qualifications, and concerns with aspects of the law which deviate from a document that ought to focus on defining the foundational tenets of the nation-state (*De Valera* 147). The more a constitution intervenes in the customs and expectations of social interaction, the more that changes in social norms require constitutional expression. Ireland is a nation in which constitutional principles are frequently negotiated, which makes it an exemplary case study for the effect of narrative fiction on the imaginative change in society that precedes constitutional amendments.

The Irish Constitution and the Supreme Court

The 1937 Irish Constitution manifests the difficult maneuvering required by De Valera and Fianna Fáil in the face of political and social uncertainties during the early post-independence era. When De Valera entered the Dáil, both he and his predecessor, W.T. Cosgrave, recognized the importance of the peaceful transition of power between parties that were once at opposite ends of the civil war. By way of consolidating democracy, as Maura Adshead contends was the central problem after 1932 (64), De Valera turned to majoritarianism. He voiced his desire to reintegrate the IRA soldiers who had become enemies of the Free State,

so long as they renounced any further revolutionary activities and accepted his authority. He gave great power to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church while also ensuring that the state maintained its autonomy. Part of the reason the Irish Constitution goes to such great lengths to meticulously outline the rights, obligations, and duties within the state has to do with this majoritarian approach. Even at its point of origin, the Irish Constitution highlighted the way that the principles governing Irish society were constantly being debated, even if on the surface De Valera articulated a particular, rigid ideal of the newly independent nation.

According to De Valera in his famous St. Patrick's Day Address of 1943, ideal Ireland was pastoral and patriarchal in nature. The speech, entitled "On Language and the Irish Nation" and given on Raidió Éireann, envisioned a rural nation that lived within its means and desired spiritual fulfillment over material wealth:

> The ideal Ireland that we would have…would be the home of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, 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, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. (qtd. in Moynihan 466)

Given that the population of Ireland at the time was 95% Roman Catholic, the religious overtones of De Valera's vision certainly adhere to his principles of majoritarianism. The glance to an idyllic past, in many ways a direct lineage from the Irish Literary Revival of W.B. Yeats, George Moore, and Lady Gregory, coincided with a moment when Ireland was slowly beginning to see changing demographic patterns. As Maria Luddy has argued, the gendered division to

which De Valera's ideal Ireland subscribed was already out of date for a number of writers and feminist institutions by 1937 (179). De Valera's rural ideal indicates what Michael Rubenstein contends was "the underdeveloped identity of the Irish imagination—the opposition between utility and the aesthetic—[that was] born of Ireland's early and traumatic experience of modernity and modernization" (18). Rubenstein focuses on postcolonial development in the sense of utilities and infrastructure, but the problem of modernity and modernization extends as well to the social underpinnings of citizenship. De Valera's ideal Ireland was not just about farms over factories; it also prescribed the values that ought to dictate the socialization of citizens.

As much as De Valera may have leaned towards authoritarian characteristics in his vision of a patriarchal and rural Ireland, his belief in social democracy ensured a recognition that the constitution may not always best fit political pressures or social iterations. Primary amongst De Valera's concerns while drafting the constitution was that he not only provide a "structure of government but also…a fundamental charter for the Irish people" (O. Doyle 194). The amending formula for the constitution states that "every proposal for an amendment…shall be initiated in the Dáil Éireann as a Bill, and shall upon having been passed or deemed to have been passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas, be submitted by Referendum to the decision of the people in accordance with the law for the time being in force relating to the Referendum" (Irish Const. Art. 46.2). Given the events of the civil war, the amending formula was a nod to contingency in any definition of the independent nation. While the proposal may be "initiated" in the Dáil, the idea behind the proposal must have a social impetus given the need for popular support.

Social scientists and scholars of the Irish constitution place legal and governmental frameworks at the center of the changing political landscape, especially in the latter half of the

twentieth-century, which raises a problem with regards to the imaginative process required to construct the world outside established boundaries and limits. Part of the reason for the importance given to areas such as the law in tracing the social history of Ireland is that the acceleration of amendments in the latter half of the twentieth century coincided with a shift in the interpretive functions of the Supreme Court. The role of the courts hardly featured in the Dáil debates on the 1937 constitution because "at that time, both De Valera and the opposition parties did not regard them as central to the constitutional project" (Böss 123). For all of De Valera's rhetoric about reforming the constitution to fit better the ideals of the republican cause and further distance Ireland from Britain, independent Ireland inherited most of its governmental infrastructure from Westminster. This included a legal tradition of criminal codes and precedents.

American constitutionalism also had some influence on the Irish Constitution, an influence that became an important aspect in the shift that occurred in the Irish Supreme Court in the late 1960s. A Bill of Rights, a Supreme Court, and a distinction between the three classical branches of government were all inherited from the American constitutional model. Unlike American constitutionalism, however, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the Irish government are divided but not separate (Casey 305). Without inherent checks and balances between the branches, the constitution includes measures meant to manufacture such safeguards. For example, the President is allotted the discretionary privilege to refer any proposed legislation, as long as it is not a money bill, to the Supreme Court "for a decision on the question as to whether such Bill or any specified provision or provisions of such Bill is or are repugnant as to this Constitution or to any provision thereof" (Irish Const. Art. 26.1.1). Even though this

article was intended to provide a balance of power among the legislature, the President, and the Taoiseach, the wording grants great interpretive sway to the Supreme Court.

This interpretive power largely went unused in the first half of the twentieth century. The views held by Justice Johnson in his dissenting ruling in *The State (Burke) v. Lennon* actually mirror the general consensus of the Supreme Court until the 1960s, even though he was the minority in that particular case. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chief Justice Cearbhall O'Dalaig and Justice Brian Walsh brought about a new era of Irish jurisprudence, which was based on the interpretive powers allotted to the Supreme Court. As Ireland began opening economically to more European integration, initially through T.K. Whitaker's First Programme of Economic Expansion commissioned by Taoiseach Seán Lemass in 1958, a number of outlets for constitutional challenges also opened to the Irish people. European courts provided Irish citizens with new reference points. In 1972, the Third Amendment to the Irish Constitution removed the "special position" that had been allotted to the Catholic Church; in the early 1980s, the Supreme Court case *Crotty v. An Taoiseach* made it necessary that each ratification of a European agreement which altered the Irish Constitution required the consent through Referendum of the People of Eire. Once a topic sequestered to debates within the Oireachtas, the Supreme Court decision in *Crotty v. An Taoiseach* gave primacy to direct democracy in determining the relationship between the Irish state and the European Union. Socially, this shift to direct democracy solidified a new era for the way Irish citizens conceived of the constitution and of referendums. For many political scientists and constitutional scholars, this social shift aligns with that of the Supreme Court, which are both at the heart of a "liberalizing" Ireland.

Chief amongst these scholars is Basil Chubb, who, in the 1990s, wrote a seminal account of the politics of the Irish constitution. Chubb argued favourably for the "liberalizing" turn in the

Supreme Court of Ireland that helped usher in a new era of Irish constitutionalism. According to Chubb, the Irish Constitution after the mid-twentieth century became "normative" in relation to amendments. By "normative," Chubb meant that the constitution represented "an actual political force, respected and obeyed because it reflects the traditions, culture and standards of the people. To that end, it must be capable of being constantly adjusted, and perhaps occasionally recast, to reflect alterations in political practice and changes in community" (60). Chubb's favourable view of the constitution coincided with the beginning of the Celtic Tiger, which was a period of economic growth and expansion based on neoliberal values from the mid-1990s until 2007. In many ways Chubb's view of a liberalizing Ireland worked in tandem with a desire to see the nation announce itself as a global economic player.

The economic crash of 2008 highlighted the limitations of the "liberalizing" teleology read onto the court system in Ireland. Austerity and continued social upheaval in the nation simply do not correlate to the optimism of Chubb's assertions about a "normative" constitution. Similarly, Oran Doyle contends that viewing the Irish constitution in terms of liberalization ignores the fact that "the changes to the power of government have been minor. A number of moral issues have been placed on the constitutional plane. Although each is significant in its own terms, debate over those issues does not involve a significant deliberation about constitutional structure" (196). Despite this lack of structural change, the negotiation through amendments about defining citizenship continues to accelerate. Instead of reading amendments as limited to an unchanging structure, the question can be asked as to why the constitution encounters such frequent, successful engagement.

This dissertation deals primarily with the gap between the ideal citizen and the permitted citizen as opposed to the more usual categories of citizen and noncitizen. While these terms

pertain to the law in that they correlate to articles in the constitution, their effects are most resonant in terms of the social expectations amongst citizens. Focusing only on the legal realm elides the importance of these social expectations in determining the need for constitutional amendments. Ideal citizenship defines a citizen who adheres to the social milieu outlined in the constitution, which can often be traced back to De Valera's ideal Ireland. Permitted citizenship defines any action, interaction, speech, or value of a citizen that does not align with the ideals of the state while simultaneously not amounting to grounds for exclusion. As such, constitutional amendments, especially when they involve the social expectations of citizens, result from the contestation and negotiation of ideal citizenship based on the experiences of permitted citizenship.

Although the novels and short stories explored in this dissertation are interested in contestations of citizenship through an interrogation of the stipulations indicating ideal citizens, many of these works are equally interested in the negotiation between positions of permitted citizenship and the ideals of the nation-state as foregrounding such contests. Characters and narrators often take up positions of negotiation where they act as interlocutors "to communicate or confer (*with* another or others) for the purpose of arranging some matter by mutual agreement" ("Negotiate"). When amendments involve constitutional principles that touch on the social expectations of citizens, contestations must be prefigured by a negotiation amongst citizens, especially since referendums can only pass via a majority decision. Hence Irish narrative fiction frequently involves characters, narrators, and even narrative forms that are in search of the negotiation of values as a reordering of the ideal and the permitted citizen. Not all characters are afforded the opportunity to find this space of negotiation and instead can only contest restricting elements of ideal citizenship. Even in these cases, however, the impetus for

that contestation is to open up pathways to proceed toward future iterations of belonging built upon negotiation. Before any further examination of the coordination between narrative fiction and constitutional amendments, the categories of ideal citizenship and permitted citizenship require definition in relation to Ireland as a modern nation-state.

The Nation-State and Citizenship

In an interview with Andrew van der Vlies, the South African dissident poet Jeremy Cronin expressed his vision of a more humane world through possible interactions between art and political structures: "[I wish] to be a part of a democratic hegemonic project, not a prophet in the wilderness" (526). South Africa offers a very different context from Ireland, to be sure, but Cronin's point reflects a similar project undertaken by Irish writers. Part of imagining a "democratic hegemonic project" is the negotiation of the equivalent values that compose citizenship within a social contract. The writers and texts examined in this dissertation are concerned with the marginalized voices of permitted citizenship in Ireland who struggle to reframe the definitions of ideal citizens. Ireland as a modern nation-state conceives of citizenship through the terms of a social contract that can be altered if society demands such alterations.

The modern liberal state has its origins in the shift away from the sovereignty of kings and towards the mass of men that Hobbes defines in *Leviathan* and the social bindings that Rousseau defines in *The Social Contract*. In Hobbes' formulation, the state achieves its power and sovereignty over a collective body through an acceptance that liberty of the free individual will always be in negotiation with the "head" of that body. Citizenship in a modern nation-state, if traced back to Hobbes, arises from the secularization of sovereignty. No longer bound to the divine right of kings, a new formulation was required in order to organize the masses into a

governable society. Rousseau takes this need for reformulation as an opportunity to bind common society through a set of equivalent values. Although "Man was born free," Rousseau recognizes social order as a "sacred right which serves as a basis for all other rights" (2). The covenant, or the "reciprocal commitment between society and the individual" (17), works precisely because the individual becomes doubly committed: "as a member of the sovereign body in relation to individuals, and…as a member of the state in relation to the sovereign" (17). The state, according to Rousseau's perspective, has sovereignty because it legitimates the terms of equivalent values amongst citizens. In effect, good governance becomes a matter of upholding a stable set of values, which balance the liberties and restrictions of individuals. A constitution, in this sense, offers an official declaration of these values from the state. For Rousseau, the state need not engage in a system that enforces unwanted rigidity or severity if the bonds of the social contract are well enough established: "What makes the constitution of a state really strong and durable is such a close observance of conventions that natural relations and laws come to be in harmony on all points, so that the law…seems only to ensure, accompany and correct what is natural" (60). Optimistic though this view of the law may be, it nonetheless continues to represent an undercurrent for those who search for legal reform in society.

The liberal values of the French Enlightenment have, of course, come under scrutiny, especially in the way that the modern nation-state inevitably invokes histories of imperialism, warfare, and the threat of human extinction via nuclear arms, not to mention ongoing violence and structures of neocolonialism. Rousseau's assertion that the law of good governance is beneficial for keeping society tethered to equivalent values becomes the source of much critique against the development of capitalist nation-states. Max Weber defines the state as a political entity that "claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory"

(78). Foucault extends the power of the state beyond the creation and application of laws and onto the processes of surveillance and classification: "the power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery" (177). In this sense, demands for fidelity in terms of citizenship might be considered a part of such machinery. Yet the diversification of state power, Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen argue, means that it "is never entirely organized around disciplinary logics, for the discourse of sovereign individualism, and especially of human rights, acts as a brake upon the mechanics of discipline, with the authority of the state now finding expression in juridical codes and institutional norms" (497). An examination of changing policies and definitions of citizenship need not simply replicate a "genealogy…of Whiggish perfectability, with the umbrella of citizenship gradually extended to the marginalized…in an ever-closer convergence of the theory of citizenship's universalism and its material practice" (Ho 10). Focusing on expressions of power can potentially ignore the movements that occur across time within society as a negotiable space. Without avoiding the problems that arise from state power, nor assenting indiscriminately to the validity of the nation or the state as ideal mechanisms of social organization, I am interested in how citizens within the Irish nation-state contest, rewrite, or imagine alternatives to the equivalent values of citizenship found in the Irish constitution.

Irish writers, after all, have been vocal opponents to the more recent iterations of the liberal nation-state, especially in terms of neoliberal entrepreneurialism. Anne Enright and Edna O'Brien, for example, have both actively critiqued the Celtic Tiger for the corporatist economic expansion that left so many Irish citizens affected when austerity measures were introduced after 2008. At the same time, these writers recognize the heuristics available in the idea of a "normative" constitution, to return to Basil Chubb's formulation. Especially given some of the

more socially restrictive articles that have been a part of the constitution, writers like Enright and O'Brien endorse the need to renegotiate the values that manifest in official definitions of citizenship in Ireland. A "normative" constitution at the very least allows for some leeway for less restrictive policies. The republican democracy that constitutes the government of Ireland means that rules and laws can fluctuate to a certain degree. Citizenship, because it outlines the reciprocal rights, duties, and obligations between the citizen and the state (Wulf 14), proves particularly useful for writers who wish to think not just about the nation as a nebulous affirmation of belonging, but also about the particular forms that organize experiences and interactions amongst citizens and between citizens and institutions of the state.

Another benefit of focusing on citizenship, then, is that it offers a very specific set of parameters with which to think about narrative fiction outside of the much larger, and more complicated, problem of the "nation." As Hart and Hansen remind us, the nation and the state are not the same, since the state is the mechanism of legitimacy for a particular social contract while the "idea of a 'nation'…draws on concepts of consanguinity and folk heritage" (78). In the "Cyclops" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom falls into a trap built from the more xenophobic qualities that can arise through concepts of the nation. Faltering in the face of the myopic, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Citizen, an absurd ultra-nationalist, Bloom is asked about his definition of a nation, to which he responds: "A nation is the same people living in the same place" (Joyce 272). His answer is met with laughter and scorn, but it highlights the problem of defining a nation for an island like Ireland. No negotiation is possible with the Citizen. Joyce's point touches on the arbitrariness of who does and who does not belong in the Citizen's version of the nation. Are the Anglo-Irish included? What about the fact that Dublin was settled by Vikings? Should the ability to speak Irish be a pre-requisite? These questions are all frequently

involved in the debates about Irish nationhood that were prominent at least until the late twentieth century.

Compared to consanguinity or other subsets of national identity, citizenship presents a more easily legible set of legal problems. As Saskia Sassen articulates, "citizenship describes the legal relationship between the individual and the polity" (44). In terms of the nation-state, the legibility of this relationship generally comes from the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion. Étienne Balibar reads *The Social Contract* as originary of the negotiation between civil society and individual liberty that still, even in the age of internationalism, transnational movement, and mass refugee migration, characterizes much of the discourse that goes on amongst citizens within a nation-state. But with these patterns resulting from the expansion of European empires, Balibar recognizes that citizenship necessitates a duality: "in order to speak of 'all citizens,' it is necessary that somebody not be a citizen of said polity" (35). Nation-states are built upon the fact that borders are meant, at least nominally, to delineate spaces of legibility: at the border a state can determine who does and who does not belong, who can be categorized as citizen and who can be categorized as noncitizen.

Exclusion can take a number of forms depending on the political and historical moment. Ariella Azoulay, for example, approaches the systematic exclusion of women in her essay "Female Trauma." "Modernity," Azoulay notes, "has given rise to a new political and cultural framework with regard to the attitude toward women. This is a framework not only of exclusion but of abandonment as well" (51). The "first" exclusion of women in a foundational document such as *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* leads to a world in which "trauma is a paradigmatic example of rape, which interconnects violent experience, sexuality, and muteness and lies at the very foundation of relations between men and women in the West" (50).

Extending enfranchisement to women, then, does not negate this history of exclusion from citizenship. Independent Ireland never technically excluded women from full citizenship, since suffrage had been won under British rule in 1918. If the constitution never excluded Irish women, it never protected them beyond their idealized roles as mothers either. Sassen argues for a wider understanding of "nonformalized developments in the institution of citizenship" (43); although she is thinking more along the lines of changing hierarchies of power beyond the form of the nation-state in an increasingly globalized world, "nonformalized" developments in citizenship night also include the gap between the ideal and the permitted citizen as tied, though not exclusively, to legal questions. While policy changes cannot simply erase underlying absences or exclusions from a social contract, Irish writers remain aware of the possibilities in reframing and reimagining national institutions especially as they might reflect changing social values. In that sense, these writers search for ways of proceeding towards a negotiation of equivalent values in the hopes of redefining belonging in future iterations of the constitution.

Literary Contestations, Literary Constitutions

Janice Ho's *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* was particularly influential for the work of this dissertation. Through the British novel, Ho reads "citizenship as a locus of political contests, one whose definitions become particularly fraught during moments of national anxieties and upheavals" (3). Citizenship, according to Ho's argument, is historically open-ended and becomes the site of frequent contestations, which makes it a topic worthy of exploration in relation to literature (10). Ho's emphasis on literature that reflects the sites of contestation for citizenship deviates from preceding work on citizenship and the novel, which instead looks at the correlation between genre and the formulation of the

citizen. In this regard, Joseph Slaughter's *Human Rights Inc.* (2008) is foundational for connecting literary form to the structures of citizenship. In Slaughter's account of the novelization of citizenship, the "plotting" of human rights aligns most closely with the genre of the *bildungsroman*. Because the *bildungsroman* positions the "problematic individual" as growing into the reality of a heterogeneous society, Slaughter contends that the genre represents the model of liberal citizenship most adopted by modern nation-states. Slaughter builds off Lukács's reading of "the inner form of the novel…as the process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself, the road from dull captivity within a merely present reality—a reality that is heterogeneous in itself and meaningless to the individual—towards clear self-recognition" (Lukács 80). A *bildungsroman* thus works as a correlative to the legitimation of a social contract because it depicts the elision of a problematic individualism in favour of an envelopment in society.

Another way of perceiving the correlation between literature, citizenship, and the state is through governance and administration. John Marx traces the history of the global Anglophone novel through several attempts at governance; empires and novels have consistently sought a form of governance capable of operating on a global scale. Just as Ho argues that the British novel reflects contestations of citizenship throughout the twentieth-century, Marx suggests that, "without disavowing the violence of empire, its racism and its rapacity, contemporary fiction provides an alternative to the formulation in which Western authority spawns derivative postcolonial discourse. By offering an account of European domination as never fully complete, always historically delimited, and geographically diverse, these books invite us to shake off the stock formulae of core and periphery, self and other" (5-6). This dissertation is not concerned with administration and its scale is considerably smaller than Marx's. But with Marx, as with Ho,

I share an understanding that literature imagines ways of governing, ways in which citizenship can challenge such governance, and ways in which citizens attempt to continuously negotiate definitions of belonging within the nation-state.

Due to its nature as a specific case, a study of citizenship and Irish constitutionality ultimately deviates from the work of Ho, Slaughter, and Marx, and thus requires a different methodology. As Ho indicates in her introduction, the notion of citizenship itself is relatively new in the context of Britain, where the term first appeared with the British Nationality Act of 1948. Ireland, on the other hand, possesses a written constitution, which, unlike Britain, allows writers to engage with the textuality of the document as well as its social, political, and legal effects (Brooker 37). Because this textuality coincides with a detailed set of social expectations, writers are willing to consider the imaginative impetus for amendments as a negotiation of equivalent values amongst citizens, rather than only in the terms of contestation. Narrative form aids in parsing these nuanced engagements with the Irish constitution, especially as the constitution itself proliferates narratives about types of citizens.

Connecting an aesthetic art like narrative fiction to the political realm has in itself a long critical tradition. As Eric Auerbach argued in *Mimesis*, his major work on representation in Western literature, aesthetics and structures of literature can mimic the structures and governing orders of reality. The nation, the state, and the citizen can therefore all be represented in literature as aesthetic creations. When Jacques Rancière argues that politics intersects with aesthetics at the point when "the aesthetic experience—as a refiguration of the forms of visibility and intelligibility of artistic practice and reception—intervenes in the distribution of the sensible" (5), he claims a kinship between political and aesthetic formulations. The distribution of the sensible parallels the notion that citizens are defined through equivalent values. Negotiating

these values relates to the "aesthetic experience" because it seeks to disrupt or intervene in the accords of official definitions of belonging in the constitution.

Engaging political questions with the forms of narrative fiction aligns with the recent work of new formalism. The argument of this project—that the forms of narrative fiction mirror and provide imaginative alternatives to the structures dividing the permitted from the ideal citizen—shares similarities with the work of Caroline Levine, who draws upon the ideas about the productive real-world effects of literature posited by Bruno Latour, Jacques Rancière, and Susan Wolfson. Literary and narrative forms, Levine argues, undergo similar processes to the forms of politics, since, like literature, "politics involves activities of ordering, patterning, and shaping. And if the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience, then there is no politics without form" (3). In a similar fashion, the politics of citizenship in Ireland engenders a negotiation between the ideal and the permitted citizen. Narrative form becomes representative of the multivalent components that inform these negotiations.

Critics of Levine's work have pointed out that connections between political forms and literary forms can be tenuous if treated equivalently. Sandra MacPherson's rebuttal in *PMLA* to Levine's thesis turns on the question of equivocation: "I don't find myself as frightened of sonnets as I am of Nazis" (1218). Wagner's operas, iconography, and anti-Semitism were admired by Hitler, but *Der Ring des Nibelungen* did not install the Third Reich. Of course, the debate about the role of literature and the arts in political ideologies is hardly new—nor is the question of whether art can be dangerous. Levine questions whether political formations can exist without the imaginative formations that are normally associated with literature. The Irish

constitution provokes an even more direct relation to the forms of literature because it is a document that contains literary forms.

Benedict Anderson's argument about imagined communities underlies much of the theoretical and critical work presented above. Novels, along with newspapers, were key for creating the imagined communities of newly conceived nation-states that arose in Europe in the eighteenth century because "these forms provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (Anderson 25). Similarly, Ho argues that the novel as a genre is "particularly well-suited for mapping the changing forms of citizenship, given its concern for the intersections between the individual subject and social collective" (15). Anderson's argument about the importance of the novel to the imaginative underpinnings of nations as communities provides an opportunity to think about the Irish constitution as given to literary expressions. Perhaps one of the reasons Irish writers over time have so frequently engaged with the topic of the constitution is due to the way that, although it is a legal document, it also creates an imagined world.

While citizenship has previously been associated with the form of the novel, constitutions have rarely been seen as literary documents. Granted, few constitutions provide much fodder for extended literary analysis. The American Constitution and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for example, are relatively brief compared to the Irish Constitution. Drawing too close a correlation between a literary genre and a legal one risks erasing innate, important, and obvious differences. A novel does not have the authority to deny or allow someone entry into a country, even if the possession of a book denied customs entry could put an individual into a spot of bother, as was the case with people hiding Joyce's *Ulysses* in their luggage. Viewing the Irish Constitution through a literary lens is not to provide an extended reading of the constitution as a

novel, or as narrative fiction. Rather, thinking about the way that the constitution creates narratives about the nation and its citizens in a literary sense elucidates a potential in novels and short stories to negotiate equivalent values because these forms can replicate and diverge from two of the main literary elements of the Irish Constitution: the creation of a chronotope for the nation-state and the shaping of citizens as character types.

Mikhail Bakhtin conceives of the temporality of the novel as a chronotope, or a temporal-space. With its representation of artistically visible, thickened time through the manipulation and design of length, duration, and space (Bakhtin 84), a chronotope normally ought not to be applicable to the defining document of sovereignty and citizenship for a modern nation-state. While the nation as imagined community may be conducive to representations of novelistic time, as Anderson points out, the state has less interest in delineating specific, or multiple, temporal interactions. Ian Baucom argues that the state "has yielded a thinner grammar of time, in significant part because it has seemed to succeed in putting the question of time outside of itself" (713). A state has little need or want to imagine a temporal shift that may ultimately work against its principles, even if the state holds sovereignty over a nation that it justifies through a historical lens, of which Ireland is an example.

Yet the Irish Constitution at times gestures towards something akin to a "chronotope." The internal ordering of the nation, the state, and citizens within a specific, artistically visible temporal and spatial plane can be seen in the article that addresses partition:

> It is the firm will of the Irish Nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by a peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people,

> democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island. Until then, the laws enacted by the Parliament established by this Constitution shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws enacted by the Parliament that existed immediately before coming into operation of this Constitution. (Irish Const. Art. 3.1)

Partition contributed one of the key points of division that led to the Civil War in Ireland, as well as the ongoing Troubles throughout the twentieth century, which explains the careful, almost circumscribed nature of the article. Still, the article stakes a claim for a future iteration of the nation *and* state that holds sovereignty over the entire island of Ireland. The constitution points to a possible future, which, as the third article and the first to define the nation, creates an underlying temporal plane that runs throughout the document. Citizens become characters in this temporal space—thickening it, making it visible—through the monikers of the "Irish Nation" and "people." The declarative tone of the article certainly reads constitutionally, but while most of the articles in the constitution feature this tone and the historical present tense grammar, article 3.1 also points to an uncommon invocation of possible events that occur over time, which is an inherent feature of narrative.

Article 3.1 reads like a miniature chronotope because, if implicitly, citizens are conceived as characters through interactions with social expectations. Those who are enveloped within the "firm will of the Irish Nation" are those who wish for unity in a specific sense—harmony and friendship, democratically expressed in both jurisdictions. These are the ideal citizens of the nation. Waiting in the wings, however, are the non-ideal or permitted citizens. These citizens, in their absence, take on a variety of forms. Some may be loyalists or the Anglo-Irish who have no such desire to unite the island of Ireland. The article also invokes the violence of groups such as

the IRA; “in friendship and harmony” hardly suggests revolutionary means for reunification. The IRA border on excluded citizens, but nonetheless they are present in the background of Article 3. In other words, the division between the ideal and the permitted makes citizens into characters because it places them within a particular social milieu full of expectations.

Some invocations of a social milieu and distinctions between ideal and permitted citizenship are more explicit in the constitution. Ideal citizenship for Irish women within the patriarchal structure of the Irish state highlights the need to negotiate the disjunction between the ideal citizen and the permitted citizen. Women, according to the constitution, ought to be mothers within the home, though their citizenship does not require that they are mothers. Relatedly, as workers, Irish women are obliquely referred to as second-class. In a constitutional article that ostensibly seeks to protect workers’ rights, the state recognizes that “citizens shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age, or strength” (Irish Const. Art. 45.4.2). With its forays into family law, education, religion, workplace legislation, and so on, the Irish constitution deviates from foundational principles and attempts to legally frame the ideal Ireland that De Valera envisioned in his 1943 address. The principles of citizenship in the constitution create situations of belonging that go beyond the binary categories of citizen and noncitizen. Ideal and permitted citizens become characters acting out the social milieu of the nation.

While literary genres, such as the *bildungsroman*, might help consider the way that an individual becomes a part of a society as a citizen, narrative form, as divorced from genre, provides an opportunity to think about the structural divisions between ideal and permitted citizenship. Narrative forms, in other words, replicate the reality of political forms. Historical reality, Hayden White claims, can only exist through narrativity (15). In White’s formulation,

history can only be represented as real insofar as it can be shaped as a narrative: "The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possesses as mere sequence" (5). In this sense, the Irish Constitution seeks to create the conditions for a perceived historical reality. The creation of a social milieu and the chronotope of reunification replaces perceived failings in independence with a narrative of triumphant nationalism.

Narrative fiction need not simply replicate or reflect the realities of political structures. The narratives created in the constitution are fodder for imagined alternatives in the realm of fiction. Even realism, broadly speaking, creates, as Thomas Pavel argues, possible worlds that are not always contingent on the actual world: "it has always been assumed by artists and critics that one of the sources of aesthetic delight lies precisely in the skillful intermingling of true and imaginary things" (174). Pavel argues against reductionist models of reading literary works because fiction has autonomy from the actual world. Irish writers frequently engage with the tension between imaginary worlds and actual worlds, though not necessarily in the most ostentatious way. Of the works covered in this dissertation, only Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* plays with the possibility of a fantasy world to any extensive degree, though the metafiction of the novel is still rooted in aspects of realism. Instead of metafictional or metaphysical play, the novels and short stories examined in the following chapters create constitutional worlds that hew closely to the constitutional paradigm of an actual Ireland across various historical moments. In other words, these narrative fictions, while attending to constitutional elements of an actual Ireland, do not merely reflect that world; they also imagine

worlds where a different constitution is needed in order to better comprehend the experiences—the equivalent values—of characters as citizens.

Inventing Irelands beyond the Postcolonial Debates

Over the past decade, Irish studies scholars have increasingly turned towards the intersections between culture, nation, and the state. Clair Wills' extensive study of cultural production during Neutrality pairs the policies of the government, such as official censorship, with works from the page, airwave, and screen. *That Neutral Island* charts in intricate detail the close relationship between official policy and the creative impulses of the writer, actor, architect, producer, in the ways that they adhere to, and deviate from, the wishes of the state. As already mentioned, Michael Rubenstein offers a similar interweaving of public policy and cultural production, though his connections point to infrastructure, Irish modernism, and postcolonial comedies of development. Due to the nature of local and international politics at the time, much scholarly attention has focused on the first half of the twentieth century in Ireland, although contributions from Susan Cahill and Liam Harte have recently examined cultural and literary reactions to the failures of the Celtic Tiger.

The political turn in Irish studies began in the 1980s as scholars of social and cultural histories, as well as feminist scholars, thought more attentively about the connections between cultural production and the structures of the independent government. Terence Brown's *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present*, provides, in the author's own words, "a provisional and speculative sketch" of an intellectual, social, and cultural history of post-independence Ireland (9). Feminist scholars such as Geraldine Meaney observe the effect that constitutional mandates for Irish women, such as the articles that idealize women as mothers

within the home, had on conceptions and performance of identity within the nation. The work of feminist critical theorists and historians like Meaney proved foundational for literary critics, including Eibhear Walshe in his edited collection *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing* (1997). While cultural and feminist histories and sociologies continued to develop during the 1990s, the prevailing intellectual debates at the turn of the century dealt with the applicability of postcolonial theory to the context of Ireland.

Founded by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea in 1980, the intellectual collective Field Day was instrumental to the introduction of postcolonial debates to the area of Irish Studies. Field Day published the influential collection *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, which featured essays by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said. As Seamus Deane noted in his introduction to the collection, the crisis of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, still at its height in the late 1980s and early 1990s, held affinities with similar crises around the globe (3). "Ireland is the only Western European country," Deane argued, "that has had both an early and a late colonial experience" (3). For critics like Eagleton, Deane, Luke Gibbons, and Joe Cleary, the anticolonial promise offered by a literary nationalism in the first few decades of the twentieth century had failed when it came to transitioning into everyday governance. The Irish literary revival imagined in the works of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Moore, and others, could not be said to reflect the ongoing struggles of an independent Irish nation-state, especially in relation to the sectarian violence of Northern Ireland. In its place, writers began to think about the much more complex intertwining of nationhood, colonial past, and participation in a broader cultural and economic exchange.

Perhaps the most influential work to arise out of this postcolonial focus was Declan Kiberd's sprawling account of modern Irish literature, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature and the*

Modern Nation (1995). Kiberd's argument presents an intricate link between resistance to colonial power, modern nationalism, and the "idea of Ireland" that proliferated amongst the diasporic communities around the globe (2). Parsing the history of Irish literature as a continuum of resistance to the imposition of colonial power allows Kiberd to consider the invention of the nation as multivalent, complex, and in part the work of prose and lyric writers. The approach reintegrates outcasts like Oscar Wilde back into the fold of Irishness alongside Gaelicists, Irish literary revivalists, and writers of the Irish language. Inventing a nation as an imagined community becomes not the work of novels, or *a* novel, but rather a colloquy of writers and their works. As a result, a national imagination is no longer contingent on a specified historical moment and continues to change and transform as new moments of national crisis arise, such as the Troubles of Northern Ireland or the collapse of the Celtic Tiger.

As Ireland entered the new millennium, the questions raised through postcolonial theories began to find limitations in the face of increasing participation in the European Union, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland in 1998, and a renewed writerly concern with the workings of the Irish state as an independent entity of power. Of course, the old connections and spectres of a colonial past continued to resonate in public consciousness. Debates on abortion, for example, resurfaced anticolonial rhetoric in the 1990s. Brexit, the severance of Britain from the European Union, prompted fresh questions about Irish sovereignty and the tenuousness of the Irish border. As Gerry Smyth argues, "the history of English colonialism in Ireland is *exemplary* in the degree to which it was unstable, inconsistent and partial" (10). Likewise, decolonization must be thought of as unstable, inconsistent, and partial (10). A history of colonial rule certainly continues to inform the politics of Ireland. Yet focusing on this history does not necessarily

explain the consistency with which Irish writers examine the documents and principles of a sovereign, independent nation, as with the Irish constitution.

Citizenship provides a fresh perspective on the intersection between the nation, cultural production, politics, and the state. The negotiation of equivalent values connecting citizens touches on a number of categories that stretch from the legal to the humanistic, as was the case with the 2018 referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which had banned abortion in Ireland. The political and emotional stakes were high, which created a particularly difficult campaign in the lead up to the referendum. The successful vote to repeal the Eighth Amendment naturally elicited myriad responses: jubilation, happiness, relief, exhaustion, uncertainty, ambivalence, sadness, heartache. Such emotional responses are not associated with citizenship as a legal category, yet they underpin the way that citizens conceive of equivalent values in society. Bakhtin viewed the political benefits of the novel around its capacity for what he called "heteroglossia." The novel, in other words, produces a colloquy of linguistic registers without necessarily deferring to a particular hierarchy of legitimacy—legal language can exist alongside vernacular, religious alongside vulgar, and so on. But politics also includes structural interactions, which suggests attention paid to narrative form parses the future-oriented politics that either implicitly or explicitly underpin the novels and short stories of so many Irish writers since independence. The recognition that aesthetics and politics interact, which can reflect the formation of equivalent values within a historical reality and a present reality, does not explain how such values are negotiated in terms of a future-oriented position. The negotiation between the ideal and the permitted citizen, as imaginative amendments, ultimately gestures to the future.

The Corpus

Turning away from postcolonial debates, the corpus of literary works gathered in this dissertation share an implicit awareness of possible futures. Each of these works features specific forms that give shape to the negotiation between the ideal and the permitted citizen as imagined constitutional amendments. In order to make these connections, the chapters are ordered on two levels. The first level is thematic; each chapter charts a particular aspect of the constitution across a series of works. The second level has to do with narrative technique; each chapter involves a series of works that share particular formal characteristics. The two levels both correlate to the two main literary qualities of the constitution in a variety of ways. Matching thematic and technical qualities helps to chart the multivalent distinctions that arise in the gap between ideal and permitted citizenship.

A few limitations in terms of the corpus ought to be addressed, however, especially with regards to the politics of the Irish literary canon. The dissertation only includes Irish writers of English and, as a result, only Anglophone novels and short stories. A number of Irish writers and Irish novels could also fit within the methodological framework. An expanded version of the project might consider the Irish text of the constitution—since the document exists in both English and Irish, with equal weight given to both. Novelists such as Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, who writes in both English and Irish, offer several works that comment on the social implications of citizenship. *Aisling Nó Inion A* (2015), for example, presents a number of similar themes to Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River*. Ultimately, the politics of language in Ireland brings with it a number of questions that simply cannot be answered within this project, though the questions certainly bring a different perspective to the gap between the ideal and the permitted citizen.

Due to the extensive nature of the Irish Constitution, themes were chosen as representative rather than exhaustive. Entire subfields have been dedicated to the complexities

and nuances of topics such as the Irish border. And the particular topic of the border concerns the distance between the categories of citizen and noncitizen in a way that exists outside the argumentative parameters of this dissertation, which instead focuses on the negotiable space between the ideal citizen and the permitted citizen. Even within the parameters of the ideal and the permitted, certain groups remain peripheral to the dissertation. For example, the community known as Travellers, a nomadic group, has a long history in tension with the nature of both colonial rule and the independent nation-state. Although Travellers are briefly mentioned in a reading of Seán O'Faoláin's "Midsummer Night Madness," an extensive consideration of their history in Ireland, as with the Irish border, requires a different set of inquiries to those proposed in this dissertation.

Although the primary method for the selection of texts was based on the confluence between narrative forms and constitutional structures, a secondary emphasis was placed on a diversity of writers. While Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett are referred to throughout, none of these three writers, who sometimes dominate critical reception of Irish literature, receives extended readings. By contrast, Kate O'Brien and Seán O'Faoláin have only recently elicited comprehensive critical engagements, though this work remains incomplete. Due to the nature of being contemporary writers, criticism of works by Anne Enright, Roddy Doyle, and Colm Tóibín is relatively recent and therefore rudimentary. Writers with more extensive critical traditions, such as Elizabeth Bowen, John McGahern, and Edna O'Brien, have rarely been considered in terms of a larger political trajectory such as the one covered in this dissertation. While overviews of modern Irish literature, as in the work of Derek Hand, have tended to include colloquies of writers, an extended examination of their narrative techniques as relatable to the structures of citizenship has, until now, never been explored.

The first two chapters focus on the need for narrative fiction to imagine future iterations of the nation and the constitution. Thematically, the chapters examine the political ambivalence following the post-independence era of the 1930s, when De Valera was still drafting his constitutional reform. Ambivalence in narration allows for definitions of belonging that diverge from the republican nationalism that formed the early iterations of the independent nation-state. Since it deals with the origins of the independent nation, this first chapter focuses on the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion more than the other three chapters. The focus, however, provides a point of departure when it comes to the negotiation of equivalent values. In navigating the boundaries of inclusion, the writers of the 1930s began to imagine the possibilities of permitted citizenship through politically engaged ambivalence. In the second chapter, that ambivalence becomes an ethically centered refusal of conclusions. Inconclusiveness as a narrative trajectory in turn counters the limitations of the court system, which seeks conclusiveness in judgements. Focusing on the techniques of narration in these chapters elucidates the need for narrative fiction to imagine alternative constitutional worlds, because the mechanisms and narratives of the state, despite allowances, will not engage with the negotiation without outside impetus.

The second half of the dissertation engages more specifically with the process that attends to the negotiation of the equivalent values of citizenship. Novels explored in these two chapters frame negotiations around a politics of reliability. Irish women in the constitution are idealized as reliable mothers; emigrants from Ireland are relied upon for maintaining a "special affinity" with the heritage and culture of the Irish people according to the constitution. In the chapter on ideal citizenship for Irish women, textual markers of unreliable narration become a way in which permitted citizenship expresses the unreliability of the ideals of the constitution.

Emigration, in turn, becomes a matter of narrative reorganization to highlight the political benefits of detaching from the stipulations of ideal citizenship. In this second half of the dissertation, the negotiation of equivalent values within the gap between the ideal and the permitted requires a structural imagination, one which reorganizes the official definitions of belonging.

Chapter One:

Ambivalent Citizens: Imagining Beyond Exclusionary Violence in the Early Decades of Irish Independence

In the early 1930s, constitutional reform looked increasingly on the cards in Ireland. Under the leadership of Eamon De Valera, the Fianna Fáil party pushed for a new constitution, one meant, at least ostensibly, to reflect better the aims of the Republican independence movement after the Easter Rising. The questions raised in the debates leading up to the passing of the 1937 Irish Constitution were essentially concerned with various tenets of belonging on the level of both citizenship and international relations. Prior to any sustained public debate on the matter, Irish writers had begun to imagine possible answers to these questions. Seán O'Faoláin, Frank O'Connor, and Elizabeth Bowen were concerned with the transition from revolutionary violence for independence to the everyday politics of an independent state. They were also concerned with how to narrate this transition through fictional forms.

O'Faoláin's "Midsummer Night Madness," O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation," and Bowen's *The Last September* represent a trend amongst Irish writers in the 1920s and 1930s to grapple with a sense of place in the newly independent state. Naturally, the Anglo-Irish War and Irish Civil War became *de facto* settings to explain why and how the new state was being moulded as isolationist and conservative. Rifts between neighbours and communities caused by the civil war became the dominant forum for fiction produced in the decades immediately following the upheaval. Liam O'Flaherty tunes in to an atmosphere of dread and expectation in *The Informer* (1925), his novel about spies, informants, and reprisal justice. Kate O'Brien feared the erasure of the upper-class Catholics in Ireland in *The Ante-Room* (1932), a novel about a

Catholic land-owning family during the Land Wars of 1880. Big House novels were increasingly elegiac, as with Edith Sommerville's novel about the self-destructive Anglo-Irish, *The Big House at Inver* (1925). On the stage, playwrights like Seán O'Casey, especially in *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926),[3] were challenging the rhetoric of Irish nationalism in ways that the public, at times, quite violently rejected. O'Faoláin, O'Connor, and Bowen highlight the anxiety about the future that underpins much of the general unease sensed by their contemporaries.

The anxiety about the future that arises in these works pertains to the historical moment of the narratives as well as the general ambivalence of the nation-state in the 1930s. Clair Wills uses an anecdote about the Irish Pavilion at the 1938 New York World's Fair to illustrate the temporal ambivalence dictating competing visions for Ireland. Designed by architect Michael Scott, the pavilion was built in the shape of a shamrock and its Art Deco interior clashed with Catholic paraphernalia. As Wills argues, "the green-and-white shamrock plumped in the middle of the metropolis proclaimed its difference—its singular identity…But it was also a cipher—the most traditional symbol of Irishness used as the marker for an as yet undefined future" (*That Neutral Island* 20). "Ancient nation and nascent state," Wills continues, "Ireland's challenge in the inter-war decades was to be both new and old at the same time" (21). Ambivalence was a major problem for De Valera because it rendered tenuous the terms of sovereignty and legitimacy for the still fledgling independent state.

By way of avoiding this ambivalence towards the future of Ireland, De Valera opted for continuation and protectionism. Since he was the leader of the IRA forces that did not recognize

[3] The initial production of *The Plough and the Stars* met with public riots outside the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

the Irish Free State, thus leading to the Civil War, De Valera had to ensure a certain amount of continuation when he took over as leader of the government in 1932. As a result, the "1930s…deepened the conservatism of Irish life…To cultural and religious protectionism at their most draconian in the censorship policy was added the official encouragement of economic nationalism as a force sustaining the structure of an essentially rural society dominated by the social, cultural, and political will of the farmer and their offspring" (Brown 117). To avoid ambivalence, De Valera implemented policies that aligned with some of the more exclusionary impulses of revolutionary nationalism. O'Faoláin and O'Connor were concerned with this direction towards exclusionary politics; Bowen recognized this shift as further erasing the Anglo-Irish. While the future may have remained somewhat undefined and uncertain for Ireland, these writers were suspicious of the direction in which the nation was heading under De Valera. If the state looked to exclusionary politics to avoid ambivalence, Irish writers sought to explore the political benefits of ambivalent positions for citizens. As opposed to protectionism, isolationism, and exclusion, ambivalence offered an opportunity to imagine the future of Ireland as negotiable. For O'Faoláin and O'Connor ambivalence could lead to a more liberal Ireland, while for Bowen ambivalence could open new conceptions of citizenship for someone who existed between Ireland and Britain.

Exclusionary violence preoccupies much of the early writings of all three authors, though the perspective of this exclusion changes drastically among them. O'Faoláin and O'Connor fought with De Valera and the IRA; Bowen grew up a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. The gulf between these positions in part illustrates the problems that arise when a government, initially built upon revolutionary violence, transitions to one that must implement its ideals as everyday political practice. Due to the authors' polarized positions between ideal and permitted

citizens, ambivalence in all three works suggests a desire to negotiate the boundaries of belonging in Ireland. O'Faoláin's story "Midsummer Night Madness," the title story from his banned first collection, and O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation" capture the individual in the throes of exclusionary violence—partaking in the revolution but wishing for a new identity beyond the dichotomy of "us versus them." Bowen's novel *The Last September* attempts to articulate a narrative voice beyond the failings of the Anglo-Irish to recognize their fate.

Faced with the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion, characters and narrators explore ambivalence as a possible space for negotiating the boundaries of belonging. Whereas exclusionary politics seek to clearly delineate noncitizens, or "them," ambivalence, since it defines "the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing" ("Ambivalence"), inherently blurs the distinction between "us" and "them." Ambivalence could be associated with fence-sitting or soft moral principles. Yet the writers of the post-independence era in Ireland were in a unique position. They were disillusioned with nationalist rhetoric while also recognizing the necessity of the anticolonial struggle. In other words, they faced a dilemma in which they had no desire to invalidate the independent nation-state while at the same time wishing to critique its expressions of authority. To O'Faoláin, O'Connor, and Bowen, ambivalence affords a political position where citizens can negotiate the ideals of the independent nation without undermining its right to sovereignty. In effect, returning to a previous moment of conflict works as an analog for the issues of citizenship arising in the 1930s.

For Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin, understanding their own involvement with Republican nationalism during the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War required a distinction between the official state narratives of the nation and the narratives of citizens within the nation.

Both O'Faoláin and O'Connor had direct experience with the impulses driving revolutionary violence, insofar as both enlisted in the IRA prior to the Anglo-Irish War and continued to fight for the Republicans during the Civil War. Daniel Corkery was integral to the nurturing of O'Faoláin's and O'Connor's growing nationalistic fervour—although less directly in O'Connor's case as, unlike O'Faoláin, he never attended University College Cork where Corkery lectured. Corkery's romantic, Gaelic revivalist nationalism resonated with the young writers as they approached adulthood, if for different reasons. O'Connor's impoverished childhood in Cork meant that visions of a unified Ireland breaking down the class hierarchy imposed by the British was all too appealing. For O'Faoláin, the appeal of romantic nationalism was a classic case of youthful rebellion against his conservative parents. Part of his process was the symbolic transformation of names: O'Faoláin was born John Whelan. Personal visions and revisions eventually met the realities of post-revolutionary politics.

Even if neither O'Faoláin nor O'Connor experienced any significant fighting firsthand, the war years honed an intellectual engagement with the public. Propaganda was their calling: O'Faoláin eventually earned the post of chief editor for the *Sinn Fein* newspaper while O'Connor's stint in the propaganda division of the South Cork IRA battalion during the civil war was cut short when he was imprisoned by the Free State (Delaney, *Sean O'Faolain*, 17; Lennon 17). After the Troubles, as Heather Ingman suggests, O'Faoláin and O'Connor found themselves at a crossroads: "they did not want to turn their backs on their country…[but] at the same time, they felt that independence had been only partly achieved and they became disenchanted with the political rhetoric they had imbibed and acted on" (*History* 116). If De Valera was moving towards legitimating his vision of ideal Ireland throughout the 1930s, O'Connor and O'Faoláin were moving towards articulating a critique of that vision. While they never regretted their

participation in liberating Ireland from British rule, they did resent the way that the state developed in the early decades of independence. O'Connor's fateful three years as head of Yeats's Abbey Theatre was built on a desire to stage the "real" Ireland that countered the idealized version of rural happiness proffered by the Republican movement. O'Faoláin, especially through the journal *The Bell*, which he cofounded and edited from 1940-1945, increasingly expressed public dissent from De Valera and his government. "Midsummer Night Madness" and "Guests of the Nation" present early attempts to formulate a political critique borne from ambivalent circumstances.

In "Guests of the Nation," the narrator Bonaparte experiences the brutal reality of exclusionary violence, which forces him to consider ambivalence as a way of escaping isolationist nationalism. The story depicts the execution of two British soldiers at the hands of their Irish captors. Until the execution, the Irish soldiers consider their prisoners friends. O'Connor's story obfuscates the clear boundaries between "us" and "them" that characterized popular accounts of the Anglo-Irish War after independence. Each character of the story represents a slightly different formulation of Irishness and of what it means to belong within the Irish nation. Thus the irony of the title—the supposed invitation of hospitality—extends beyond the two British prisoners. At any given time, several of the Irish figures in the story also feel disconnected from the nation. Bonaparte searches at the end for a distance from nationalism and in doing so he finds an ambivalence that can make sense of the way that his prisoners also feel like friends. Ambivalence at the end of the story gestures outwards to a possible future that rejects exclusionary politics and allows for multiple conceptions of belonging to the nation.

Disillusionment is integral to the narrative structure of "Midsummer Night Madness" because it allows the narrator to enter into a state of ambivalence that, as in "Guests of the

Nation," can disrupt destructive elements of Republican nationalism. Brad Kent suggests that although disillusionment regularly forms the backdrop for scholarship on O'Faoláin's writing, hope for reform proves an essential aspect of the essays that he wrote in various journals and newspapers ("Introduction" xii). Perhaps less explicit in this hopefulness, "Midsummer Night Madness" nonetheless aspires to diagnose the exclusionary violence inherent in the Anglo-Irish war. The narrator of the story, John, travels to a rural area of County Cork to check in on Stevey Long, the leader of the local battalion. Stevey has neglected his duties because, as John discovers, he is embroiled in a love triangle with a Traveller woman named Gypsy and an old man named Henn, the last of an Anglo-Irish glass-making dynasty holed up in the local Big House. As the feud between Stevey and Henn escalates when Gypsy becomes pregnant, John recognizes the violence of exclusion that resides at the heart of his own cause; Stevey rejects the pregnant woman, and potentially his own child, and forces both her and Henn to leave Ireland. Part of John's disillusionment stems from the way that the stipulations of belonging in the envisioned Irish nation for Gypsy and Henn are contingent upon the whims of a jealous and capricious man. John's desire to occupy a space of ambivalence at the end of the story is an explicit attempt to negotiate for Old Henn and Stevey.

When it comes to the question of Irish citizenship and the direction of Ireland between 1922 and 1937, Bowen presents far murkier waters to navigate than either O'Faoláin or O'Connor. For one thing, the conservative direction of the nation was less of a pressing matter to Bowen; she did not have to fear censorship quite as stringently as O'Faoláin or O'Connor in part because Ireland was not the primary audience for her writing. Isolationism, however, was a different matter. Isolation curtailed her own sense of herself as a go-between for Ireland and Britain. Allan Hepburn suggests that in "living between English and Irish culture, [Bowen]

positioned herself as an outsider to both" (9). Her position in the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy gave Bowen a particular perspective on the social, cultural, and political climate of post-independence Ireland. During the Second World War, as Ireland adopted an official policy of neutrality, Bowen worked for the British Ministry of Information and wrote reports detailing Irish attitudes towards the war effort. For some in Ireland, Bowen's reporting amounted to treacherous betrayal—an act of espionage. Given the way that the Troubles had ruptured trust in communities, such a reaction to Bowen's work was to some degree understandable. The reports themselves were considerably less nefarious. Bowen often stressed understanding from the British and sought to explain the Irish position of Neutrality sympathetically.[4] In other words, while Bowen supported the war effort she also supported the right for Ireland to assert its independence. Revealing Bowen to be more commissary than spy, the wartime reports shed light on her own attempts to carve out a particular kind of Anglo-Irish existence in the wake of Irish independence. Hers was a desire to articulate a citizenship that could breach the new dynamics in an old relationship.

On political matters, then, Bowen appears at odds with O'Faoláin and O'Connor. Nonetheless, the three held a certain admiration for each other. O'Faoláin and Bowen had a particularly intimate relationship given their affair, which was at its height in the late 1930s. Beyond romantic entanglements, the two writers shared intellectual connections; as Eibhear Walshe points out, *The Bell* was a rarity in that it was one of the only Irish publications to which Bowen regularly contributed ("Introduction" 8). An interview with Bowen conducted by

[4] In one report to the Ministry, Bowen argued for more nuance from the British with regards to Irish affairs with regards to the war. Churchill had brazenly condemned the Irish for their attitudes towards the possibility of leasing its strategically significant ports to Britain. Bowen stressed that "neutrality is Eire's first *free* self-assertion: as such alone it would mean a great deal to her" ("Report from Ireland" 53).

O'Faoláin for *The Bell* has drawn considerable critical attention in part because, in one response, Bowen claims her status as an Irish, not British or even Anglo-Irish, novelist ("Meet Elizabeth Bowen" 421). Whatever skepticism O'Faoláin and O'Connor might have held to such a claim did not affect their respect for Bowen as a writer. O'Connor had a less personal relationship with Bowen but her short story "Summer Night" appears in the *Modern Irish Short Stories* anthology that he edited for Oxford. In turn, Bowen favourably reviewed O'Connor's *Crab Apple Jelly* (1944) and *The Common Chord* (1947) for *Tatler*. The former review highlighted Ireland as "a fertile breeding ground for character...[where] the level of idiosyncrasy is high" (171); the latter stated that "[O'Connor], whose reputation is European, is more than a master of ringing and true prose; he shows, particularly as a short-storyist, the power of sighting, piercing, and bringing down the most shy or elusive subject" (219). In any case, Bowen's claim for her status as an Irish novelist hints at the kind of citizenship she imagined for herself. Being able to traverse the world of Bloomsbury and that of Cork, at least as far as Bowen envisioned, allotted a certain perspectival advantage after the dust kicked up by the Troubles had settled.

Like "Midsummer Night Madness" and "Guests of the Nation," *The Last September* explores ambivalence as a necessary reaction against exclusionary violence. As the summer of 1920 draws to a close, the Naylor family and their niece Lois Farquar host tennis and dinner parties for other Anglo-Irish families as well as the slowly accumulating British military presence in Cork. Outside the walls of the Danielstown estate looms the threat of the Irish revolutionary soldiers. In response to the threat, the Naylors pretend it does not exist at all; instead, they favour a persona of calm serenity. For characters like Lois, a young woman at the precipice of change in her life, these personas offer nothing but stasis as a form of capitulation. Lois embraces ambivalence as a way of denying this paralysis, although this too turns out to be

another kind of persona. Unlike Bonaparte and John, who move towards ambivalence in order to negotiate a future beyond exclusionary nationalism, Lois's ambivalence only renders in stark relief the distance between the Anglo-Irish Ascendency and the ideals that will dictate an independent Ireland. Bowen dramatizes the limitations of ambivalence as a political position within Ireland; however she also recognizes the benefits of thinking about ambivalent positions on an international scale. *The Last September* indicates that one must recognize and contextualize an ambivalence that allows for a future-oriented perspective. Simply existing ambivalently eventually leads to erasure.

O'Faoláin's memorialization of Bowen in *The London Review of Books* described her as "heart-cloven and split-minded" (15); although perhaps unresolved over the course of Bowen's career, that split-mindedness in regards to national identity does not equate with the ambivalence that Lois experiences in *The Last September*. As Maud Ellmann suggests, in the worlds that Bowen creates, "national identity is a performance" (9). Where Lois' ambivalence traps her between two options (stability in marriage to a British soldier and the romanticized excitement of revolutionary warfare), Bowen understands ambivalence as a mode of existence that can provide perspective and insight. Narration takes on the responsibility of forging that new form of citizenship for an Anglo-Irish class that was facing erasure from the nation in the decades following independence. The third-person, omniscient narrator, who has a tendency to slip into the idiom of the various Anglo-Irish characters, presents a distinction between Lois' ambivalent existence and Bowen's perspectives parlayed from ambivalence. In the form of the narration, Bowen seeks out a frame of reference on which she will later stake a claim, especially during the Second World War.

In many ways, the difference in narrative point of view explains the different perspectives about the potential in ambivalence as a space for a new kind of citizenship in Ireland. First-person narration, as with Bonaparte and John in O'Connor's and O'Faoláin's stories, emphasizes the individual as an active negotiator of values. For writers and characters who, at least at one point in time, belonged within De Valera's boundaries of ideal citizenship, personal recollection can provide a glimpse at psychological motivations for defining a more inclusive Ireland. Bowen, already on the outside of two different nations, cannot achieve the same incisiveness with first person narration for her Anglo-Irish characters. Hermione Lee, in a critical introduction to *Bowen's Court*, offers a hierarchy of insight that applies to the narrator of *The Last September*: "The Bowens were largely oblivious of their ambivalent position in Ireland. It was for the novelist, the last of the Bowens, the first to live, in part, away from the house and in the end to resign it to its inevitable fate, to diagnose their relationship to history" (x-xi). If the narrator does not know more than the Anglo-Irish at Danielstown, at the very least narration possesses the ability to break through their personas. Distance, as opposed to the immediacy of Bonaparte and John, allows for the kind of negotiation that carves out a continued space of permissibility long after an old way of life has vanished.

"Midsummer Night Madness," "Guests of the Nation," and *The Last September* explore the political benefits of disillusionment about the revolutionary spirit of the past. Through disillusioned perspectives of nationalism and, in Bowen's case, the complacency of the Anglo-Irish Ascendency, these works re-examine the past as a way to imagine a future-oriented project of critique. Disillusionment allows for an ambivalence in O'Faoláin's and O'Connor's short stories that disrupts the ideals of isolationist and exclusionary nationalism. Ambivalence can provide a role in the independent Ireland for the Anglo-Irish, but Bowen suggests that this must

be carefully negotiated for fear that ambivalence will only lead to further erasure. Somewhat ironically, these writers take a cue from the Irish literary revival by looking to the past in order to imagine ways of proceeding toward an as yet unidentified future for Ireland in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Rather than looking to a mythological past, all three works look to the recent history of revolution and civil strife to see alternative trajectories for the independent nation. All three narratives could be read as imagining forms of future citizenship for their respective authors; in doing so, these authors move towards the myriad possibilities of permitted citizenship at a time when De Valera was reforming the ideals of the nation and the state.

"Midsummer Night Madness" and "Guests of the Nation": Disillusionment and Ambivalence

More often than not, critical accounts of the early post-independence Irish literary landscape pair Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin together as representatives for the burgeoning short story form.[5] The style preferred by both writers represents what Derek Hand describes as "the wholesale abandonment of a formal or aesthetic consciousness in relation to the novel and the enthusiastic embracing of documentary realism as *the* mode of expression in Irish fiction" in the 1930s (*A History* 194). Continental writers such as Guy de Maupassant, Émile Zola, and Ivan Turgenev influenced O'Faoláin's and O'Connor's understanding of short stories. O'Faoláin also admired the Victorian novel due to "its grand balance of feeling and

[5] Each writer penned critical examinations of the short story: O'Faoláin's *The Short Story* (1948) and O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice* (1962). Both shared an interest in the French naturalism of Guy de Maupassant as well as Ivan Turgenev's Russian realism. Joyce's *Dubliners* also looms large in these works. Perhaps due to the decade and a half that separates the two studies, though, O'Connor was more willing to provide space to twentieth century writers such as Ernest Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, and Katherine Mansfield, to whom O'Faoláin gives far less attention.

intelligence…A sense of life and its endless interest, a humanity, a restrained sympathy, even a breeziness near to vulgarity" ("Dickens and Thackery" 68). On 12 June 1926, Frank O'Connor hinted at his *modus operandi* in an article for Æ's *Irish Statesman*: "In the articles I have contributed from time to time to this paper I have tried to interest the ordinary reader in Irish literature, not from the sentimental or the patriotic or the historical point of view, but from the point of view of contemporary criticism" ("Literature and Life" 379). Both were interested in the human and in humanity, though their aesthetic approaches diverged at times, especially during O'Connor's fateful tenure at the Abbey Theatre.[6] Nonetheless, both writers shared a desire to document what they saw to be the reality of living in modern Ireland.

They shared an understanding that, in the decades immediately following independence, Ireland was hardly amenable to their intellectual and artistic aims. When O'Faoláin and O'Connor envisioned the independent nation in their youth, they did not foresee a government opposed to their intellectual pursuits. Originating out of the colourfully named Committee on Evil Literature, the Censorship of Publications Board was established in 1929 and quickly became zealous with its mandate. Writers like O'Faoláin and O'Connor, who both had work proscribed by the board, publically sloughed off the censure while privately taking great offense to being ostracized from the very community of and for which they wrote. O'Faoláin was an early critic of censorship, having witnessed its effects in Boston when he attended Harvard for a Master's degree on a British Commonwealth scholarship. At the heart of censorship, O'Faoláin argued in an essay that also appeared in Æ's *The Irish Statesman*, was "the type of social problem which annotates the compromise on which society is founded—the inevitable

[6] O'Connor was appointed Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre in 1937. His direction was not always popular with the other board members; after W.B. Yeats died in 1939, O'Connor was forced to stepdown from the board of directors.

compromise between the ideal of the individual and the need of the masses for ordered community-living" ("Censorship in America" 20). The 1937 Irish constitution brought this concern to the fore: the fledgling years of independence hinged on the definitions of the "individual" and "the masses" as it pertained to Ireland.

Both writers were vocal critics of censorship because they viewed the policy as intellectually stagnating and culturally backwards. O'Faoláin's non-fiction, for example, took up the issue of Draconian censorship with sustained and insightful critiques of the committee.[7] As Terence Brown suggests, O'Connor's critiques of the Irish state under de Valera tended to be more direct and unflinching, which made him "*persona non grata*" after he published a particularly scathing essay in the English journal *Horizon* ("Frank O'Connor" 46). In the essay O'Connor suggested modern Ireland was a place of little character and utter subservience:

> I am bewildered by a complete lack of relationship between Irish literature and any form of life, within or without Ireland. Blandly, sentimentally, maundering to itself, Irish literature sails off on one tack, while off on another go hand in hand Mr de Valera and the Church…it may be argued that they are the business of publicist, not of artists, but there are no publicists, there is no public opinion, and if the artists do not fight, who will? And if we don't fight, and new circumstances

[7] In 1943, the Censorship board came under fire from the public because it had proscribed Dr. Halliday Sutherland's *The Laws of Life*, presumably because the book, though arguing against artificial contraception, promoted the "rhythm method." Halliday's study received the imprimatur of the Westminster Diocesan Council. Instead of simply admitting that the censorship board had made a mistake, as O'Faoláin suggests he should have done, the Chairman of the board, William Magennis, gave a long and rambling speech in the Dáil defending the decision. O'Faoláin, with acerbic wit, commented that "it is always depressing to see a man whorling about in the mazes of his own mind in the effort to stave off the humiliating admission that he has done a wrong thing. One sympathises with him. It is, nonetheless, an embarrassing public spectacle" ("The Senate and Censorship" 187).

> don't settle what Mr de Valera has for us, what is to become of Ireland or Irish literature? ("Future of Irish Literature" 62)

O'Connor castigates the Irish intelligentsia for their lack of courage in confronting De Valera's policy of Neutrality. Like his article for *The Irish Statesman* from 1926, he frames his critique for ordinary readers and not sentimental patriots. O'Connor believed in the potential for an Irish nation at the forefront of the modern world, if only it could be wrested away from the conservative and religiously insular rulers that had gained control after independence. For each writer, the early short stories were essential to the process of honing a critical voice that could remodel disillusionment about the past into a constructive platform for proceeding towards a more liberal future.

Disavowal and disillusionment underpin the early stories of both writers, especially those that returned to the Troubles for inspiration. After the fighting, the Gaelic revivalist nationalism learned from Corkery was abandoned and in its place, as O'Faoláin articulates, was an attempt to understand the frustration of ideals through human agents: "as my anger gradually abated, but with my curiosity still unabated, I was, over the years after 1924, to become fascinated to understand, in sympathy, what flaws in the intricate machinery of human nature keep it from fulfilling itself wholly" (*Vive Moi* 226).[8] The two writers ultimately recognized that Corkery's work was symptomatic of the isolationist nationalism that was vying for control of the state.

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[8] Corkery's major work of nationalist and revivalist history, *The Hidden Ireland*, was disavowed by O'Faoláin and O'Connor. O'Faoláin reviewed the book negatively. As with the bulk of O'Faoláin's reviews and essays, he does his best to give a full account of the work. Vitriolic this review is not. Yet some of O'Faoláin's more soured attitudes towards his former mentor, to whom he also lost out on a position at University College Cork, peep through the seams: "It is a biggish book and it would take a bigger book to dispel the illusion of veracity it creates: for its arrangement of facts, and of half-facts, and of pious beliefs, by a man with an inadequate knowledge of Irish history, is tendentious in the extreme" ("Daniel Corkery" 86). O'Connor objected to the sectarianism of Corkery's history of Ireland (Fanning 252).

O'Connor frames the influence his shift in political outlook had on his writing in an introduction to the *Modern Irish Short Stories* anthology: "O'Faoláin, [Liam] O'Flaherty, and I wrote in the period of disillusionment which followed the Civil War, though with considerable respect for the nationalism that gave rise to it" (xiv). Disillusionment also gave rise to each writer's first major creative sparks. Their early stories consistently looked back to the period of the Troubles in an attempt to understand their sense of disillusionment as well as their anxiety about the future of Ireland.

In both content and form, the stories of O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* and O'Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* present ambivalence as a potential platform from which to negotiate a less isolationist version of the nation-state. In the title stories from both collections, ambivalence at first refers to two possible outcomes: a fear of stasis and stagnation and a fear of revolutionary violence. What begins as anxiety turns to possibility as Bonaparte and John both move towards positions of ambivalence in order to counteract the violent ends of staunchly nationalist characters like Jeremiah Donovan and Stevey Long. Faced with the demands to choose from clearly delineated sides—us and them—these characters choose ambivalence as a way to imagine a future beyond this dichotomy. Published just prior to De Valera controversially taking the oath of allegiance to the British crown required to enter the Dáil,[9] "Midsummer Night Madness" and "Guests of the Nation" attempt to illustrate a political voice for disillusionment—

[9] Along with the partition of the six counties in the North, the oath of allegiance to the British crown, to be made by each elected official in Ireland, was one of the key factors in the Civil War. De Valera had initially refused to say the oath. His reasoning was that, in fact, he never really did take the oath because he always planned to disavow the procedure as a part of his planned constitutional reform. Although De Valera was roundly criticized as hypocritical in some quarters, O'Faoláin actually saw good reason in the somewhat ambiguous maneuver. As critics such as Maurice Harmon (1966), Richard Bonaccorso (1987), and, more recently, Paul Delaney (2014) have pointed out, O'Faoláin did not fault De Valera for taking the oath because he recognized the move as an exercise in pragmatic politics.

one that configures a way of proceeding towards a more open and inclusive Ireland. By returning to the war of independence, these stories attempt to go back to a source of division in Irish society in order to imagine new categories for Ireland beyond that of "Irish" and "other."

A story about the execution of two British auxiliaries, Hawkins and Belcher, by a group of IRA foot soldiers, "Guests of the Nation" scrutinizes the limits of hospitality and the failure of community in the face of nationalist ideals. The tragedy and gravitas of the story stem from the officious manner of the execution; prior to the order, the two British soldiers are considered friends and get along well with the Irish: "I could not at the time see the point of myself and Noble guarding Belcher and Hawkins at all, for it was my belief that you could have planted that pair down anywhere from this to Claregalway and they'd have taken root there like a native weed" ("Guests" 49). Belonging, however, soon cedes to nationalism. "In its ironic use of the term 'guests,'" Eugene O'Brien writes:

> the story offers a window onto the role of communities and how they create themselves through the interaction with outsiders: how the homely (*Heimlich*) is created by the unhomely (*Unheimlich*). Hospitality, through its enactment of a discourse of mastery, can rapidly become hostility, and those who are these community's [*sic*] guests can risk becoming ghosts so that the home of the community can be validated and reinforced. ("Guests of the Nation" 120)

Having participated in, and been jailed during, the civil war, O'Connor was well aware of the precarious nature of hospitality in the Irish nation. Bonaparte does not seem to be as aware, at least at first. When his commander Jeremiah Donovan reveals that they are to execute the friendly prisoners, Bonaparte responds with surprise and anxiety to the point that he rebuffs the idea that Belcher and Hawkins are hostages ("Guests" 52). Jeremiah Donovan makes a clear and

violent distinction between those included and those excluded from his vision of Ireland. In other words, Jeremiah Donovan cannot think about the world ambivalently; he must section the world into "Irish" and "Enemy."

The irony in the title of the story seems at first to reflect the status of Hawkins and Belcher, since they are perceived initially as friends—as guests—when the reality is that they are prisoners of war. As prisoners, they ought to be the obvious outsiders. Yet the Irish soldiers are made to "look like fools when [Hawkins] showed that he knew the country better than [they] did" (49). For Bonaparte, this kind of knowledge suggests an innate kinship that exists beyond the boundaries of nationalism. Jeremiah Donovan has no such flexibility and to him the hospitality of nationalism begins and ends with loyalty to a cause and a set of ideals rather than any sense of community, knowledge about the land, or even birthright. By the end of "Guests of the Nation," Bonaparte is left to wonder just how closely attached he will be to the independent Ireland as it looks according to the zealous Jeremiah Donovan.

At its core, O'Connor's story is a striking critique of the ostentatious, self-appointed verisimilitude that developed in Republican nationalism during the Troubles. Another possible set of "guests" to the Irish nation appear to be the old woman and even the IRA soldiers themselves. The old woman, at whose house the soldiers are holding the prisoners, is a curious addition to the otherwise realist tone of the story. While the Socialist Hawkins blames the destitution of the Irish people on the corrupt clergy, the old woman confounds the men by blaming the drought on "Jupiter Pluvius" (51); and when Hawkins starts "swearing at the capitalists for starting the German war," the old lady counters that in fact the war was due to "the Italian Count that stole the heathen divinity out of the temple in Japan" (51). Bonaparte can only reflect that she was "a queer old girl, all right" (51). Robert Anthony Welch argues that the old

lady represents another occurrence of the Hag of Beare, a traditional Irish folkloric figure who "[presides] over life and death in…her landscape, the realm of Ireland, in which profound offence is to be given, in the name of Ireland, to the energies of being over which she has sway" (176). In O'Connor's story, the offence extends to both the invading forces of the auxiliaries as well as to the IRA soldiers who unceremoniously dispatch Belcher and Hawkins.

Disillusionment manifests in the way that Bonaparte narrates the events surrounding the execution. O'Connor's gift for capturing the nuances and rhythms of the speaking voice has at times meant that his narrative technique has been subordinated to other critical concerns (Neary 83). "Guests of the Nation" proves that O'Connor's meticulous skill as a stylist requires further attention.[10] As a narrator, Bonaparte seems to be caught in a mental dusk, that being the time of day at the beginning of the story ("Guests" 49). His main role throughout seems to be that of a reporter—mostly introducing the dialogue of the other characters. The effect is that Bonaparte avoids contemplation, especially when confronted with the possibility that he must execute his new friends: "I don't know how we got through that day, but I was very glad when it was over" (54). While Bonaparte cannot remember much about the ephemeral elements of the day, the execution scene is rendered in great detail, as if Bonaparte were trying to stave off the effects of revolutionary violence in his memory. Details of the bog collect extensively as the march to the execution site slows to a crawl. Once the inevitable execution takes place, Bonaparte condenses his memory in order to accelerate past the ramifications of violence: "I don't remember much about the burying, but that it was worse than all the rest because we had to carry them to the grave" (59). His lapses in detail and in memory suggest a disillusionment with the past because

[10] In an interview with Michael Longley, O'Connor remarked that he had a penchant for rereading and revising stories up to fifty times, even returning to stories after publication (273).

of the way that republican nationalism violently excludes certain individuals from any future in the independent nation.

For Eugene O'Brien, who borrows the term from Jacques Derrida, Belcher and Hawkins continue to effect Bonaparte "hauntologically" because they will shape any view he has to the future (123). By way of working through these hauntings, Bonaparte structures the story as a breakdown in the negotiation of community values. Even though the first-person narration features the loose conversational tone of the Irish oral tradition, the four sections of the story, which work almost like distinct tableaus, produce a form in which rigid linearity takes over from interpersonal relations. The main event of the first section is the card game and the circular positioning of characters around a table in turn mirrors the amiable atmosphere within the house. The second part, when Jeremiah tells Bonaparte that they will have to execute the prisoners if the British do the same with their soldiers, divides characters into pairs: Belcher and Hawkins are kept in a separate room from Bonaparte and Noble. By the third part the groups have formed into a line as Belcher and Hawkins are marched to their execution site out in the bogs. In the final section of the story, the overall spatial structure is that of separation: the dead men are in the bog, Jeremiah leaves for headquarters, and Bonaparte stands ambivalently in the doorway of the house that once hosted card games amongst friends.

The final paragraph of the story captures the correlation between disillusionment and the need to imagine a different iteration of belonging for the future. The passage presents a shift in Bonaparte's tone as he drifts towards ambivalence:

> Then, by God, in the very doorway, [the old woman] fell on her knees and began praying, and after looking at her for a minute or two Noble did the same by the fireplace. I pushed my way out past her and left them at it. I stood at the door,

> watching the stars and listening to the shrieking of the birds dying out over the bogs. It is so strange what you feel at times like that that you can't describe it. Noble says he saw everything ten times the size, as though there were nothing in the whole world but that little patch of bog with the two Englishmen stiffening into it, but with me it was as if the patch of bog where the Englishmen were was a million miles away, and even Noble and the old woman, mumbling behind me, and the birds, and the bloody stars were all far away. And I was somehow very small and very lost and lonely like a child astray in the snow. And anything that happened to me afterwards, I never felt the same about again. ("Guests" 59-60)

Bonaparte can no longer associate with either the religious convictions of the old woman and Noble or the "stiffening" corpses buried in the bog. The very environment of Ireland becomes contaminated with his disillusionment, a disillusionment that leads to ambivalence. A future built upon the kind of exclusionary violence to which Bonaparte was witness means a future of anxiety about the tenuous sense of belonging within Ireland. How long before Bonaparte himself ends up in the bog? Grammatically, the final sentence relates ambiguously forwards and backwards at the same time. This grammatical ambiguity coincides with Bonaparte's ambivalent position in the doorway. The narrator sits poised between multiple positions and although at the end this fills him with anxiety, there remains the suggestion that his views on this exclusionary violence will change his understanding of the future. In this sense, reflections on the past allow for the continuous rewriting of the future as a negotiation of community values not built on exclusionary violence.

After the establishment of the Censorship Board in 1929, writers like O'Connor were suddenly feeling exclusion from the ideal Ireland that maintained a strict, conservative moral

authority over the nation. O'Faoláin's "Midsummer Night Madness" makes the ambivalence that Bonaparte moves towards at the end of "Guests of the Nation" an essential feature for the narrator, who uses his disillusionment to potentially stave off exclusionary violence. Perhaps even more than O'Connor, O'Faoláin struggled to find his voice reflected in the independent Irish nation of the 1920s and the 1930s. *Midsummer Night Madness* was proscribed by the censor, much to O'Faoláin's annoyance and dismay. Yet throughout this period, he could not bring himself to disavow De Valera and the idealism for which he had fought less than a decade earlier.

Nowhere was O'Faoláin's uncertainty more obvious than in his two biographies of De Valera published six years apart in the 1930s. *The Life Story of Eamon de Valera* (1933) offers a generous portrayal of the politician and hero of the 1916 Easter Uprising. Even in the first biography, which has an ameliorating tone, O'Faoláin gestures towards the dangers of exclusionary nationalism. In O'Faoláin's view, de Valera "[believed] firmly in his own people [and aimed] to give them as much political liberty as possible to develop and build on the nucleus of the old Gaelic-Christian civilisation," while remaining an "absolute nationalist" (107). In 1939, O'Faoláin published a second, more damning, portrait, entitled simply *De Valera*. That the latter biography was picked up by Penguin and printed in London, as opposed to the Dublin-based Talbot press that published the first biography, might explain some of the impetus in O'Faoláin's change of attitude. The shift in critical tone can be read through the increased skepticism towards De Valera's stature as an "absolute nationalist." Figures of "absolute nationalism" in *Midsummer Night Madness*, such as Edward Bradley in "The Patriot" or Stevey Long in "Midsummer Night Madness" and "The Death of Stevey Long," become caricatures of

revolutionary fervour. Like Jeremiah Donovan, the "absolute nationalist" in "Guests of the Nation," these figures deploy destructive tendencies in the name of the IRA.

The violence in "Midsummer Night Madness" is considerably less stark and immediate than in "Guests of the Nation," but the same anxiety about the future persists in the narration. John, the first-person narrator of O'Faoláin's story, must navigate a world of extremes. John is to stay at the local "Big House," which he has known since childhood as the home of Old Mad Henn—a folkloric figure rumoured to be a curmudgeonly womanizer. Henn and Stevey have formed an inharmonious love triangle with a girl named Gypsy, whose family name is Gammle. Gypsy has been impregnated by either Henn or Stevey and instead of taking responsibility for the child, Stevey decides to force Henn and Gypsy to marry. The story ends with a glimpse of Henn and Gypsy leaving Cork for a new life in Paris, baby in tow. The fate of the pair may be considerably less brutal than that of Hawkins and Belcher, but the essential question remains about who does and who does not belong in the independent Irish nation.

Much of the disillusionment that John feels in "Midsummer Night Madness" mirrors O'Faoláin's own ambivalences about the direction of Ireland under De Valera. Disillusioned as he was, in 1932 he was not able to sustain a polemical critique of the government or the republican movement because he still needed to understand his own position in Ireland as someone who participated in the Troubles. Not until the 1940s would O'Faoláin completely disavow Eamon de Valera and the Fianna Fáil government in a public manner.[11] To a certain

[11] Even this disavowal might be divided into two parts. The first was the rejection of De Valera as a capable leader, which can be best gleaned from O'Faoláin's 1945 essay on the Taoiseach: "If in some generation yet to come the hope of the title is ever fulfilled, then the future biographers of Eamon de Valera, far from finding his story dwindle into an anti-climax, far from seeing—as we now more and more tend to see—his procrastinations of 1922 and his long pause since 1932 as aimless and weak, his Constitution a mere scrap of paper in so far as it is constantly being blown aside by the harsh winds of reality, and his ambiguities in relation to

degree, O'Faoláin was still hopeful for the independent Irish nation to mold its ideals of romantic nationalism into an inclusive and collaborative effort to establish Ireland on the world stage. Julia O'Faoláin notes that the contradictions her father felt between his hopes for the nation and his disillusionment about the revolution led to "a fascination with feelings which could break down what he called 'the barriers of self'" (3-4). The divisiveness of the revolution suggests such barriers also point to national belonging. As Maurice Harmon argues, "O'Faoláin hoped for some sign of an emergence of a distinctive national culture…One phase of national evolution had ended, and he wanted to see the new phase begin, wanted to help create the conditions in which the national imagination could be defined in satisfying terms" (55). A slight reconfiguration, and suddenly the "barriers of self" become "barriers of national imagination." In "Midsummer Night Madness" barriers of national imagination occur along lines of belligerency. Henn and Stevey both curtail possible futures of inclusion for Ireland. To thwart these stark divisions, John seeks out ambivalence as a position for negotiating values of the nation away from exclusionary violence.

Whereas ambivalence was a point of departure from disillusionment in "Guests of the Nation," "Midsummer Night Madness" begins by writing it onto the very fabric of the land. The opening paragraph of the story depicts John leaving the city and its "thousand tiny beacons winking and blinking beneath [him] to their starry counterparts above" ("MNM" 9). With the "Tans in their roaring Lancia-patrol cars" patrolling the city streets (9), John looks forward to the "open fields…[drawing] in a long draught of their sweetness, their May-month sweetness, as

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Great Britain irritating if not dishonourable…that we may all eat our words with the worms….Nobody can now say whether Mr. De Valera has written the word EIRE on his coffin or his cenotaph" (320). By 1951, in the second part of his disavowal, O'Faoláin had broadened the scope of his attack to the government: "Republicanism, we see at last, never did work…it broke in de Valera's hands" ("The Dáil and Bishops" 440).

only a man could who had been cooped up for months past under one of those tiny roofs, seeing the life of men and women only through a peep-hole" (9). Adjectives signal an initial dichotomy between the city and the country: the houses are tiny with limited perspective while the fields are open and afford "long draughts" of the sweet air. In this opening paragraph John replicates one of the foundational mythos of the republican revolutionaries that became an integral version of the ideal Ireland that de Valera outlined in his 1943 St. Patrick's Day Speech.

The co-ordinating conjunction "yet" that begins the second paragraph of the story undermines the dichotomy established in the opening. John turns away from the idyllic scenes: "though the countryside was very sweet to [him] after all those months among the backyards, worried and watchful lest [he] should run into a chance patrol or raiding-party, [he] kept listening, not to the chorus of the birds, not to the little wind in the bushes by the way, but nervously to every distant, tiny sound" (9). Where the opening paragraph depicted a land of abundance, the first sentence of the second paragraph infuses that abundance with a sense of danger. Like Bonaparte's reflections at the end of O'Connor's story, the ambivalence in the opening of the "Midsummer Night Madness" sets a template for negotiating this new Ireland from a space in between extremes. John looks back and remembers that, although he is annoyed that he has to set Stevey straight, he was looking forward to getting out of the city: "there was enough romance left in the revolution for me to be excited at the thought that I was to stay at a house I had known and wondered at since childhood" (10). Staying at the Big House of Old Henn primes John for his position as negotiator, since he feels the need to treat his host with a certain degree of decorum and civility.

The story that John recounts in the rest of "Midsummer Night Madness" details the move away from the romance of the revolution towards a more complicated understanding of

belonging to the nation. As the narrator, John consistently positions himself as an observer caught between loyalty and sympathy, just as in the opening paragraphs he positions himself ambivalently between attitudes towards the land. His descriptions of Henn Hall oscillate between nostalgic admiration for its grandiosity and a mild repugnance at the state of decay it has fallen into during the war. The same discrepancies between expectation and reality depicted in the opening paragraphs extend to the descriptions of the house. At first, John remembers that "it was a wonderful old house to look at, and often we looked at it far off, sitting up on its own high hill, its two gable chimneys like two cocked ears and all its empty windows gazing wide-eyed down the river-valley" (11). The powerful gaze of the windows, a kind of panopticon atop the townlands in John's memory, shifts to the vulnerability of exposure in the next passage: "on my left, high as two men, rose the estate walls that had once kept the whole countryside at bay but could not now (gapped and crumbling as they were) keep a fox or a chicken in" (13). Past grandeur has fallen into disrepair, as the interior rooms are stately in space but "battered and unkempt like a tramp" (21). John's unease about the decay of Henn's home comes not as a wish to return to a pre-revolutionary Ireland, but as a desire to move away from a simplistic discourse about the means and ends of independence.

Over the course of the narrative, John moves away from his initial position as an observer of disillusionment to an active inhibitor of revolutionary violence from the position of ambivalence. By the climax of the story, Stevey and his battalion have burned a nearby estate, owned by the Blakes, and have marched on Henn Hall. John, recognizing the selfishness behind Stevey's maneuver, stands on the front steps between the battalion and Old Henn, who curses the soldiers from the doorway (39). Just as the spatial positioning of the characters in the different sections of "Guests of the Nation" reflected their changing relationships to one another, John's

station between Henn and Stevey represents a movement towards ambivalence as an active manifestation of his disillusionment. John takes up this ambivalent position in order to intervene as a negotiator between Henn's ignorance and Stevey's ferocity.

John recognizes that in moving to this ambivalent middle position he maintains some kind of stasis that averts, at least momentarily, catastrophic violence. This aversion relates to a deeper understanding that the violence proposed by Stevey has little to do with liberation or anticolonial struggle. Certainly, Henn is a descendent of colonial rule and he hardly demonstrates an awareness of the pain and poverty that Empire has enacted on the Irish. Nonetheless, John understands the burning of Henn Hall to be an act of exclusion based upon selfish definitions of who does and who does not belong to Ireland. After all, the very reason that Stevey has marched on Henn has to do with the love-triangle with Gypsy. John wishes to seek out an ambivalent position because the two extremes he faces, Henn and Stevey, share a capriciousness about ideals and belonging. Neither man claims responsibility for Gypsy's pregnancy. Stevey excludes Gypsy in the same manner that he excludes Henn because the Anglo-Irish man "ruined her" (39). Stevey's feigned indignity at the behaviour of Henn and Gypsy is just that: an act meant conveniently to solve a problem that he in part created.

To John, Gypsy reflects the failure of republican ideals because she is excluded from the nation despite never being an "enemy" in the same fashion as the British. The real reason that Stevey attempts to rid himself of Gypsy has everything to do with the fact that her real name, Gammle, "was well known in North Cork for a tinker tribe…a name few decent men or women ever bore" (29). Tinker is a pejorative term for Irish Travellers, an indigenous nomadic people. Jim MacLaughlin notes that "Irish Travellers…were…prone to the lowering of the thresholds of tolerance that separated them out from settled communities in the emerging Irish nation" (137).

Travellers were deemed to be "inferior to the propertied classes because they literally had no territorial stake in the nation-state" (137). In other words, Gypsy, like Henn, does not adhere to the ideal Irish citizen desired for independence. Stevey's rejection of the child is in turn a rejection of certain futures of citizenship in the independent nation. Just as Jeremiah Donovan refuses to negotiate values of belonging, Stevey's ideals allow no room for change. One may be forgiven for wishing to exclude Henn from the independent nation as he is, in many ways, a reprehensible figure. Yet, beyond trying to walk a tightrope between two competing forces of power, Gypsy's only crime appears to be the fact that she belongs to a group of people who hold alternative views of property, settlement, and livelihood.

John recognizes that he has sided with a force which allows for the capriciousness of a man like Stevey to dictate belonging. As such, he wishes to move away from a dichotomy that can so easily negate people like Gypsy as citizens of the nation. Ultimately his recognition meets its limits by the end of the story. Gypsy and Henn are seen leaving Cork for Paris; Henn Hall has been burned to the ground. For a moment, John imagines the pair walking gaily in Paris, only to turn away because he finds the thoughts painful: "Life is too pitiful in these recapturings of the *temps perdu*, these brief intervals of reality" ("MNM" 43). The personal memories of the first-person narration allow for the recognition of disillusionment, but not much else. Yet ambivalence, as a result of disillusionment, provides John with a way of proceeding. Through ambivalence, he can imagine a world outside of the insular strands of Republican nationalism that create strict boundaries of inclusion. John at least begins to think about negotiating a possible future in which Gypsy and Henn, or rather Gammle and Henn, are not forced out of the country. From a position of ambivalence, John, and indeed O'Faoláin, imagine a future where Gammle's child might be included, might belong, in Ireland.

The narrators of both "Guests of the Nation" and "Midsummer Night Madness" are thus transitional figures. The ambivalence that Bonaparte and John gravitate towards has roots in the Troubles. These stories, however, are not merely historical snapshots in time. Ambivalence demonstrates the authors' growing frustration with the direction of the independent nation under De Valera. Just as the state was transitioning towards everyday public policy, O'Faoláin and O'Connor were both transitioning towards the role of public intellectual and engaged citizen. Like John's attempts at negotiating the existence of Henn, Stevey, and Gypsy, O'Faoláin and O'Connor considered their ambivalent position as an integral function to the way they conceived of critique and of imagining an alternative version of Ireland for the future.

Killing Time and the Ambivalence of the Anglo-Irish

For O'Faoláin and O'Connor, the ambivalent spaces in their short stories provided a glimpse at what it might mean to find a new voice within independent Ireland, a voice that could counter the exclusionary and isolationist politics that was overtaking the political climate of the 1930s. From a position of ambivalence, they could negotiate the boundaries of permissibility in order to alter the ideals of a future Ireland away from exclusionary politics. The Anglo-Irish in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, though, already inhabit that space of ambivalence and have done so for some time. Rather than being able to forge new spaces of belonging, the residents and guests at Danielstown exhibit personas of calm serenity that ultimately leaves them unprepared for the shock of exclusionary violence, which comes in the final lines of the novel as the Big House burns to the ground. The personal movement towards an ambivalent position between "Irish" and "Other" does not work for the Anglo-Irish, who have always existed closer to the latter on at least two fronts—not wholly British and not wholly Irish. John and Bonaparte

can move away from Republican nationalism, or the strict label "Irish," towards a more neutral form of citizenship in independent Ireland, but the Naylors and Lois Farquar in Bowen's novel are not able to move towards that same middle ground. Bowen exposes the limitations of this tactic of personal disavowal. Instead, she searches for a way to use the inherent ambivalence of the Anglo-Irish presence in Ireland as an opportunity to gain perspectives on post-independence identity. She imagines new Anglo-Irish citizens as negotiators between neighbouring nations as they entered into a new set of diplomatic relations.

Bowen's position as a part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy granted her particular perspectives on Ireland and the Irish, which for her resonated with a general need to control personae. After all, Anglo-Irish life arose from the contradictions between "theatrical bravado and alienation, pride of property and sense of deracination, repining and self-parody" (Lee vii). The problem for the Anglo-Irish in *The Last September* is that they do not recognize their existence in Ireland as relying on adjustable personas. Instead, they insist upon living as though the revolutionary war looming just outside their gates were nothing but some slight nuisance. Even Lois and her cousin Laurence, who often sides with the Irish point of view, can never quite shake the fact that they are stuck in a place that stands both inside and outside Ireland. Bowen turns to a third-person narrator to move beyond the personal limitations of her characters who are trapped in the stasis of their personas.

Much of the critical writing on Bowen has been interested in the way that history continuously haunts the characters and settings of her fiction. With regards to the short fiction, Phyllis Lassner argues that "the past that forms the central concerns of Elizabeth Bowen's stories is her own Anglo-Irish history. Her readers have consistently pointed to the horrors of Ireland's endless civil strife as the inspiration for Bowen's tales of terror and to her dual identity as the

source of her insights into two cultures" (4). In Bowen's own words, Ireland "is a country of ruins" (*Bowen's Court* 15), an insight which Hermione Lee suggests arises from the "Ascendency's fanatical commitment to property, their formidable matriarchs, decaying Big Houses, and declining gentry" (ix). Bowen often chooses the past as a framework for the characters in her novels. Unearthed *billet-doux* in *A World of Love* (1954) signal the disintegration of an Anglo-Irish family. Movements between the past and present structure *The House in Paris* (1935), which Maria DiBattista reads alongside *The Death of the Heart* (1938) as "fictions of inheritance" (222). Even if the characters of *The Last September* pretend otherwise, history still haunts the walls, portraits, and locked bookcases of the Danielstown Big House. "Bowen's addiction to personification creates the sense that every object has a psyche," Maud Ellmann writes of the difference between Bowen and her friend Virginia Woolf as novelists (6); in *The Last September*, that psyche can be described as in decay.

Yet for all of the haunted objects and impending doom knocking at the gates of Danielstown, *The Last September* is also a novel with a deep anxiety about the future. Even in Bowen's novels that deal directly with the consequential relationship between the past and the present, the future remains on the minds of the characters. In *The House in Paris*, for example, a game of card reading leads young Leopold to announce that he wishes the knaves be thrown out since "it's the future [he] wants to know" (*HP* 63). *A World of Love* ends ambiguously at an airport, the Montefort family implicitly pondering what the future might hold for their disappearing class. Bowen, in her monograph *English Novelists*, suggests obliquely that great novelists are not tied to the present or the past. Instead, a great novel elucidates the way that lasting human essentials "run through all experience, independent of time" (*EN* 8). Reminiscent

of E.M. Forster's methodology for his Cambridge lectures on the novel form,[12] Bowen imagines that literature can have something to say for future generations of readers not bound to historical context. Although this view of literature primarily allows her to cover a great swathe of canonical English novelists from the seventeenth century onwards, it also suggests that the concerns of the future are worth pursuing in interpretations of her novels.

One reason that less attention has been given to this future-oriented anxiety in *The Last September* may be due to the desire of the Anglo-Irish characters to remain outside time. Nicola Darwood suggests that the Naylors and their friends can be considered as "an often childlike body of people who appear to remain generally ignorant (or innocent) of political issues throughout 1920" (24). The false calmness of the Naylors and their guests protects their sensibilities from the harsh reality that the Irish war for independence posed both a physical and an existential crisis for the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Yet they show a perpetual concern for Lois' future, which tends to belie the calmness that the Naylors otherwise work continually to evoke.

The options initially presented to Lois appear rather limited and in all cases amount to detachment from a future in Ireland. On the one hand, the Naylors frequently press on Lois the idea of art school. On the other hand, Lois flirts with the notion of marrying Gerald Lesworth, a British soldier stationed in the local battalion. Gerald makes the appearances of the world an easier place to navigate for Lois, because he "is naïve enough to think the good guys can be firmly distinguished from the bad guys" (Ellmann 57). Gerald cannot comprehend that the very presence of the Anglo-Irish, of Lois and the Naylors, complicates such a simple dichotomy. In

[12] Forster posed the issue metaphorically: "Time, all the way through, is to be our enemy. We are to visualize the English novelists not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room—all writing their novels simultaneously" (27).

that sense, Gerald represents the British in a similar fashion to the way that Jeremiah Donovan and Stevey Long represent the Irish. Lady Naylor opposes the marriage on the grounds that Gerald is not of the appropriate class, and she actively seeks to end the engagement. She succeeds in disrupting the marriage plans but one cannot help but feel that the economic and class concerns are covers for the danger that attends marrying a British soldier in 1920s Ireland. This reading affords Lady Naylor a degree of political awareness, although to maintain her persona she must displace this awareness onto romantic affairs. The inability for Lady Naylor to make direct approach to her uncertain existence in Ireland underscores the anxiety that Lois feels but cannot quite name. As such, Lois looks for ways to disrupt the personas that maintain the hyphenated existence of the Anglo-Irish at Danielstown. To her, such existence creates a sense of paralysis, which affirms Ellmann's point that the atmosphere at Danielstown is "clenched to a breaking-point…the novel abounds with images of nets and traps" (55). Indeed, tennis parties soothe worries and provide entertainment but they also show that the Ascendancy are merely killing time.

Lois' potential for disruptive behaviour often arises in the way that she looks to break down the personas of her Anglo-Irish hosts. One definitive instance of her disruptive behaviour touches on the looming dangers of political, social, and cultural exclusion. After Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency arrive as guests at Danielstown, Lois occasions to gossip about buried guns on the grounds:

> Three of the men on the place here swear there are guns buried in the lower plantation. Michael Keelan swears he was going through there, late, and saw men digging. I asked him, 'What were they like?" and he said, 'The way they would be,' and I said, why didn't he ask them what they were doing, and he said 'Sure,

> why would I; didn't I see them digging, and they with spades?' So it appears he fled back the way he had come. (*LS* 29)

Sir Richard Naylor, patriarch of the Danielstown estate, responds to Lois' gossip with reprimand. He does not want to hear of these stories because he "will not have the men talking, and at all accounts [he] won't have them listened to" (29). The reprimand is a form of denial. Sir Richard writes off the story as nonsense and simply suggests these men were Michael's friends. Michael's elusiveness in responding to Lois, at least in her version of the conversation, hints at the actuality of the guns. The "way they would be" elliptically affirms the unspoken fear in Sir Richard's reprimand: Michael foretells the end of the novel, when Danielstown is burned to the ground.

Fear exists in ellipsis throughout the novel, which suggests that Lois's disruptive behaviour is an attempt to break out of a persona that only accelerates the erasure of the Anglo-Irish class. Ireland and the exclusionary violence of revolution infringe upon Danielstown, a place that appears dilapidating around its outer edges, especially its stone wall. Just as Lady and Sir Richard Naylor displace their fear outside direct political commentary, the Anglo-Irish consistently avoid saying just what they mean; as Neil Corcoran points out, even "the name 'Cork' itself is elided in the novel" (321). Ellipses also manifest typographically, especially in the brief seventh chapter of the first part of the novel. Over the duration of roughly ten pages, a total of fifteen ellipses cut the conversations of the characters short. The chapter features Francie and Hugo Montmorency talking at cross-purposes about Lois's potential fancy for Gerald, while Lady Naylor wishes to refute the possibility of engagement altogether, since Lois ought not to marry a "subaltern" (*LS* 79). As was the case with Sir Richard's ardent response to Lois's gossip, discussion and conversation persistently fall off and are left unfinished or unsatisfactory.

The inability of the Anglo-Irish hosts to communicate and connect with their guests and with themselves exemplifies the problem of their ambivalence. Overtures made to the British soldiers and guests at Danielstown only serve to indicate the disconnect felt by the Anglo-Irish. At several points in the narrative the Anglo-Irish and the British seem to be lost in cultural translation. For example, when Gerald first arrives for a party at Danielstown he remarks how nice it is for his hosts to forget his Englishness as a member of the "jolly old army of occupation" (49). One of the guests, Mrs Hartigan refuses to accept these terms: "one wouldn't like to call you *that*" (49). Yet what Mrs. Hartigan might like to call Gerald lacks definition, just not *that*. British military presence creates a rift in the Anglo-Irish understanding of their place in Ireland and in Irish history. Bowen's own duelling sense of allegiance between Britain and Ireland aligns this division with the failure of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy to establish a new position within Ireland as their old way of life disappears (Jordan 8). Mrs Hartigan and Gerald are separated by the terms they use in their dialogue. "Speech is what characters *do to each other*," Bowen proclaimed in her "Notes on Writing a Novel" (*The Mulberry Tree* 41). Apparently, the characters at Danielstown do not do much. Lois seems to recognize that the position upheld by the elliptical presence of Lady Naylor and Sir Richard cannot be sustained, since it only serves to underscore the "demise of the Protestant Ascendancy" (Jordan 49). Yet her disruptive behaviour, while perhaps attempting to negotiate a future in Ireland, ultimately cannot connect the two ends of her hyphenated, ambivalent existence in the Irish nation.

Both possibilities for the future presented to Lois throughout the novel seem to increase her sense of disconnection from Ireland. Even before Lady Naylor intervenes, Lois is less than convinced that she should marry Gerald. To Lois, marriage amounts to a kind of *pro forma*; when, halfway through the novel, Gerald kisses her for the first time, Lois' reaction is at best

desultory: “so that was being kissed: just an impact, with inside blankness” (*LS* 127). By the time news reaches Danielstown of Gerald’s brutal execution in a roadside ambush, Lois has already relinquished any lingering ideas of a future with the soldier. Her reaction to the news amounts to little more than a shrug. Lady Naylor has at this stage already successfully impeded the engagement but Lois too has come to the realization that an existence in Ireland with Gerald has been excluded from her by outside forces. His death only punctuates that realization. Simply disrupting the personas of calm serenity at Danielstown does not represent liberation from the ambivalence that paralyzes the decaying Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. After all, Lois’ disruptions are just another kind of front.

At the center of Lois’ disruptions of the Naylors’ supposed political ignorance, demonstrated by their refusal to comment directly on the realities of the war beyond their gates, lies a romanticized version of the “us versus them” dichotomy of revolutionary violence. The excitement of revolution offers another avenue away from the Big House, not a form of belonging to the independent nation soon to arrive. While the other guests take their post-dinner tea on the front steps, Lois wishes to go for walks on the edge of the property. In a certain sense, the desire to keep finding the fringes of safety is a movement into the core of her ambivalence. And like John and Bonaparte, this movement arises from disillusionment. Lois almost replicates the movement of John towards the position of negotiator, able to grace the fringes of danger while also interacting with colonial power. Unlike the narrators of O’Faoláin’s and O’Connor’s stories though, Lois lacks political foresight. A movement towards ambivalence from the position of the Anglo-Irish cannot be considered on the same terms as that from Republican nationalists. Naïveté, not political disruptiveness, ultimately characterizes Lois’ dalliances with the impending forces of the revolution. Her story about the guns being buried in the lower

plantation, after all, bears all the hallmarks of adventure. Buried like treasure, the guns represent a secret to be uncovered. Adventure and mystery are deeply privileged ways of framing a war for independence. Like the Naylors, who are not prepared for the burning of their home, Lois' persona of youthful rebellion cannot match the realities of exclusionary violence.

Lois experiences this distinction with shocking abruptness when, while on a walk with her friend Marda and Hugo Montmorency, she encounters a revolutionary soldier in the old mill. The IRA footman, startled, ironically, by the intrusion into his hiding place, makes the threat of exclusion clear: "it is time…that yourselves gave up walking if yez have nothing better to do, yez had better keep within the house while y'have it" (181). The typographical distinction made in the representation of the Cork accent illustrates the clear division between the Irish and the Anglo-Irish, who are never represented with such verbal affectations. Lois' immediate response to the threat is to retreat into the most readily available form of safety: she thinks that she "must marry Gerald" (182). The soldier shatters this illusion too; the gun he holds accidentally discharges and wounds Marda's hand. In many ways, this event makes up Lois' mind for her. She leaves for art school by the end of the novel. Although the exclusionary violence may be less brutal than the acts depicted in "Guests of the Nation" and "Midsummer Night Madness," or even the murder of Gerald, the result is the same. For Bowen, Lois's move towards ambivalence allows her to break out of one particular persona, but she lacks the wherewithal for it to amount to anything other than an impossible fantasy of belonging.

The incident at the mill also aligns Lois and Marda with the silence of the Naylors and the other Anglo-Irish guests at the estate. Before the actual gunshot, the scene shifts to Hugo, who has been waiting outside the mill for Marda and Lois to return. Hugo thinks of the impending exclusion that only takes on more certainty after the gunshot: "the mill behind

affected him like a sense of the future; an unpleasant sensation of being tottered over. Split light, like hands, was dragged past to the mill-race, clawed like hands at the brink and went down in destruction" (182). When Hugo reacts to the gunshot and finds Marda wounded and Lois jolted, he naturally wants an explanation. Yet Marda and Lois refuse to acknowledge that they had been shot at by an IRA soldier because they "swore" not to say anything (183). The curious refusal protects the identity of the soldier while also shielding Lois and Marda from having to acknowledge that their time in Ireland is up. Exclusion coincides with silence and absence. After all, the gunshot is narrated as an intrusion of sound, "making rings in the silence" (183). Where the Anglo-Irish who are excluded must retreat into the silence, into the absence, the narrator takes on the responsibility of communication.

Although external to the story world, the third-person omniscient narrator of *The Last September* takes on the characteristics of someone who, as Lee attests, can "diagnose [the Anglo-Irish] relation to history" (xi). Able to slip seamlessly into the idiom of any character, in a similar fashion to what Hugh Kenner terms the "Uncle Charles Principle" in Joyce's writing,[13] the narrator does more work than simply reporting the events of the novel. Since the Anglo-Irish characters refuse to acknowledge their fear verbally, that task falls to the narrator. When, for example, Francie Montmorency gossips that Lois and Gerald have made a match, the fear that washes over Lady Naylor is articulated through descriptive narration: "Lady Naylor was forced into open country" (*LS* 79). For a moment, Lady Naylor must navigate the frailty of her persona. Being open to the elements plagues the physical building of the Big House, with its large

[13] Kenner defines the Uncle Charles Principle as when "the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's" (18). The technique appears to combine a complex version of free indirect discourse with stream-of-consciousness and psycho-narration.

"curtainless" windows exposed to the looming danger of the revolution just beyond the walls of the estate (7). In other words, "openness" in the novel is tantamount to vulnerability.

Narration prominently intrudes upon the personas put on by the Anglo-Irish, often through sound, as exemplified by the narrated gunshot. Rooks, the blackbirds that nest in the attics of Danielstown, tend to cry out at unexpected moments (16; 73). These birds similarly highlight the openness, and thus vulnerability, of the Big House. Perhaps most exemplary of the effect that sound has in the novel is the "thin iron gate" that welcomes the Montmorencys at the beginning of the novel and lets out the IRA soldiers that have torched Danielstown at the end (3; 303). The mirroring of the "twanging" sound in both instances highlights the fact that the narrator has long understood the trajectory of the novel: welcome turns to exclusion. While Lady and Sir Richard Naylor can only look at their burning home indirectly against the silhouette of the mountain (303), the twang of the gate punctuates the complete collapse of their false serenity. Unlike any of the characters, the narrator has the prescience to understand what will happen to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

Taking Dorrit Cohn's point that "narrative fiction is the only literary genre, as well as the only kind of narrative, in which the unspoken thoughts, feelings, perceptions of a person other than the speaker can be portrayed" (7), the intrusions of the narrator in *The Last September* are against the collective class and not just the individual. All the pretentions of indifference, of safety and calmness, are laid bare by the narrator's ability to render the collective thought processes of the guests at the various parties that the Naylors host, as when Gerald first arrives at Danielstown for dinner: "they thought how daring it was of Mr. Lesworth to come so far to a party at all" (*LS* 59). Daring because dangerous: the roads that Gerald traverses to attend a party will become the same roads of his execution. "They" signals the collective fear of the guests.

The Anglo-Irish are perhaps not as aloof to political realities as their outward gestures indicate. However, whatever understanding of the situation they do possess is never acted upon to forge a new way of belonging in Ireland after their inevitable attrition. Their ambivalence leads to stagnation. Therefore, the narrator has the insight and ability to "diagnose" the Anglo-Irish because narration can intrude into the thoughts that go on behind the personas.

Bowen once remarked that she felt most at home in the middle of the Irish Sea (Corcoran 12), which in some ways illustrates the issue facing Lois. Her ambivalence remains deeply rooted in a disappearing version of Ireland. Being at home between Britain and Ireland demonstrates an altogether different kind of ambivalence—one not wedded to a past but instead to a future. Transnational belonging for Bowen reveals a type of citizenship that can claim authority over the negotiation between neighbouring nations with a difficult past and, as she was to learn during the Second World War, a difficult future. The difference between the character and the writer seems to be in the agency of matters; Lois whimpers away in part because she is made to realize that Ireland has excluded her. Although Bowen may not have the same deep connections to the independent Irish state as O'Faoláin or O'Connor, her work for the British Ministry of Information as well as her continued interest in the Irish literary scene indicate that she was not simply willing be to excluded from the nation.[14] One may trace Bowen more onto

[14] Eibhear Walshe's edited collection of Bowen's Irish writings suggests that much of her review work focused on books concerned with the Anglo-Irish presence in Ireland, as in her review of Brian Fitzgerald's *The Anglo-Irish* for the *Observer* (1952) or of Joseph Hone's *The Moores of Moore Hall* for the *New Statesman and Nation* (1939). However, she was an avid reader of Joyce and reviewed a number of critical studies of his works for *The Bell* and *Tatler*, amongst other publications. Her penchant for reviewing the work of friends meant that she also wrote about O'Faoláin's biography of Hugh O'Neill, the Anglo-Gaelic Lord cum Irish patriot. Bowen praised the biography, concluding that "Mr O'Faoláin's study must stand or fall by the importance he succeeds in giving its subject—and to my mind it stands triumphantly: shrewdness and a perception on the poetic level are equally present in the interpretation" ("Weeping Earl" 101).

the narrator than onto Lois or any of the other Anglo-Irish characters. Lois falters at the recognition of her ambivalent existence in Ireland; the narrator recognizes the ambivalence of the characters and grapples with a total understanding of its place in their identity. Commissary and interlocutor, the narrator of *The Last September*, like Bowen herself, speaks into the future in which Danielstown has already become a ghost.

Conclusion

Biographical insights contextualize the different points of view separating Bowen's novel and the stories of O'Faoláin and O'Connor. The colloquial authority of first-person narrators in "Midsummer Night Madness" and "Guests of the Nation" arises in part from the fact that both authors had first hand experiences in the war of independence and civil war. Bowen, on the other hand, was not living in Ireland in 1920, the setting of *The Last September*. Similarly, Bowen's Court, the ostensible inspiration for the fictional Danielstown, was never burned in the Troubles—Bowen was forced to sell the house in 1959 and it was demolished by the new proprietor. These biographical insights also contextualize the different ways that each author views the political potential for ambivalence in the face of nationalism. Who benefits from ambivalence and how differs greatly across the three texts. O'Faoláin and O'Connor see ambivalence as an opportunity to disassociate from their old beliefs in the hopes of negotiating a more inclusive nation. While Bowen also views ambivalence opportunistically, her characters cannot reach a middle ground in Ireland with the same success as Bonaparte or John. Lois and the Naylors dramatize the failures of ambivalence for those who do not begin within the parameters of ideal citizens.

Across each text, narrative form introduces a possibility to read these writers of the 1930s as already engaging with the contestations and negotiations of citizenship in advance of De Valera's constitutional reform. Even before De Valera had set about writing the document to replace the Free State Constitution, these works highlight the problem facing the independent nation in its efforts to define citizenship. O'Faoláin and O'Connor identify the connections between the exclusionary violence of the revolution—the execution of Hawkins and Belcher, the forced exile of Gammle and Old Henn—and the isolationist policies of the independent state. Censorship, for example, is intellectually isolating in O'Faoláin's view because it cuts off ideas that run counter to ideals of De Valera and Fianna Fáil. Where Bowen differs most from O'Faoláin and O'Connor is in her recognition that exclusionary violence cannot be undone through negotiation. Nonetheless, even as they all deal with exclusionary politics, ambivalence gestures to the possibilities found in creating spaces of permissibility.

While these narratives do not correlate directly to constitutional elements, they provide a point of departure for thinking about the ways that narrative form frames the negotiation of values in relation to Irish citizenship. The difficulty of determining inclusion and exclusion in a story like "Guests of the Nation," after all, prompts the kinds of questions that future writers will ask about the division between the ideal and the permitted citizen. Of course, these narratives in their own way offer particular and minute versions of what citizenship can look like. As O'Faoláin was wont to tell her on occasion, Bowen's field of vision with regards to the Irish was rather narrow. Imagining the new Anglo-Irish position as one of citizen interlocutor between two nations has very limited applicability. Beyond the specifics though, Bowen hits on a problem about how Ireland approaches citizens with multiple national allegiances. This question becomes integral for the Irish diaspora as well as the sustained emigration rates, especially to Britain, after

the Second World War. Similarly, the fears of exclusion in “Midsummer Night Madness” and “Guests of the Nation” are rather dampened for the narrators when compared to the Old Woman or Gypsy. Women in both stories appear much more vulnerable to this kind of violence: the Old Woman and Gypsy are both treated as curiosities by Republican nationalists as opposed to potential citizens of the nation. Nonetheless, O’Faoláin, O’Connor, and Bowen represent the fact that Irish writers have always been engaged in reimagining the stipulations of belonging within Ireland. The desire to reframe ambivalence as something potentially positive, and not a form of weakness in the state, provides a platform for future generations of writers to contest citizenship. Rather than imagining the shift from revolution to governance as the calcification of nationalist ideals, all three writers imagine the shift as from struggle to negotiation to contestation. Narrative ambivalences, and those who knowingly operate from ambivalent positions, create a space where negotiation supersedes obedience and adherence to certain ideals.

Chapter Two:

Without Prophecies: Narrative Fiction and the Limitations of Irish Constitutional Law

Irish literature boasts rich interactions with the law, from Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812) to Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Last Heir of Castle Connor" (1838), from Frank O'Connor's "The Majesty of the Law" to Mary Lavin's "The Will" (1943). Narratives involving the forms and functions of the judiciary in Ireland since 1922, however, have been less popular. Nonetheless, a handful of novels help frame some of the central questions about the role that the courts play in negotiating the definitions of citizenship in Ireland. Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing* (1992), and Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River* (1996), dramatize the shifting nature of the judiciary in Ireland from De Valera's 1937 Irish Constitution to the end of the twentieth century. Ideal citizenship offers conclusive definitions of belonging and fidelity to a nation that wrought independence from colonial power. Yet the very nature of a republican democracy recognizes a certain amount of malleability in society, hence the presence of an amending formula in the constitution. The interpretive clout held by the courts in relation to the constitution greatly increased after the late 1960s and this newfound emphasis on interpretive powers coincided with greater access to, and use of, the amending formula in the Irish constitution. These novels explore the imaginative impetus to reframe the constitution by favouring the inconclusiveness of individual experiences over the conclusiveness of narratives about ideal citizenship.

Flann O'Brien's satirical, metafictional novel offers a point of departure for considering the limitations of the law when it comes to defining new forms of belonging to the nation. *At Swim-Two-Birds* takes as its political underpinning the issue of ambivalence facing De Valera as

he shaped his vision for the independent Irish state in the 1930s. De Valera wanted to distance Ireland further from Britain while recognizing that he simply could not do away with some colonial structures, such as the legal codes and precedents of Westminster. For O'Brien, this ambivalence provided ample fodder to lampoon notions of authority. *At Swim-Two-Birds* includes a ludicrous kangaroo court narrative, which builds around the real dangers posed by an authority that desires conclusiveness rather than the possibility of negotiation through inconclusiveness. In one of many narrative levels, a moralizing novelist named Dermot Trellis attempts to write a novel about sin in Ireland. His characters wish not to perform the vile deeds he sets out for them. By way of retaliation, the characters drug Dermot's porter; while the author sleeps, they hire his illegitimate son, Orlick Trellis, to write a story about Dermot's trial and execution. The conclusiveness desired in the courtroom narrative ultimately fails in the face of proliferating narrative levels: Dermot wakes up and burns the remaining pages of Orlick's novel in a repudiation of novelistic authority. As M. Keith Booker contends, "O'Brien's comedy is not silly or gratuitous, but participates in important social, political, and cultural issues in his contemporary Ireland" (7). For Flann O'Brien, the conclusiveness of authority has political underpinnings that only the imaginative possibilities of fiction can undermine. So despite its distinct difference in tone and style, *At Swim-Two-Birds* presents the fundamental tension between the conclusiveness of the courtroom and the inconclusiveness of individuals that forms the backbone of the novels by Colm Tóibín and Edna O'Brien.

Eamon Redmond, the conservative High Court judge at the heart of Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*, exemplifies the personal crisis arising from the failure of rigidly held beliefs about the moral primacy of the nation. The novel oscillates between Eamon's past and his present, which highlights how he was "destined from birth to uphold traditional republican values" (Harte,

"History" 58). Eamon favours the rigid lines of infrastructure over things unknowable or imagined. When his partner Carmel dies, Eamon realises that he never really understood the women in his life, especially his wife and his daughter, Niamh. Published more than half a decade after *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Tóibín's novel sets the questions of authority that Flann O'Brien raised in relief against the tensions between ideal citizenship and the modal lives of permitted citizens. Eamon's conservative views of the nation uphold a version of Irishness that cannot be reconciled with the experiences of Carmel and Niamh. At this impasse, Eamon searches for new perceptions of the world that contrast with the conclusiveness of the law. As Eamon's reading habits change and he begins to read novels instead of just case law and precedent, his views of the law subsequently shift towards inconclusiveness.

While Edna O'Brien holds a similarly heuristic view towards the possibilities afforded by narrative fiction, she reads the Supreme Court not as divergent from the narratives of citizens but instead as the legitimizing arbiter of these narratives. Based on the *Attorney General vs. X and others* case that drew international attention in the early 1990s, *Down by the River* critiques the reading capabilities of the Supreme Court as limited by a desire to form conclusive definitions for the experiences of citizens. Rather than arbitration, O'Brien favours the ongoing, perhaps indefinite, process of the negotiation of constitutional worlds. The novel follows Mary McNamara, who travels to England in order to procure an abortion after her father rapes her. When the Irish authorities discover her plans, they serve an injunction based on the language of the Eighth Amendment, which banned abortion and outlined the responsibilities of the state to ensure an "equal right to life" for the mother and the unborn (Irish Const. Amend. 8). Mary returns to Ireland as a ward of the state. During her trial, Mary becomes the increasingly silent subject of a national conversation. On the one hand, she is the sinner who will be redeemed

through giving birth; on the other hand, she is a scapegoat used to deflect attention away from the problems of the patriarchal state. The Supreme Court case that challenges the nature of the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution attempts to tell the conclusive story about Mary's experiences—the case seeks to assent to one of two conclusions about her trauma, in effect defining her through that trauma. O'Brien's novel illustrates the way that the Supreme Court is limited to narratives that have conclusive endpoints of definition: Mary the redeemed sinner or Mary the scapegoat. For O'Brien, novels can enter into an imaginative plane that creates the seeds for amendments to the constitution because characters can resist rigid categories of definition.

Colm Tóibín and Edna O'Brien, in particular, position inconclusiveness as a trajectory towards imagining different ways to tell the stories of individual citizens in Ireland. These novelists recognize the functions that allow for the constitution to be, in the words of Basil Chubb, "normative" (60). Nonetheless, their novels reject the kind of liberal teleology that political, constitutional, and legal scholars map onto the nation, especially those writing at the onset of the so-called Celtic Tiger in the early 1990s. If the 1960s and the 1970s "[revealed] a court which complemented the 'agenda' Irish liberalism" (Murray 160), the passing of the Eighth Amendment in 1983, as will be discussed in relation to *Down by the River*, demonstrates that the same constitutional mechanisms could be used for reactionary or recalcitrant ideals. A liberal teleology of the Supreme Court tends to favour the courts as linchpins in the opening of society, which does not account for the Eighth Amendment nor does it explain how such questions about the constitution get to be asked in the Supreme Court in the first place. Edna O'Brien and Colm Tóibín show how that imagination to change comes from narratives about, in the words of the Irish lawyer Mary Redmond, the negotiation of "pluralism" in Irish society (45).

While *At Swim-Two-Birds* presents the terms of divergence between narrative inconclusiveness and judicial conclusiveness, *The Heather Blazing* and *Down by the River* gesture towards inconclusiveness as a potential form through which to imagine amendments to the constitution. Each novel positions inconclusiveness in constructive tension with the conclusiveness of the law. By coding the conclusiveness of the courts as incompatible with the experiences of individual citizens, these novels attempt to access the constitutional mechanism for inconclusiveness, which is implicit in the amending formula. As they are rather general terms, conclusiveness and inconclusiveness will have to be defined in relation to both the law and narrative forms more specifically. To begin with, conclusiveness will refer to the quality of closing up and bringing to an end through a single (or limited) point of sense-making. Inconclusiveness, conversely, suggests an endpoint that offers multiple, perhaps even infinite, possibilities of sense-making. In other words, conclusiveness defines that which comes before while inconclusiveness can have a future-oriented function.

Sense-making is one of the primary ways that law and literature scholars articulate the intersection between narrative fiction and the law. Anthony G. Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner offer the clearest articulation of the intersection between law and narrative: "the endless telling and retelling, casting and recasting is essential to the conduct of the law. It is how law's actors comprehend whatever series of events they make the subject of their legal actions" (110). Usually this sense-making occurs through Aristotelian organization of plot. Peter Brooks posits that because "narratives tend to make their endings appear inevitable since that is part and parcel of their meaning-making function," narrative fiction resonates with criminal justice ("Law Stories" 6). Verdicts, in this sense, validate one narrative of events over others; someone is guilty or someone is not guilty and this shapes the way that events are perceived in the law. As such,

the law favours conclusiveness, especially in criminal case law, tort law, or civil suits. Law and literature scholars focus on endings that create a single point of reference that provides meaning to everything preceding the conclusion.

In the configuration that most law and literature scholars contemplate, especially when they look to the American legal system, sense-making in narrative coincides with the law because it reads the world as inherently ordered and legible. "The world-view reflected in our case law," Jeffrey Miller suggests, "is founded in sacred and myth literature" (11). Miller borrows heavily from Northrop Frye's "archetypal criticism," which suggests a conception of narratives in the law as predicated on a mythopoeic drive for order. In discussing the doctrine of inevitable discovery in American Supreme Court rulings, Brooks reads the law as "[presupposing] an infinitely knowable world" and is therefore in the business of "retrospective prophecies" (16). For Brooks, Miller, Amsterdam, and Bruner, the law shares with narrative the desire to construct an understanding of experience through endings. Of course, the law also recognizes the possibility that some narratives, outcomes, and verdicts will be inconclusive—hence hung juries, courts of appeal, and suspended sentences are foreseeable outcomes in case law. Amendments hinge on this kind of inconclusiveness; they only exist because previous versions of constitutional law have proven inadequate. Within a social context, which is the context explored in these three novels, amendments can act as safety valves of inconclusiveness to allow future iterations of Ireland to change definitions of citizenship in order to better fit social norms.

The valve must close, though, because citizenship, as it sits adjacent to the sovereignty of the nation and the state, cannot remain inconclusive for fear of invalidating authority. Sense-making works more efficiently for the law when it results in conclusiveness; hence the law will

always subordinate inconclusiveness to unambiguous outcomes. This hierarchy manifests in the Irish constitution through the functions of the Supreme Court. According to the constitution, the Supreme Court holds "appellate jurisdiction from a decision of the Court of Appeal" (Irish Const. Art. 34.5.3). Through the rights of legal appeal, the article implicitly demonstrates an acknowledgement of possible inconclusiveness in the law. Decisions can be challenged as incorrect. At the same time, the Supreme Court posits a clear boundary for this inconclusiveness: the buck stops at the Supreme Court as the highest court of appeal. The ending of *The Heather Blazing* alludes to the fact that, with membership to the European Union and thus access to EU Courts such as that on Human Rights, the buck no longer actually stops with the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, this addition of European court systems only adds nuance to the tension between conclusiveness and inconclusiveness for legal definitions of citizenship in Ireland.

The appellate jurisdiction affords the Supreme Court the power to read and legitimate certain narratives of the nation. If, as Immanuel Wallerstein theorizes, "the history of nations…is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject," then the shift in the interpretive zeal of the Supreme Court during the late 1960s under Chief Justice Cearbhall O'Dalaig and Justice Brian Walsh rendered the highest court of appeal gatekeepers to the "project" of the nation, "in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness" (Balibar and Wallerstein 86). In other words, the courts arbitrate the official narratives of state ideals. Eamon Redmond and Mary McNamara, though in very different contexts, feel particularly strained by the limitations of the court as an arbiter of equivalent values for citizenship, especially since their experiences continuously rupture the validity of such conceptions of the nation. Eamon sees his paradigm of traditional republican

nationalism falter when viewed alongside the experiences of the women in his life; Mary's experiences are defined for her by the fight to achieve a liberal narrative of progression.

Part of the problem for both characters is that endings are read in the courts apocalyptically, to use Frank Kermode's term, in that they become ultimate judgements. The sense of the ending for the courts in both *The Heather Blazing* and *Down by the River*, indeed, even for *At Swim-Two-Birds*, is to find conclusiveness and finality. That apocalyptic endpoint highlights the way that the law, even in constitutional law that allows for some inconclusiveness, ultimately favours conclusiveness because it makes the world legible and inherently knowable. The very first sentence of the Irish Constitution, with its Catholic framework, is apocalyptic in its sense of an ending: "In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our *final end*, all actions both of men and States must be referred, We, the people of Éire, Humbly acknowledge all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial" (Irish Const. Preamble; emphasis added). The preamble affords another glimpse at the constitutional chronotope, one in which judges also become characters administering a state in preparation for the rapture. As will be seen in the discussion of *The Heather Blazing*, the judges must also swear an oath that legally binds them to uphold the word of God, much to Eamon's existential uncertainty. No matter what leeway may be exercised in the law, the move is always to return to a sense of teleological conclusiveness.

Rather than ending apocalyptically, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Heather Blazing*, and *Down by the River* end by elevating inconclusiveness above conclusiveness as a desirable outcome. In that sense, these novels necessarily highlight the fictiveness of the nation and the constitution. Kermode warns against the dangers involved in forgetting the fictiveness of fictions—when fictions become myth—because "its ideological expression is fascism; its practical consequence

the Final Solution" (103). Amending formulas are, in some ways, a recognition of fictiveness, without which a "democratic republic" takes on its more ironic connotation with authoritarian regimes. Despite the fits and starts of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, all three novels still maintain the sense-making that Kermode, Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur, and Peter Brooks all attribute to the structure and intention of narrative. Instead of an apocalyptic sense-making, in which a "final end" defines all that comes before, these novels search for inconclusiveness as a way of proceeding into an immediate and humanistic future. While the courts in each novel search for an ending that can lead to a "retrospective prophecy," the characters end at a point of departure into something unknown or new. Not bound to the conclusiveness of the law, characters as individual citizens are provided a space in which their experiences proliferate meaning. In other words, the courts legitimate or dismiss proposed changes to the equivalent values of Irish citizenship while the inconclusiveness of narrative fiction provides a space to negotiate the parameters of equivalent values.

Just as the terms provide a certain freedom from particular legal and political *telos*, conclusiveness versus inconclusiveness with regards to narrative allows for an emphasis on the overall trajectory of sense-making rather than on particular discursive functions. Inconclusiveness, after all, could refer to a number of possible narrative structures or rhetorical effects. Rhetorically, inconclusiveness may refer to uncertainty or ambiguity in meaning. Narratively, inconclusiveness might refer to any number of formal techniques including sideshadowing, "forking path" narratives, disnarration, or proxy narratives.[15] No one term or

[15] Gary Saul Morson defines sideshadowing in relation to foreshadowing: "whereas *fore*shadowing works by revealing apparent alternatives to be mere illusions, *side*shadowing conveys the sense that actual events might just as well not have happened" (601). David Bordwell, naturally using Jorge Luis Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths" as a springboard, offers a fairly comprehensive definition of forking-path narratives in his essay "Film Futures."

rhetorical effect accounts for all three novels. Instead, the focus of each text is on the way that, as Carra Glatt notes, "narratives generate more possibilities than they can ever realize, every outcome evoking, to a greater or lesser extent, its own alternatives" (31). More than any particular technique, Flann O'Brien, Colm Tóibín, and Edna O'Brien are interested in highlighting these possibilities as a point from which to proceed, because the law, while open to the exploration of certain possibilities, will not access them of its own accord.

While one or more of the techniques may appear in each of these three novels, inconclusiveness as an umbrella term provides a more comprehensive link to the way that each author situates the possibilities of narrative fiction against the possibilities of the law. The multiple endings of *At Swim-Two-Birds* may hinge on a certain amount of ambiguity, but the sense that Eamon possibly recuperates a relationship with Niamh and his grandson Michael at the end of *The Heather Blazing* and the invitation to hear Mary's voice at the end of *Down by the River* are not ambiguous. Neither, however, are they simply cathartic. Eamon does not achieve redemption in a plot of progression toward liberal values; Mary is not liberated either, as the novel leaves the invitation as an unanswered possibility. The three novels are connected by the way that characters are freed from endings that define their existence as retrospective prophecy. In that way, the novels allow characters to exist in a space of inconclusiveness, of the possibility

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Forking paths have their equivalent in quantum physics and the theory of multiple possible worlds, in which a linear series of events presents a number of choices that can be taken, each creating a new path of linear events that exist simultaneously. Gerald Prince defines the disnarrated as "terms, phrases, and passages that consider what did not or does not take place" (3). In her essay "Proxy Narrative in *The Ambassadors*: Reconfiguring James's Ending," Carra Glatt categorizes proxy narrative as "a given sequence of events [that] does not merely evoke a counterfactual possibility, but rather stands in for an alternative that cannot otherwise be narrated" (31).

to proceed, which defies the impetus of the law and of the constitution to define citizenship in terms of conclusiveness.

At Swim-Two-Birds against the Conclusiveness of Authority

While authority has been an important topic of discussion for critics of Flann O'Brien's oeuvre, the fragments that comprise the courtroom narrative in *At Swim-Two-Birds* have received curiously little attention. Critical reception of O'Brien's work, with the exception of Anthony Cronin's biography, only really came into its own in the mid-1990s. M. Keith Booker and Keith Hopper were instrumental in this initial critical appraisal; both read O'Brien as a postmodernist through the lens of Bakhtin. In the mid-2000s, critics such as Joseph Brooker, Carol Taaffe, and Maebh Long moved away from questions of genres to situate O'Brien's work socially, culturally, and politically. Citizenship and infrastructure, meanwhile, are at the center of Michael Rubenstein's and Gregory Dobbins' approaches to O'Brien's first two novels—*At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman* (1941; 1967).[16] An edited collection of essays published in 2017 makes authority, or O'Brien's anti-authoritarianism, its central organizing theme. That the courtroom narrative has received only cursory acknowledgment, even in the most recent criticism, seems at odds with the general momentum towards political readings of O'Brien's various works.

Part of the problem that faces any critical appraisal of the politics in O'Brien's novels, short stories, teleplays, and newspaper writings is the slippery nature of his humour. According to Carol Taaffe, the "intellectual slapstick [of O'Brien's writing], the adoption of polemical

[16] Although *The Third Policeman* was finished by 1941, O'Brien failed to find a publisher and the work was forgotten until after his death. The novel was published posthumously in 1967.

positions which can be adjusted, abandoned, attacked, and adopted again, reveal a writer in creative friction with his environment" (33). Finding a fixed political stance can be a futile act when approaching much of his writing. In fact, he often rails against fixed political stances, especially in his "Cruiskeen Lawn" column for the *Irish Times*, written under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen. The farcical nature of a metafictional novel such as *At Swim-Two-Birds* "compels us to consider the many ways in which [O'Brien's] body of work brings into sharp relief the kinship between comic genius and anti-authoritarian temperament" (Borg et al. 8). The humour in his writings is far from apolitical, even if it obfuscates any sense of political commitment; O'Brien was a writer deeply engaged with the world around him.

Bureaucracy loomed large in the world inhabited by Brian O'Nolan, the man behind the pen name Flann O'Brien.[17] After receiving a bachelor's degree from University College Dublin, O'Nolan gained employment with the Irish Civil Service in the summer of 1935. Bilingualism—Irish and English—was coveted in government offices, especially in Dublin. In this regard O'Brien fit the bill, though he was "excruciatingly aware of his forced representativeness in terms both of the postcolonial state's hopes for the revival of the Irish language…and of the postcolonial state's duties to erect and maintain a national infrastructure of public works and public utilities" (Rubenstein 98). Working in the Department of Health and Local Affairs, O'Nolan absorbed bureaucratic lingo and his "Cruiskeen Lawn" column for the *Irish Times* frequently mocked the syntax and jargon of office memos. Bureaucratic idioms aligned perfectly

[17] Along with Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen, Brian O'Nolan created a number of other pseudonyms. Other aliases included Brother Barnabas and George Knowall, who both frequented the letters pages of the *Times*. Carol Taaffe provides the most comprehensive overview of "Cruiskeen Lawn." Since this chapter primarily focuses on *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Flann O'Brien will be used throughout, with the exception of the biographical details concerning Brian O'Nolan's education and employment.

with O'Nolan's favourite mode for his comedy: the rendering of authority as banal and ludicrous. The mockery of the bureaucrat in "Cruiskeen Lawn" parallels the courtroom in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. For O'Brien, the practitioners of the law, like those of other government institutions, lacked awareness regarding the fictiveness of their authority. As R.W. Maslen observes, "it is a dangerous thing in O'Brien's universe to strive to exert authorial control over a diversity of discourses or disparate social groups" (85). That attempt to exert control over diverse discourse was exactly how O'Brien viewed De Valera's constitutional reforms.

The courtroom in *At Swim-Two-Birds* highlights the problem that the legal system posed to De Valera in his process of creating a constitution that distanced Ireland further from British influence. Liberal principles inherited from Westminster provided the legal model in the independent state, in part because "judges appointed to the office in the early decades of the State's history had been, in the main, educated in the English constitutional tradition" (Keane 88). With his sardonic wit keenly oriented to any inconsistencies in political worldviews, O'Brien pounced on a number of the ambivalences that arose from a constitution that, as one anonymous letter writer in the *Irish Times* put it, was "neither fish, flesh, nor even a good red herring" when it came to connections with Britain ("Eire"). As Rubenstein argues, O'Brien's refusal of fixed truths and his sardonic attitude allowed him to perpetuate "the ambivalence of the state itself—a modern institution for the most part modeled on, and inheriting the institutional culture of, the British state—which was attempting to valorize and integrate into itself a language born of wholly different and even contradictory political forms" (101). In an "Ireland struggling to find an identity" (Long 2), the primary disjuncture between De Valera's desire to distance Ireland further from Britain and the need to maintain British legal traditions offered O'Brien a great well for comedy and, thus, a source for undermining authority.

Descriptions of the courtroom in the novel manifest the ambivalence of the legal tradition in the post-Independence era. O'Brien skewers what he sees as a cosmetic solution to the problem of authority. When Dermot Trellis awakens to his trial, he finds himself "in a large hall not unlike the Antient Concert Rooms in Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street). The King was on his throne, the satraps thronged the hall, a thousand bright lamps shone, o'er that high festival" (O'Brien 193). The concert hall cum pub cum courtroom borrows from two competing ideals—the British legal tradition and Irish nationalism. Brunswick Street has been renamed to the more patriotic Pearse Street, which was meant to honour Pádraig and William Pearse who were both martyrs for the Republican cause following their execution as participants in the Easter Rising of 1916. However, the British monarchy still presides over the courtroom. Through the juxtaposition of two traditions with a history of bloodshed and antagonism, O'Brien seeks to undermine the conclusiveness of authority.

Dermot has been charged with committing the very moral decrepitude with which he tasks his characters in the hopes of writing the great moralistic novel of Ireland. While Dermot sleeps and the characters are free from his authorial reign, they hire Orlick Trellis, Dermot's illegitimate son, to write a revenge novel. Orlick is to put his father on trial for the irresponsible creation of John Furriskey and for raping a woman named Sheila, who is Orlick's mother.[18] Most of the cross-examination focuses on the creation of Furriskey, in part because he is one of the judges. Before Orlick can reach the conclusion of the trial—execution via razorblade—Dermot's

[18] Criticism and summaries of the novel have tended to sanitise O'Brien's less than thoughtful portrayal of this assault. Maebh Long provides one of the most comprehensive examinations of this aspect of O'Brien's work. "Myles and O'Brien's preference for sexist situations and protagonists," Long writes, "[makes] the aggressive treatment of women [for] supposed parody [offer] little subversion of patriarchal norms" (181). Sheila is one of only two named women in all of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and these women are used as objects through which to define the male characters.

assistant awakens him and they burn the rest of the novel. For some critics, the burning of the pages signifies a conservative streak in O'Brien, where "writing and sloth never radically destabilize the system" (Comer 109). Yet burning the pages also destroys the authority of an illiberal kangaroo court. Dermot's characters, including Furriskey, literally play judge, jury, and executioner in the courtroom narrative. By destroying a novel predicated on a foregone conclusion, since kangaroo courts are purely about appearances, *At Swim-Two-Birds* denies the fulfillment of an authoritarian "retrospective prophecy."

Because the setting establishes multiple, competing traditions of authority, it diminishes the weight of the demands from the judges and examiners to maintain absolute and conclusive narrative control. While the charges levelled at Dermot concern his immorality, the actual cross-examination hinges on the desire to make inconclusiveness subordinate to conclusiveness. Hence the line of questioning posed to Dermot always inevitably descends into pedantry, as in the opening cross-examination regarding the creation of Furriskey:

> In what manner was he born?
>
> He awoke as if from sleep.
>
> His sensations?
>
> Bewilderment, perplexity.
>
> Are these terms not synonymous and one and as a consequence redundant?
>
> Yes: but the terms of the inquiry postulated unsingular information.
>
> (At this reply ten judges made angry noises on the counter with the butts of their stout-glasses. Judge Shanahan put his head out through a door and issued a severe warning to the witness, advising him to conduct himself and drawing his

> attention to the serious penalties which would be attendant on further impudence). (O'Brien 42)

Much like the "Ithaca" episode in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the cross-examination demands a "catechism" of answers.[19] Any deviation from fixed answers angers the judges and must be censored with impunity because "unsingular information" disrupts the sense of conclusiveness that Shanahan, Lamont, Furriskey, and the other characters seek from Orlick's narrative. So when Dermot hedges his bets in some answers—he "supposes [he] fell asleep" (43)—the judges quickly correct his language to make it more conclusive—"you fell asleep" (43). Unsingular language disrupts the court because it highlights the fragility of authority in Ireland during the 1930s. After all, the court that demands singular answers harbours unsingular traditions. The judges themselves are frequently incapable of settling on singular information; for example, throughout the novel Shanahan and Lamont, both among Orlick's judiciary, constantly and pointlessly debate trivial matters—whether the "voice" or the "fiddle" is the greatest instrument, or whether the Irish bards or the populist and workmanlike Jem Casey represent the height of Irish literature. They never land on any agreed-upon conclusion. Conclusiveness, in O'Brien's configuration, cannot exist in 1930s Ireland, though the machinations of such authority play out ceaselessly in the novel.

While the fact that a morally repugnant figure such as Dermot gets let off the hook at the end of the novel remains troubling, the burning of Orlick's narrative allows for the refusal of

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[19] Much has been written on the influence that James Joyce had over Flann O'Brien. For O'Brien, Joyce elicited a sense of both admiration and anxiety, as he never quite felt that he could escape his predecessor's shadow. In O'Brien's final novel, *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), Joyce appears as a character. Instead of a renowned writer living in Europe, Joyce has been living in the seaside resort town in the south of Dublin known as Dalkey. Working as a bartender at a pub, Joyce acknowledges that he wrote *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but says that his name was forged for the "smut" that was *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

narratives that favour authoritative conclusiveness. Instead, the novel positions inconclusiveness as the ideal that literature, as a rejection of authority, ought to strive towards. From the very beginning of the novel, authority loses out to the possibilities of inconclusiveness: "a good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author," the unnamed narrator intones, "or for that matter one hundred times as many endings" (9). *At Swim-Two-Birds* has at least three distinct endings. First, the unnamed narrator, who is the writer of the other narrative levels, reconciles with his Gaelic League supporting uncle. In the second ending, Dermot and his assistant burn the remainder of Orlick's novel. Finally, the "ultimate" ending to the novel tells a brief story about a German fellow who is too fond of the number three, an anecdote entirely unrelated to anything that comes before. Of course, this final section marks an actual end, as even metafictional novels must come to a close. Nonetheless, the proliferation of possible endings opposes the kind of ending that Orlick's novel was meant to produce.

Dermot's ending in the novel perhaps best indicates O'Brien's favouring of inconclusiveness over conclusiveness. After burning the novel, Dermot makes an ambiguous exit that chimes with uncertainty about words: "Ars est celare artem, muttered Trellis, doubtful as to whether he had made a pun" (216). His art is not the concealing sort, though. While Dermot initially began attempting to write a rigid moralist novel, he ends by destroying the art that sought finality and singular conclusions. *At Swim-Two-Birds* spares the immoral moralist from the conclusive fate of authority, that is, execution. Instead, he is given the opportunity to proceed from a place that lacks conclusive authority, even over one's own language, because, as the unnamed narrator theorizes, the novel ought to be "a self-evident sham" (25). Within the context of the courtroom narrative, this self-evident sham "conjures alternative scenarios of law-making

and law-enforcement" (Brooker 16). O'Brien's early novels "[ponder] the paradoxes raised by legal and constitutional texts; [they immerse themselves] in the language of the law; and [they reimagine] the territory and sovereignty of Ireland" (16). Sensing the paradoxes within legal institutions makes O'Brien seem almost prescient about the debates around the role of the Irish Supreme Court that arose in the 1960s. Even more than simply mirroring the ambivalence of the state, to refer back to Rubenstein's claim, *At Swim-Two-Birds* offers a portrait of narrative fiction that privileges inconclusiveness as a way of intervening against the conclusiveness of authority, especially the law. While its political, formal, and historical context separates Flann O'Brien's novel from those of Colm Tóibín and Edna O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* nonetheless establishes a reversal of hierarchy with regards to conclusiveness and inconclusiveness that will be central to both *The Heather Blazing* and *Down by the River*.

The Heather Blazing and a Crisis of *Telos*

"A courtroom, with its adversarial traditions, was perhaps not the best place to explain that to be gay in a repressive society is to have every moment of your life clouded by what is forbidden and what must be secretive," Colm Tóibín wrote in an essay for *The Dublin Review* in 2007 ("A Brush with the Law"). Such fraught cultural and social questions often require the negotiation of held beliefs, hence the issue arising from an adversarial tradition. The essay was a reflection on an earlier piece that Vincent Browne, then editor for the influential current affairs magazine, *Magill*, had assigned to Tóibín in the mid-1980s. His time interviewing Supreme Court judges such as Rory O'Hanlon spurred the formulation of Tóibín's second novel, *The Heather Blazing*: "I realized that as I had sat dreaming, [O'Hanlon] had been sentencing a man to life imprisonment, the mandatory sentence for murder. I realized that only a novel would do

justice to justice as it sat in front of me, full of both charm and steel, ready to discuss the law in practice and in theory" ("A Brush with the Law"). Theories and practices of the law circulate in Tóibín's novel; at the same time, he imagines the myriad ways that the courts operate as extensions of the political parties that form the government.

Just as Dermot Trellis catches the ire of his judges because of his tendency towards linguistic uncertainty, the conservative judge Eamon Redmond finds himself uncomfortably at a threshold of diverging narrative trajectories. Reared on narratives of triumphant Irish nationalism, Eamon upholds the principles of De Valera's Fianna Fáil political party, as can be gleaned from his name, which refers to both the Taoiseach and the nationalist leader John Redmond.[20] Republican narratives of Ireland, passed down generationally to Eamon, form the basis of his views on the law; the conclusiveness of his judgements are built on the retrospective prophecy of the nation as per De Valera's vision. His colleagues, meanwhile, flow with the tide of liberalism. While he feels at odds with the momentum of the Four Courts, Eamon encounters a personal crisis at home when his wife Carmel suffers a stroke and eventually dies. Before she passes away, Carmel tells Eamon that he has never been able to understand her experiences, nor the experiences of their daughter Niamh, which has distanced him from the family. Juxtaposing the professional with the personal highlights the interconnectedness of Eamon's crises. The patriarchal foundations that Eamon applies to the law ultimately marginalize those who do not fit the stipulations of ideal citizenship. Tóibín's novel posits narrative fiction as a form which can

[20] John Redmond was loyal to Charles Stewart Parnell and took control of the Irish Parliamentary Party after Parnell was assassinated. Redmond was largely responsible for the passing of the 1914 Irish Home Rule Act, which was delayed due to the onset of the First World War and then eventually scuppered after the 1916 Easter Rising. Like De Valera, Redmond favoured party loyalty and a sense of unity. Eamon's namesakes in many ways reflect the values that his father wished to bestow upon him: a sense of continuation and unity of purpose.

provide Eamon with the sense of inconclusiveness that he needs to reassess his personal and professional perceptions of the world. Reading novels over case law allows Eamon to think outside narratives of a triumphant republican nationalism.

Whereas the multiple narrative levels in *At Swim-Two-Birds* sought to erase the hierarchy of institutions, the structure of *The Heather Blazing* stresses the intersections among the law, history, and individual experience of characters as fundamental to the way that judges such as Eamon conceive of the boundaries between the rights of citizens and the rights of the state. Alongside the personal crisis that Eamon experiences with the illness and death of Carmel, the novel establishes two recurring patterns. The first is thematic: each of the three parts of the novel begins with a "judgement day" in the High Court when Eamon must present his decision on the case before him. The second is temporal: subsequent chapters alternate between Eamon's past and his present. Without ever becoming a *bildungsroman* or a novel about the catharsis of a conservative judge, *The Heather Blazing* lifts individual experiences above their initial position as subordinate to the history and the law of the Irish state that defines Eamon's worldview. As Eamon begins to read novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, his perceptions of the world change; he starts to see the failures in his veneration of rigid order and the conclusiveness of history.

In many ways, the dual crisis that Eamon encounters in the novel has its roots in his experience of history as a narrative of Irish triumphalism. Tóibín's time as a student of history at University College Dublin coincided with public debates about revisionism. Some historians wished to revisit the hagiographic nature with which Irish nationalism treated the revolution and independence of Ireland. A desire amongst British historians to develop "a holistic approach to the history of the British Isles" drew sharp lines in Ireland between Nationalist and Revisionist

views (Ellis 1).[21] Historians favouring a nationalist view of modern Irish history disparaged revisionism as an apologia for colonialism. For Tóibín, nationalist and revisionist historians alike seek to grasp widespread and varied experiences through nationhood. As Oona Frawley articulates, "[Tóibín's] work offers a determined critique of grand narratives of history that present a consolidated and simplified view of the past. Instead of an overarching narrative of Irish history, Tóibín offers multiple conflicting and concentric narratives" (71). Eamon's failure to understand the women in his life, for example, stems from his view of history as inevitably leading to the triumph of De Valera's government.

To Eamon, history has always been about a teleology of Irish liberation from colonial oppression, which ultimately informs his desire for the law to uphold a particular, thus conservative, conception of the nation. Eamon's legal judgements privilege the moral exceptionalism of Ireland because that was the paradigm in which he was raised. His father was a local history teacher who turned a British castle in Enniscorthy into a museum venerating Irish rebellions. The senior Redmond reads history as a fixed series of dates that record the inevitable victory of the Irish nation:

> There was never anything to learn in history, Eamon forgot nothing that his father said. He knew the Plantations: Laois in 1555, Munster in 1575, Ulster in 1598, and later in the reign of James I. Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509, he divorced Katherine of Aragon in 1533. Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558 and she died in 1603, the same year as the Treaty of Mellifont. Sometimes his father examined [the students] in dates: Eamon had to be careful not to show that he

[21] Steven G. Ellis' "Writing Irish History: Revisionism, Colonialism, and the British Isles" (1996) and Nancy J. Curtin's "Varieties of Irishness: Historical Revisionism, Irish Style" (1996) both suggest that defining nationhood was one of the key components in the revisionist debates.

> knew more than anybody else in the class. The others got things mixed up, they had the Flight of the Earls before the Battle of Kinsale, which, as his father said, made no sense. (*HB* 106)

Importance resides in the order of events rather than in their social, political, or cultural ramifications. Linear order provides meaning; to deviate from that order is to lose the thread of sense-making. As a result, Eamon struggles with aspects of the world that do not fit into this kind of predestined chronology. He finds "unseens in Latin…difficult [because] he hated guessing, but Mr Mooney told them not to leave gaps…so he was forced to guess" (106). The history on which Eamon was raised works in the mode of retrospective prophecy, to return to Brooks' terminology; estimation, on the contrary, presupposes a future-oriented inconclusiveness. One of the pre-requisites for estimation is the imaginative leap necessary to see how patterns might expand, proliferate, or cease altogether. Eamon, though, has been reared on the charm of legible order.

The most vivid memories that Eamon can conjure from his childhood revolve around clearly defined boundaries. As a child, Eamon loved to draw maps "of main roads and side roads" (14). Given his preference for the topography of infrastructure, the spectacles of Eamon's childhood that resonate in his mind pertain to the precision and conclusiveness of order, as when the Christian Brothers march into the Wexford Market Square and "soldiers stood at attention at the front of the altar as the final part of the procession moved into the square" (44). Catholicism and Republican Nationalism intertwine as the purveyors of an order that Eamon has been led to expect, even crave. Meanwhile, the memories that Eamon struggles to understand or grasp have to do with the collapse of the perceived order of things, as when his father dies. In a similar fashion, Eamon continuously tries, and fails, to remember a recurring dream while Carmel is in

the hospital. To remember a recurring dream cuts too close to estimation since it exists outside of real world reference. In other words, the order he was taught to accept in childhood leaves him ill prepared for any deviations from such patterns in his adult life.

Viewing the world through a lens of pre-destined order and conclusiveness, as presented in the teleology of a triumphant Irish nationalism, limits the kind of retrospective prophecy that Eamon imagines in his court judgements. The Catholic foundations of the constitution emphasize natural law as a guiding force for the nation. Natural law, in this sense, refers to "the law as it is naturally or immediately interpreted; the principles of morality, held to be discernible by reason as belonging to human nature or implicit nature of rational thought and action" ("Natural Law"). When appointed to the courts, Irish judges must swear an oath that invokes the Catholic nature of the constitution: "In the presence of Almighty God I do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will duly and faithfully and to the best of my knowledge and power execute the office of Chief Justice (or as the case may be) without fear or favour, affection or ill-will towards any man, and that I will uphold the Constitution and the laws. May God direct and sustain me" (Irish Const. Art. 34.6.2). Commentators such as Diarmuid Rossa Phelan tout the benefits of the primacy allotted to the category of natural law: "part of the attraction of a written constitution is that it remains the lasting statement of matters of permanent relevance. It should not bend to current pressures for change, but rather act as a guideline to what should be proposed on matters of permanent relevance" (215). Such primacy, Phelan concludes, safeguards against imposed authority or corrupt forces. Eamon appears to hold a similar view of the law to Phelan; he privileges the original delineations of the constitution against all other ideological or philosophical positions because he has been raised to uphold the primacy of a certain worldview, one that creates a sense of conclusiveness about the moral exceptionalism of an independent

Ireland. Eamon sees this conclusiveness as an innate quality of natural law and not a construction of a particular strain of nationalism.

The case that opens the second part of the novel, concerning a young girl who has been expelled from her school due to her pregnancy, highlights the problem with conceiving of certain moral values as innate rather than the construction of political predispositions. At the center of the case brought to the High Court is the balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of institutions. These questions disturb Eamon because they do not fit neatly into his conception of Ireland:

> He sat at his desk and looked down at the judgement he had written in longhand on foolscap pages. It was ready to be delivered. He wondered for a moment if he should have typed it, but he was worried about it being leaked. No one knew about it; even as he sat down to write it himself he did not know what he would say, what he would decide. There was so little to go on, no real precedent, no one obviously guilty. Neither of the protagonists in the case had broken the law. And that was all he knew; the law, its letters, its traditions, its ambiguities, its codes. Here, however, he was being asked to decide on something more fundamental and now he realized that he had failed and he felt afraid. (*HB* 85)

He ultimately judges in favour of the school. Eamon knows he has "no strong moral views" (88) and that makes him "not equipped to be a moral arbiter" (90). In essence, he defaults to the position of institutions because the opposite would require a "broadening of the concept of the family" (89-90), which neither the mother nor the girl's council had argued. The school was within its rights to expel the young girl because the institution has the constitutional prerogative to uphold Catholic morality. Interpreting categories within the constitution, such as the family

unit, makes Eamon uncomfortable. Earlier in the novel Eamon even half-jokingly refers to the *Bunreacht na hÉireann* as a "sacred text" (91). Faced with the failure of his worldview with regards to the practice of law, Eamon defaults to the institutions of the state because they cleave more closely the conclusiveness and order he has known since childhood. He dissents to the young girl's case because of the "Christian nature of the state," despite his own sense that "the idea of God seemed more clearly absurd…than ever before" (91, 86). Though he ultimately defers to the status quo endowed in authoritative institutions, the case brings about a professional crisis for Eamon.

Stretched to the limits of the law, Eamon begins to think about what could possibly supplant his desire for conclusiveness. By way of trying to work through his uncertainties, Eamon turns to writing about the law:

> He took a biro from a drawer and began to make squiggles on a pad of paper. What was there beyond the law? 'Law'; he wrote the word. There was natural justice. He wrote the two words down and put a question mark after them. And beyond that again there was the notion of right and wrong, the two principles which governed everything and came from God. (85)

Yet the idea of God is absurd to Eamon. In effect, Eamon experiences the disjuncture between being an ideal and a permitted citizen. To maintain his status as an ideal judge, he must uphold his oath to the primacy of Catholic morality as it is laid out in the constitution. As an individual, his lack of faith pushes against these ideals. The case of the young pregnant girl illuminates for the first time the possibility that his worldview fails when exposed to the experience of individual citizens, which intersects with his personal crisis of family. At no point in Eamon's writing through the question of the law does he consider that the fundamental principles of the

Irish constitution exclude or marginalize women. As Kathleen Costello-Sullivan argues, "*The Heather Blazing* offers a scathing judgement of the Irish national self-construction that sacrifices women" (109). In other words, Eamon has no real access to the necessary point of view that would allow him to consider more fully the arguments of the young pregnant girl. Niamh, herself pregnant with a child out of wedlock, confronts her father with this argument. When Eamon defends his decision in favour of the school, relying on the tautological adage that the law is the law, Niamh rebuts: "I know about [the case]. I know what it's like to be a woman in this country, and I know what it's like to have a child here" (99).

The second half of *The Heather Blazing* hinges on the potential in the inconclusiveness of narrative fiction to provide Eamon with the foundation upon which he may proceed towards understanding Niamh's argument. For a man whose "subjectivity is defined discursively, in and through the acts of reading and writing" (Harte 113), Eamon initially reads quite narrowly. Most of his reading habits in the first half of the novel pertain to Irish and American case law as he reads over judgements and precedent. Unsurprisingly, when precedent and legal traditions fail him, Eamon feels as if he has nowhere to turn. Tóibín presents the opportunity to escape the rigidity of these reading habits through intertextuality. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* appears twice in *The Heather Blazing*. Eamon first stumbles upon the book when he walks through the house of his old friend Mike—a house that, like many others in the area, is in the process of falling into the sea. When he picks up the mildewed pages of Gaskell's novel, "some memory stirred in him, as though he was about to remember the dream he had had, and he picked the book up again and held it, staring at the title" (*HB* 33). At this point in the novel, prior to the case with the young pregnant girl, Eamon puts the book down and leaves the half-destroyed house.

Cranford makes for a particularly useful foil to the professional and personal crisis that Eamon experiences after his judgement in favour of the school. Gaskell's witty, provincial tale of Victorian women offers a world nothing like Eamon's; the novel concerns the lives of the women who dominate the town of Cranford. Men exist in the novel mostly as interruptions to order: Signor Brunoni, the magician, causes a panic and "Poor Peter" disrupts gender distinctions for the remaining patriarchs because his humorous trickery often involves cross-dressing. Through the narration of Mary Smith, Eamon could encounter an aspect of the world that his conception of the law and of the primacy of the Irish constitution has fundamentally excluded. Structured episodically, *Cranford* also lacks the kind of linearity and cohesiveness that lets endings enact retrospective prophecy; in fact, Gaskell often humorously plays with the way that episodes hang together. In other words, *Cranford* cannot be read through a desire for conclusiveness—it cannot be read as Eamon reads the law.

Carmel's stroke occasions a change in Eamon's reading habits and he returns to these novels that tell of experiences far beyond his legalistic understanding of the world. With Carmel in the hospital and his house repressively quiet, Eamon returns to some of the classic novels he read as a teenage but had stored away upstairs. Opening the first one, "he was puzzled by it, the unfamiliar was being described in too much detail. But he carried on, until he found a story to follow and learned how to skip the descriptive passages. He became engrossed in the story, the side plots and cast of characters. Thereafter he spent more time in the parlour reading the novels than studying his own texts" (131). Not the most conscientious reader of fiction, Eamon nonetheless finds a way to deal with the kinds of puzzles and uncertainties that used to render him immobile all those years ago in Latin class. A change in reading habits coincides with a change in Eamon's attempts to perceive and understand the world, both professionally and

personally. As Liam Harte argues, "Tóibín dramatizes the personal and societal consequences of cleaving too rigidly to institutional and constitutional imperatives rather than responding reflexively to the evolving rights and demands of a diverse citizenry" (113). Reading novels provides Eamon with the opportunity to respond more reflexively to the world around him. After Carmel dies, Eamon turns to the imaginative possibilities of "guessing." He begins to "imagine [himself and Carmel] wandering in Wexford" (*HB* 212). Similarly, he begins to mend his relationship with Niamh in the hopes of having a chance to spend time with his grandson, Michael. On a professional level, Eamon starts to reassess his attitudes and ideas about the primacy of the law and of the objective neutrality of judgement.

In the third part of the novel, the chapters that deal with Eamon's past illustrate his early days as a lawyer and, eventually, judge in order to illustrate the political underpinnings of Eamon's desire for the law to have the authority of conclusiveness. Party loyalty leads to nepotism; in the third part of the novel, the chapters regarding the past reveal the way that Eamon was handpicked for his career on the bench. After the adolescent Eamon gives a speech to a crowd during the 1958 general election, a friend of Seán Lemass informs him that he "should do the bar [because] there's a great need now for Fianna Fáil barristers" (159). After law school, Fianna Fáil barrister becomes Fianna Fáil judge, as Minister Haughey pulls Eamon aside at a restaurant to inform him that he is "for the bench" (22). Pretentions of objective neutrality—that the law is the law—come undone when faced with the reality of politics. The act of reading novels pushes Eamon towards a retrospection that goes beyond his previously held sense of appropriate conclusions.

Consequently, Eamon's reassessment of the politics guiding his judgements and views of the law leads to the recognition that what he thought was objective neutrality was in actuality the

privileging of the state. The third case in the novel that Eamon must preside over concerns an IRA member charged with murder. While deciding the fate of the man, Eamon remembers his role in a secret report that he made for the government at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In order to temper public opinion Eamon recommended a number of special constitutional changes that would allow for streamlined state interventions in acts of terrorism (178). The law, it seems, can be flexible as long as it bends towards the authority of a patriarchal state: "he had also included a section on how the courts, in particular the Supreme Court, could become difficult for any administration trying to combat terrorism" (179). Tóibín strikes a through-line between a childhood spent admiring the pageantry of order to a conception of the law that leans towards authoritarianism.

By undermining the conclusiveness of authority that Eamon privileges, the novel itself opens towards inconclusiveness. Tóibín ends the novel with an image of Eamon swimming off the Wexford coast with Michael. The sea that was previously viewed as a threat—eroding away the past—now becomes the site for new possibilities. Framing the ending as an embrace of inconclusiveness avoids reading the novel as a redemption plot. Eamon still made harmful judgements; Niamh has not simply forgiven him. The novel aims for a way of proceeding, not for a sense of catharsis. Such catharsis would ultimately fit into Eamon's understanding of the past as a retrospective prophecy. Instead, the conservative judge must begin to process his new reading habits into the matter of the law. Because of the liberalizing ideologies of his peers in the High Court and Supreme Court, Eamon starts to change his reading habits of case law as well. Towards the end of the novel he begins studying the judgements and rulings of the European Union. With regards to the case of the IRA man charged with murder, Eamon recognizes that, in the views of his peers, "the state had lost already" (226). Lost, it seems, not just in that particular

case but in a larger sense, in the sense of the state as De Valera had conceived of it in the 1930s. Conclusiveness has lost to inconclusiveness, and Eamon must find a way of proceeding with this shift or he will himself become lost.

Down by the River and the Law in a Gossamer World

Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River* is considerably less reconciliatory about the court system in Ireland than Tóibín's vision for the conservative judge, Eamon Redmond. To a certain extent, O'Brien's novel amalgamates the plurality of narratives in *At Swim-Two-Birds* with the sense of diverging narrative trajectories found in *The Heather Blazing*. Like Flann O'Brien's novel, *Down by the River* depicts the law as an arbitrary authority attempting to legitimate certain values that define citizenship in the nation. Unlike the repugnant Dermot Trellis, Mary McNamara in Edna O'Brien's novel is the victim of incestuous rape and thus the injunction against her attempted abortion shifts the moral indignation onto the functions of the state. As in *The Heather Blazing*, *Down by the River* presents Mary's marginalizing experiences as a narrative that exists outside the boundaries of legibility for the courts. The Supreme Court can only filter the competing narratives, made by citizens, about Mary's experiences. Mary's lawyer, the phone-ins on the radio, and the religious "pro-life" women all, in different ways, attempt to contain the young woman's experiences within a conclusive narrative, which the courts can then adjudicate. *Down by the River* explores narrative strategies that can give voice to Mary's perceptions of the world, which are intrinsically inconclusive because they are always negotiating a multivalent sensorial experience.

O'Brien interrogates the teleology of a liberalizing Supreme Court for the way that, no matter the political differences, inconclusiveness is still subordinated to conclusiveness. As made

clear in *The Heather Blazing*, that conclusiveness tends to limit the possible narratives that can be legitimated as representative of ideal citizenship. Certain voices will not be given access to the courts because they cannot be bound by conclusiveness. Mary's is such a voice and increasingly she is not allowed, and chooses not, to speak. As Jane Elizabeth Dougherty argues, "O'Brien seeks to articulate both the experience of being silenced and the difficulty of articulating the experience of being silenced" (78). For Dougherty, this silence comes as the result of a failure in Irish literary tradition to imagine, or allow for, the voice of women. When read through the tension between conclusiveness and inconclusiveness, though, the failure to understand Mary's voice extends beyond the literary and into the realm of the law.

The Supreme Court, rather than seeking to validate Mary's experiences, re-establishes the moral boundaries for the nation by sifting through the national conversation about abortion. As Mary's case threads throughout the novel, the sense is that the outcome will do little to change the legal and political structures of Ireland. O'Brien wishes not to undermine the value of certain legal precedents and changes to the law—her novels often look to voice the possibilities for isolated women like Mary who have "a future first sullied and then almost emptied for her by interference" (King 61). The questions at the heart of Mary's court case do not fundamentally interrogate the patriarchal foundations of the constitution. *Down by the River* suggests that any futurity for Mary, any future version of Ireland in which she can exist as Mary and not some conclusive narrative about her experiences of rape, must come from the plurality of inconclusiveness.

Down by the River fictionalizes the *Attorney General vs. X and others* case, which attracted international attention at a time when Ireland sought to align politically with the developing European Union. The case concerned a state injunction against a fourteen-year-old

girl, given the moniker "X" due to her age, who had travelled to England to have an abortion. A family friend raped the teenager, which resulted in pregnancy. *Attorney General vs. X* became a focal point in a constitutional battle over abortion that began in the early 1980s in Ireland. Abortion had been officially illegal since the 1861 Offences against the Persons Act, but in the late 1970s and early 1980s a group called the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) sought a public referendum to amend the constitution.

The Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution legally obliged the state to protect the right to life of the "unborn." In the words of the amending article, "the state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right" (Irish Const. Art. 40.3.3). As Ursula Barry notes, "one of the most interesting aspects of the amendment is the wording itself. The ideology which shaped the amendment draws little on traditional Irish Catholicism; it is, in fact, the influence of the American 'pro-life' movement and particularly its ideology of foetal rights which provides the framework for it" (59). In terms of the law and the courts, the Eighth Amendment throws the teleology of liberalization into serious doubt. Those who opposed the amendment argued that the language of the article renders women second-class citizens. *Attorney General (SPUC) v. Open Door Counselling* brought about the problem of free access to information. The decision of that case meant that clinics, hospitals, and counselling services could no longer legally provide information about abortion clinics in Britain. Travel for pregnant women was also restricted, hence the possibility for the state injunction against "Miss X." Even the grammatical structure of the amendment "recategorized" Irish women "to be equal to that which is *not yet born*" (Barry 59). Mothers are housed within a

dependent clause.[22] Due to the high profile attention that the X case received, the Irish nation and state were forced to confront many of the consequences that issued from the Eighth Amendment.

In November of 1992, after the conclusion of the *Attorney General vs. X*, the Irish people were asked to vote on three amendments. The twelfth amendment proposed the removal of the language about the equal right to life of the unborn, the thirteenth amendment provided that the right to life of the unborn would not impede free travel between Ireland and another state, and the fourteenth amendment would not limit the availability of information about abortion services in other states. All three amendments stemmed directly from the "X" case. The thirteenth and fourteenth amendments passed while the twelfth did not. Yet O'Brien's novel, written and published after these referendums, displays little optimism about the constitutional changes. Legal questions arising in Mary's case provide a central plot for the novel, but that plot almost always remains in the background. In the foreground, O'Brien focuses on the way that the national conversations about Mary's experiences impact the young, isolated woman. The law, in turn, reacts to these conversations rather than the particular aspects of Mary's case. *Down by the River* articulates the need for a change in the types of narratives the nation creates about its own citizens before any significant structural change, such as the full repeal of the Eighth Amendment and the dismantling of the patriarchal state, can occur.

[22] The particular wording of the article was central to the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution. For hospitals and doctors the legal uncertainty around the terms of "due regard" and "equal" in the amendment led to serious impediments to pregnant women facing severe complications. In 2012, Savita Halappanavar died of sepsis after doctors could not terminate a pregnancy that was dangerous to her health. Professor Peter Boylan, the former Master of Holles Street Maternity Hospital, argued to the Oireachtas committee on abortion that Mrs. Halappanavar "died as a consequence of the Eighth Amendment," to which the committee agreed (Murray).

National identity—what it means to be Irish—is at the very heart of the debates about Mary's experiences, just as it was during the X case. Since abortion coincides with travel across the Irish Sea, "pro-life" campaigners aligned themselves with anticolonial rhetoric. Ruth Fletcher argues that "Irish colonial history is part of the explanation for a conservative abortion policy which constitutionally protects the right to life of the 'unborn'" (569). "This unusual stance," Fletcher continues, "reflects in part a post-colonial desire to construct a culturally authentic 'pro-life' Irishness in opposition to what has been perceived as a British colonial pro-choice culture" (569). Within the novel, this question of identity dictates the narratives told about Mary from various citizens. "Pro-life" characters subsume Mary's experiences into a Catholic, messianic trajectory: the life growing inside her is the miracle that will redeem the sinner. At the same time, the "pro-choice" side of the national conversation see Mary as an opportunity to challenge the status-quo.

Unlike Tóibín's novel, which positions the legal narratives of the Four Courts in opposition to the narratives of citizens, *Down by the River* formulates the court system as an arbiter of national narratives. The conversation about Mary that goes on in the homes of Ireland and in the media come to define the terms on which Mary's experiences will be legitimized or rejected. Robert Dinerstein, writing on narratives in disability cases, suggests that the law is limited to telling certain stories due to the emphasis on "*the prism of tactical calculation*" (43; original emphasis). In other words, the desire for the right conclusion leads lawyers to frame a client's narrative in terms most amenable to the court. Mary's court case is not about disabilities, of course, but the prism of calculation offers a useful example as to why Mary feels increasingly silenced by those around her, even if they are ostensibly on her side. Citizenship, in this sense, becomes about telling the right story, which generally means that the story conforms to the

conclusiveness of retrospective prophecy. “Pro-life” or “Pro-choice” co-opting of Mary’s experiences are more easily legible in the eyes of the law because they adhere to, in Tóibín’s terms, an adversarial tradition. The law can be contested between two particular ways of reading a narrative. As a means of countering this conclusiveness, the narrator of *Down by the River* attempts to describe Mary’s world as a structure of gossamer—a world in which the individual is in constant negotiation with their surroundings because no singular order or set of values can make sense of experiences.

When the narration focalizes through Mary, descriptions overflow with sensory information. Initially, this emphasis on the sensory attends to traumatic experiences. Mary’s father rapes her for the first time in a meadow that becomes “an empty place, a place cut off from every place else and her body too” (*DbtR* 5). The third-person omniscient narrator begins to blend with Mary’s interiority: “It does not hurt if you say it does not hurt, it does not hurt if you are not you” (5). Third person blurring into second person obscures the line between external and character narrator, which reflects Mary’s rupturing sense of self. Within this ambiguous narratorial space, descriptions become intimate webbings of plural sensorial textures at the very moment of violence: “Criss-cross waxen sheath, uncrossing, uncrossing. Mush. Wet, different wets. His essence, hers, their two essences one. O quenched and empty world. An eternity of time, then a shout, a chink of light, the ground easing back up, gorse prickles on her scalp and nothing ever the same again and a feeling as of having half-died” (5). Marija Cetinic notes that contemporary models for reading trauma, as with the work of Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman, dictate that “traumatic narrative…must be spoken in a language that permits for temporal disruption, fragmentation, violence, and the breakdown of any mastery or unity” (287). Some of these psychoanalytic ideas about trauma seem to surface in the opening chapter of

O'Brien's novel; grammatically fractured and ontologically uncertain language proliferates around the moment of violence.

Classifying the narration of Mary's experiences in terms of circumscription, of the deficiency in mastery or unity, effectively reads Mary into a similar desire for conclusiveness that is exhibited by the courts. Part of Cetinic's arguments against contemporary trauma theory stems from the focus on address (287); in the narration of Mary's experiences the issue is about what constitutes address. Within the context of mastery, the opening chapter could be read through Robyn Warhol's classification of the antinarratable, or the "silence that results from trauma" (224). Rather than suggesting that narration lacks a certain mastery of events, O'Brien's novel proliferates multi-sensory details to circumvent structures of conclusiveness, which hold truth and fact as moving towards a single point of definition. The rape is narrated, even if the language, grammar, and syntax obscure linearity; the violence and violation are not in doubt. Everyone except Mary wishes to find a linear narrative of events that, as the narration makes clear, is impossible. Mary wishes to exist in a space where her experiences and perceptions can be recognized as inherently non-linear. The novel offers its critique of the Supreme Court along these grounds. While the narratives made about Mary can fit into the conclusiveness of the law, Mary's existence in the world cannot be bound up in the same way.

A kaleidoscope experience of the world requires an almost synesthetic narrative that can simultaneously overlap and interconnect multiple descriptive and temporal planes. The dazzling opening paragraph of the novel functions as a first foray into the world that Mary navigates:

> Ahead of them the road runs in a long entwined undulation of mud, patched tar and fjords of green, the grassy surfaces rutted and trampled, but the young shoots surgent in the sun; flowers and flowering weed in full regalia, a carnival sight,

> foxglove highest and lordliest of all, the big furry bees nosing in the cool specked recesses of mauve and white bell. O sun. O brazen egg-yolk albatross: elsewhere dappled and filtered through different muslins of leaf, an after-smell where that poor donkey collapsed, died and decayed; the frame of a car, turquoise once; rimed in rust, dock and nettle draping the torn seats, a shrine where a drunk and driven man put an end to himself, then at intervals rubbish dumps, the bottles, canisters, reading matter and rank gizzards of the town riff-raff stowed in the dead of night. (*DbtR* 1)

As Iris Lindahl-Raittila suggests, O'Brien's Joycean influences, along with the fact that she left Ireland in the late 1950s, lead some critics to accuse her of "being disconnected with her own country" (76). With language moving from overabundance to death and decay, the narrator attempts to open a path towards imagining Mary's experiences in a way that the rest of the nation in the novel is unable or unwilling to attempt. Everything becomes outsized: the grassy ditch is also a monumental fjord and the foxglove has magisterial airs. Joyce's language of flowers also gives way to an almost Coleridgian Romanticism in which the sun doubles as an "egg-yolk albatross." Fruitfulness inevitably leads to decay because for Mary the sensorial world equates both to her own budding sexuality and sense of self and to the threats of violent men. Girls, Mary's father tells her before his first assault, are "sugar and spice and everything nice" (*DbtR* 4).

Multiple levels of sensorial experience mirror the plural social expectations placed on Irish women like Mary, which also comes out through the temporality of narration. While the opening paragraph to the novel uses the present tense, as the road "runs" ahead of Mary and her father, the very next paragraph switches to the past tense: "'Blackguards,' her father said" (1).

Acts of sexual violence, and the spaces where the acts occurred, also bring about the disjunction between the past and the present tense. A man in a trench coat forces Mary to perform fellatio one evening after she leaves the house of her friend Tara. The narration renders this second assault in terms of textural sensations: "Not sight, not words, only touch. Touch telling her what to do. Almosting it…Then volitionless. Sea foam, sea horses, a lavering in her mouth" (31). The grammar splinters as Mary loses her voice; the doctors fear her mind has "just [clamped] up" (32). As the doctors leave, the narration of Mary's world shifts to the present tense: "the cushions have been put back on the bedchair and Mary is made to sit now, a princess's throne, little blandishments, cut cubes of toast and a mug of cocoa" (32). Within the same passage, a man uses Mary as an object of sexual gratification and Mary's family primp her up as an innocent princess. Having to navigate these social expectations, Mary requires a mode of narration that can oscillate temporal planes and sensorial extremes.

Her existence within a world of unfolding pluralities demands a narration of inconclusiveness, yet voices of the nation attempt to find conclusiveness from her experiences. These voices tend to divide along political lines. On the one side are women like Roisin and Eilie, who have been charged with the care of Mary while she remains a ward of the court. Roisin, an especially zealous "pro-life" figure, dismisses Mary's suicidal thoughts during the trial because the "little life growing in the depths of her body which brought the truth to light, the whole sordid business of the rape, that the little life was the saviour and that it would also save the rapist, because all rapists long for the day when somebody would find them out and put a stop to what they know to be shameful but which they cannot control" (172). Beyond the dubious pop-psychology with regards to rapists, the narrative proffered by figures like Roisin shape complexities into a single unifying endpoint: Mary is a sinner in need of redemption, and

so is her rapist. Conflating the victim and the perpetrator doubles a larger patriarchal structure as highlighted in the phrasing of the Eighth Amendment. Women's actions are predisposed to be morally objectionable.

On the other end of the national conversation are the politically progressive voices that stand up for Mary's defense in the Supreme Court case. These voices view a potential malleability in the courts along the lines of the "liberal" teleology held by scholars such as Michael Böss, Thomas Murray, and Basil Chubb. Molly, daughter to one of the Supreme Court judges presiding over Mary's case, makes this very argument to her father, Frank. Like Eamon Redmond in Tóibín's novel, Frank replies with the adage that "the law is the law" (270). Molly, in turn, pleads that he ought to "bend it" (270). Her argument follows similar lines to that of Niamh in *The Heather Blazing*: Frank and his colleagues do not fully understand the case because they are "not fourteen years of age and sick and vomiting and a thing inside you put there against your will" (273). Patriarchal foundations, Molly and Niamh both implicitly argue, cloud any ability for the courts to legislate beyond "a definition of women's citizenship [that] was deliberately narrow" (Connolly 68). As such, Molly contends that Mary is being made into a "scapegoat" (*DbtR* 270). O'Brien does not equate the views of Molly with those of Roisin—their narratives imagine Mary's experiences very differently, and O'Brien certainly aligns with Molly's politics. For O'Brien, seeing Mary as a "scapegoat" offers far more compassion than seeing her as a sinner in need of redemption because it takes account of contingent social structures. Still, the narratives presented by Molly and Roisin share a trajectory towards a single point of definition. O'Brien's critique is about the way that the Supreme Court demands that narratives lead to unifying and conclusive definitions about the experiences of citizens.

The novel denies the impact of the court decision regarding Mary's case on the basis that it only pertains to a conclusiveness favoured by the Supreme Court and not to a radical re-imagining of the structures of the Irish nation. Overall, the judges, one assumes, decide in favour of Mary's defense—the X case was decided four to one in favour of the defendant, which prompted the series of referendums in 1992. *Down by the River* buries the decision of the court in favour of focusing on Mary's experiences. When the women and Mary's lawyer come in to tell her of the decision, they find her on the floor covered in blood—she has miscarried. The decision is never announced in the novel. Mary's legal case, however important, indicates a much larger structural issue in Ireland. While O'Brien recognizes the high position of the Supreme Court to define citizenship and belonging in Ireland, her novel rejects the capacity of the law to imagine a version of the nation where Mary does not need to be defined by the violence perpetrated against her.

Rather than ending with the drama of the final judgement, which would displace Mary's experiences onto the conclusiveness of a verdict, O'Brien ends *Down by the River* with an invitation. As Mary dances at a club in the final scene of the novel, the DJ asks her to sing. Mary approaches the microphone, though she never sings. "One might ask at the conclusion of [Mary's] story," Dougherty queries, "not how a woman might be a tower of ivory or a house of gold, but how she might be anything else" (94). The answer to this query might lie in the attempt for narrative fiction to open up the space where inconclusiveness presents citizenship as an ongoing process of negotiation, which ultimately limits the authority of conclusiveness within the law. Amendments, O'Brien suggests, must begin in the stories of individual citizens, in the grassroots of society. If they begin at the intersection with the courts, these amendments will ultimately align with the underlying structures that are already in place.

Conclusion

In his keynote address at a conference on law, literature, and translation held at Trinity College Dublin in 2012, High Court judge Bryan McMahon made the case that lawyers ought to read novels, short stories, and drama as a part of their vocational training. "The power of literature and of things said in an unusual and fresh way by a person who has experience can be overwhelming and even life-changing," McMahon noted (qtd. in Coulter). Based on this conclusion, *Cranford* makes Eamon Redmond a better judge because it makes him more compassionate. As Dougherty points out with regards to patriarchal literary traditions in *Down by the River*, reading "great literature" can also reinforce particular hierarchies and worldviews. Direct causal relations between judges well-read in great literature and judges who are better servants of the law is perhaps wishful thinking. Reading does not necessarily result in greater empathy. Yet the idea that literature offers something of importance to the understanding of the law seems to be a habitually attractive one for law and literature scholars. Often that amenability stems from the connection between narrative and case law. Constitutional law and citizenship, however, ask slightly different questions about narrative and the possibilities accessed through reading.

Because it does not subordinate inconclusiveness to conclusiveness, narrative fiction throws into relief the constant processes of negotiation between individual citizens, their experiences, and the equivalent values that define society. The "retrospective prophecy" that orders the law, according to Peter Brooks, has the effect of reading the courts as a superscript of the nation-state. Contestations of citizenship benefit from the kind of sense-making that occurs in constitutional law; as *Down by the River* suggests, though, contestations must originate from a negotiation of the diverse experiences of citizens within the gap between the ideal and the

permitted. Roisin's narrative of the redeemed sinner in many ways enfolds Mary back into the ideal citizenship of motherhood and duty for Irish women. By labelling her a scapegoat, Molly suggests Mary is a permitted citizen on the margins of the nation. The court injunction, of course, delineates exclusion. Similar categories arise in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Heather Blazing*, which suggests that inconclusiveness in narrative can work towards a complex negotiation between each category. When the narrator attempts to give structure to Mary's non-linear experiences, it attempts to negotiate a space where the ideal and the permitted are not two opposing sides of a national conversation. In other words, narrative fiction operates differently from what Tóibín called the adversarial tradition of the law.

Because of the willingness to explore the negotiation between the ideal and the permitted, narrative fiction imagines constitutional amendments. The referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, held on 25 May 2018, finds some germs in *Down by the River*, perhaps through the younger generation of women in the novel like Mary and Molly. Structures of inconclusiveness, where the ending of a novel suggests a future-oriented plurality of possibilities for definition and sense-making, allow for the imaginative removal from existing structures of society. Where the phone-ins force Mary into one of two politically-oriented narratives, O'Brien can attempt to write Mary's experiences and perceptions of her world as gossamer. In other words, *Down by the River* can imagine a world in which a different constitution, one that does not include the Eighth Amendment, would be required to best represent the Irish nation.

The referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution overwhelmingly passed. Almost two-thirds of Irish citizens voted in favour of the Thirty-Sixth Amendment to the Irish Constitution bill with a voter turnout of 64.13%, which marks a higher

margin than when the Eighth Amendment was implemented in 1983.[23] Of course, the work of grassroots activism, health experts, media coverage, public canvassing, op-ed writers, and so on, played a major role in the groundswell support for the change in the constitution. This chapter suggests that novels such as *Down by the River*, *The Heather Blazing*, and even *At Swim-Two-Birds* also had a part to play. More than reflecting the social milieu of their times, novelists like Flann O'Brien, Colm Tóibín, and Edna O'Brien compel readers to think structurally about an alternative constitution that springs from within an imagined story world. The Irish Constitution creates a complex figure in the shape of the ideal citizen, which encompasses many different narratives about Ireland as a nation. Because of its emphasis on conclusiveness, the Supreme Court cannot always access the manifold narratives that arise as unforeseen consequences of the definitions of citizenship in the constitution, which gives much impetus for the critical and imaginative work of Irish novelists.

[23] The Thirty-Sixth Amendment repeals the language of the Eighth Amendment. Turnout and voting statistics reported in *The Irish Times* ("Referendum Result").

Chapter Three:

The Politics of Reliability: Memory, Narration, and the Status Quo of Silence for Irish Women

Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls*, Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* all examine the politics of reliability as it relates to ideal citizenship defined for Irish women in the constitution. O'Brien's novel interrogates the limits of ideal citizenship as a reliable model for young women in the nation. Doyle's and Enright's novels explore the social, cultural, and political predispositions in Ireland to disbelieve women, especially those who have survived abuse. Acts of permitted citizenship within these novels illustrate the failures of the ideal values upheld in the constitution, which establish a status quo of silence around issues facing Irish women. Because of this status quo, narration itself becomes a permitted act, not ideal in terms of the values of the nation and state throughout the twentieth century. Narration thus takes on the form of negotiating the terms of reliable citizenship away from silence. In effect, expressions of discontent become acts of unreliable citizenship for Irish women, at least in the eyes of the state.

Political unreliability intersects with narrative unreliability to differing degrees across each novel. Caithleen Brady, the narrator of *The Country Girls*, is not an unreliable narrator. However, her structuring of the past as a romance fantasy breaks down the strict dichotomies between artifice and authenticity. As Elke D'Hoker argues, "the tradition of female narrative voice still stands for honesty, immediacy, and authenticity, for a narrator-protagonist who is artless and speaks directly from the heart" (23). For Caithleen, the artifice involved with imagining the past as a romance fantasy provides a method for defying the expectations of reliable citizenship—namely motherhood—that have been placed on her. Caithleen's disruption

of the strict division between authenticity and constructed memory gives fresh impetus to think about Paula Spencer in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and Veronica Hegarty in *The Gathering* as broaching the limitations of reliability as it is traditionally defined in literary theory. Both novels feature textual markers normally associated with unreliable narrators and Paula and Veronica take to commenting on their own fallible memories; yet neither are unreliable in the traditional literary sense. The textual markers of unreliability instead gesture towards the politics of skeptical reading, which can become especially problematic when the narrators are survivors of abuse. Paula and Veronica's frequent commentary on their own fallible memories, as well as the imagined scenarios they sometimes construct of the past, interrogate why reliability itself appears to be taken as *a priori* and politically neutral.

At the time of its publication in 1960, *The Country Girls* was a revelation in that it was one of the first novelistic portrayals of the real struggles, desires, and everyday lives of young women growing up in rural Ireland. While novelists such as Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien, and even Edith Somerville had all written coming-of-age stories about young Irish women before, their settings were mainly restricted to middle class households or the Anglo-Irish Ascendency. The frank depictions of Caithleen and Baba's budding sexuality as they traverse small town life, attend school at a convent, and eventually find work in Dublin, was new territory for Irish writers in 1960. Much of the novel focuses on the ebb and flow of Caithleen's interactions with her first notable love object, Mr. Gentleman; the trauma Caithleen suffers when her mother dies in a boating accident near the beginning of the novel underpins many of her experiences of romance, longing, and desire for escape from rural Ireland. Her romance fantasy of Mr. Gentleman is a construction of the past that is meant to provide the opportunity to escape an ideal citizenship of

motherhood, which, beginning with the death of her own mother, appears throughout the novel as a position of stasis and unhappiness, which leads to decay.

For Paula Spencer in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, motherhood demands the reliable performance of duties within the home, even at the cost of her own wellbeing. Due to her obligations and duties within the domestic space, she must put up with her physically, sexually, psychologically, and emotionally abusive husband, Charlo. Abuse begets alcoholism and in turn Paula's memory suffers. Her memories of adolescence and trips to the hospital after one of Charlo's assaults highlight the fact that her fallibility comes from a predisposition within the institutions of the nation to question the reliability of women like Paula. State institutions facilitate a version of ideal citizenship built upon silence; in the very process of attempting to narrate her experiences, Paula becomes an unreliable citizen. The textual markers of unreliable narration in the novel are the result of institutional and cultural expectations that Paula accept abuse and remain silent about trauma.

Whereas Paula learns to embrace her fallible memory as an expression of a political predisposition in Irish society, Veronica Hegarty in *The Gathering* recognizes a potential in constructed versions of the past. Imagining the past helps Veronica overcome a status quo of silence because it gives voice to past traumas that have been suppressed. When Veronica was nine, she witnessed an old family friend named Lamb Nugent molesting her little brother Liam. Like Paula, Veronica is unable frame an exact memory of the event in her mind. For Veronica, silence comes from a familial demand not to disrupt the household. As she recognizes later in life, this familial silence correlates to a larger cultural silence pervading Ireland. After Liam commits suicide at the beginning of the novel, Veronica attempts to make sense of what she witnessed in her grandmother's house as a child. Part of her process is the creation of a romance

fantasy of the past where her grandmother, Ada, and Lamb were lovers. While similar to the romance fantasy that Caithleen creates, Veronica's differs in that she frequently comments on and revisits the forms of her constructed past. Not meant to supplant the truth of her experiences, the imagined history instead provides Veronica with an outlet in which to speak—something routinely denied to her in the Hegarty household and Irish society as a whole.

Widespread revelations of child abuse in the educational institutions and the homes of Ireland form the cultural backdrop to Enright's novel. Although these revelations are not central to O'Brien's or Doyle's novel, the worlds that Caithleen and Paula move through share the characteristics of abuse that Veronica attempts to uncover from her own past. Since the 1990s, Ireland has been forced to reconcile with the fact that the ideals and morals outlined in the Catholic nature of the constitution were not representative of the reality for many of the more vulnerable citizens of the nation. Child abuse was a systemic problem in Catholic educational institutions during the bulk of the twentieth century in Ireland. According to the Executive Summary of the Ryan Report, "parents, relatives and others knew that children were being abused as a result of disclosures and their observation of marks and injuries. Witnesses believed that awareness of the abuse of children in schools and institutions existed within society at both official and unofficial levels" (14).[24] Yet little was done to address grievances: "contemporary complaints were made to the School authorities, the Gardaí, the Department of Education, Health Boards, priests of the parish and others by witnesses, their parents and relatives. Witnesses reported that at times protective action was taken…in other instances complaints were ignored, [and] witnesses were punished" (14). The silence within the Hegarty family is indicative of a

[24] The Ryan Report is the common name for the final report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, published 20 May 2009. The Commission began in 1999 after a decade of public debate and revelations in the press.

larger “culture of secrecy and isolation” (14). Reliability within such a culture is tantamount to silence—a silence doubled for women who historically have had an uneasy relationship to Irish citizenship.

The tenuousness that Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica experience can be traced back to changes in the status of women between the 1922 Free State Constitution and the 1937 Irish Constitution. Most problematic of these changes, argues Maria Luddy (176), was De Valera’s omission of Article 3, which in the Free State Constitution guaranteed citizenship “without distinction of sex” (Free State Const. Art. 3). The novelist and historian Dorothy Macardle, who was a close friend and ally to De Valera, was firm in her assessment of the constitution in a letter that she wrote to the Taoiseach: “I do not see how anyone holding advanced views on the rights of women can support it, and that is a tragic dilemma for those who have been loyal and ardent workers in the national cause” (qtd. in Kiberd 405). While De Valera claimed that the effect was moot, feminist organizations such as the National University Women Graduates’ Association and the Joint Committee of Women’s Societies and Social Workers protested the omission because they sensed it could open dangerous avenues for the government to diminish opportunities for Irish women in the public sphere. Some of their petitions were successful: “the phrase ‘without distinction of sex’ was inserted in article 9 which read that ‘No person may be excluded from Irish nationality and citizenship by reason of the sex of such person’” (Luddy 184). Nonetheless, as Ivana Bacik notes, “over the five decades from 1922 to 1970, women lacked visibility in the public arena” (100). A women’s place in the public sphere was something not taken as a natural, reliable expression of citizenship. Put another way, ideal citizenship in the constitution is not necessarily a reliable source for reciprocating the ideals of Irish women as citizens.

Ideal citizenship for Irish women designates them as mothers performing their duties within the home. They are the happy maidens in De Valera's Ideal Ireland. In the words of the constitution, "the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" (Irish Const. Art. 41.2.1). The state determines domesticity as the realm of ideal citizenship for Irish women like Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica. And only ideal citizens receive affirmations from the state: "mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home" (41.2.2). Whatever progressive welfare policies that could arise in such a designation clash immediately with the gendered nature of the article. In the experiences of Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica, the duties pertaining to motherhood are ultimately oppressive as they hem women into homes where silence is expected with regards to anything that might trouble the larger social and political narrative of Ireland as a moral beacon for the world.

While ideal citizenship for Irish women places them within the home, the primacy of the family as a social unit ensures that the status quo of silence dictates the interactions between private and public life. Ireland sanctifies the family unit as "antecedent and superior to all positive law" (Irish Const. Art. 41.1.1). Relatedly, divorce was not legal in Ireland until 1996; the stipulations governing divorce remain strict.[25] When the dynamics of the family unit are oppressive or abusive, as is the case in all three novels, that sanctification creates an unreliable environment in which to live, and one that becomes difficult to escape. Because of the political centrality of the family, the persistent examination of dysfunctional families in Irish literature

[25] Courts will only grant a dissolution of marriage if "the spouses have lived apart from one another for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least four years during the previous five years" (Irish Const. Art. 41.3.2.i). There must also be "no reasonable prospect of a reconciliation between the spouses" (41.3.2.ii).

offers more than a common trope. Such has been the trend of depicting dysfunctionality in Irish homes that Michael Cronin suggests "one could argue that the unhappy Irish family is such a staple of late twentieth-century Irish fiction and memoir that its repeated appearance is more wearisome than illuminating" ("Inside Out" 77). Such narratives are not just about unhappy childhoods or dysfunctional relationships between family members; they are about the consequences of the ideal social milieu outlined for citizens in the constitution. The status quo of silence in many ways exemplifies Ariella Azoulay's point about the framework for the exclusion and abandonment of women in modern conceptions of the nation-state. Narrative provides the opportunity to challenge this framework. "It was only when women began writing their own lives (biography) in a massive way," Azoulay contends "that they created the conditions for discerning that the 'first event' of the abandonment of the female body to sexual assault is actually the universal female experience" (62). Any act of narrating events that counters the sanctification of the family or the idealization of motherhood in turn becomes an act of unreliable citizenship. The tension between reliability and unreliability in these novels thus maps onto the tension between ideal citizenship and permitted citizenship.

Although these three novels do not feature unreliable narrators in the traditional sense, the disruption of the dichotomy between truth and artifice challenges many conceptions of narrative reliability and unreliability. Current theoretical models of unreliability generally stem from Wayne Booth's seminal definition while adding a more extensive taxonomy of possible reasons and/or effects of unreliable narration. Booth asserts that a narrator is "*reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work…., *unreliable* when he does not" (158-9). Neither Caithleen, Paula, nor Veronica can be considered unreliable based on the norms of their narratives as per Booth's definition. At no point are these novels raising questions about

the validity or legitimacy of the traumatic aspects of their past. Instead, these novels raise questions about assumed causal relations between unreliability and deficiency.

Whether extensions of Booth's rhetorical definition, or theories based on cognitive-linguistics, models of unreliable narration take for granted the ethical superiority of reliability. For narrative theorists, unreliable narration most often designates a form of deficiency in the narrator. Even James Phelan's rhetorical and ethical typology of unreliable narrators that "bond" with the implied reader reverts to the implicit hierarchy established by Booth's definition. Bonding unreliability, Phelan argues, has the "paradoxical result of reducing the interpretive, affective, or ethical distance between the narrator and the authorial audience" ("Estranging" 225). The paradox of bonding to which Phelan refers is based on the idea that the implied audience feels closer to a narrator *despite* their unreliability. In a similar fashion, Greta Olson's distinction between "fallible" and "untrustworthy" narrators essentially functions along an axis intersecting moral and epistemological deficiency. Either an unreliable narrator is lying—thus morally deficient—or they cannot remember properly—thus epistemologically deficient. When Paula and Veronica question their own reliability, they initially imagine themselves in terms of deficiency. Doyle and Enright shift the impetus of reading unreliability away from determining the credibility of the narrators and onto the definitions of ideal citizenship. In effect, these narrators overcome self-doubt and a culturally engrained sense of deficiency through strategic unreliability.

Reading the narrative techniques in each of these three novels as critical of the larger socio-political circumstances of Ireland assumes a degree of agency in the act of storytelling for Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica. Especially in relation to Caithleen, whom critics have at times dismissed as naïve or innocent, a focus on her construction of the past as an interrogation of the

reliability that motherhood provides for her future lends new perspectives on the possibilities that can arise from imagining romance fantasies within a patriarchal state. Emphasising these structures of the past and of fantasy offers a way to proceed when reading the markers of unreliability in Paula's and Veronica's narratives. In the face of the political predisposition to disbelieve women, Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica must find a way to shift the impetus of unreliability away from the validity of their experiences and onto the structures and institutions of the nation and state.

The politics of reliability is therefore a central organizing component in *The Country Girls*, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, and *The Gathering*. While reliability works strictly in a cultural sense for O'Brien's novel, the structures of Caithleen's narration suggest an intrinsic link between culture and narrative. Paula and Veronica must overcome the ideal citizenship for Irish women that, along with motherhood, privileges silence. In a socio-political climate with a status quo of silence, any act of narrating events that contradict the moral platitudes of the state takes on the valence of disobedience. Unreliability, once recognized as an inextricable manifestation of a political predisposition, becomes for Paula and Veronica an opportunity to imagine permitted citizenship as overtaking the ideals of motherhood and silence. Permitted citizenship accounts for the actions of these women that exist outside the ideal, but cannot be considered excluded. Women are not excluded from speaking, from telling their stories, by any policy or law of the Irish state; in that same sense, Caithleen's citizenship does not require motherhood. Yet the politics of reliability work as an act of censorship for Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica. Narration in each novel offers a radical reimagining of the politics of reliability as a means of forging new forms of ideal citizenship not dependent on silence within the home.

Memory, Structure, and Motherhood in *The Country Girls*

Due to the sociological insights and the cultural impact of *The Country Girls*, critical approaches to Edna O'Brien's first novel have at times ignored Caithleen's narrative techniques and style. The novel made a significant, and not necessarily welcomed, impact in Ireland; the censor banned the book and some parishes publically burned copies. Frank Tuohy suggested that "while Joyce in *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist*, was the first Irish Catholic to make his experience and surroundings recognizable, 'the world of Nora Barnacle' had to wait for the fiction of Edna O'Brien" (qtd. in Roth 50). And in *The Country Girls*, the world of Nora Barnacle is one hedged in by the expectations of the nation. For Rebecca Pelan, Edna O'Brien's fictional worlds are "symbolic of a post-independence Ireland in which women are material possessions, whose ambitions are rarely allowed to go beyond getting a husband and making a home and whose identity is formed entirely by an enforced domestic role as wife and mother" ("Nora Barnacle" 51). Perhaps because *The Country Girls* is considerably less experimental or reflective compared to O'Brien's later novels, such as *Down by the River*, the emphasis on the insight into the everyday life of girls growing up in rural Ireland has tended to elide considerations of the narrative techniques that Caithleen uses in structuring her memories.

The elision of narrative technique in critical receptions of *The Country Girls* continues, if obliquely, the tradition in which authenticity and honesty are in opposition to artifice. As Kristine Byron argues, a critical emphasis on the author's persona tends to "ignore not only the 'cultural and political contexts' of Edna O'Brien's writing, but also…her narrative techniques" (17). O'Brien has been keenly aware of the way that cultural and political contexts shape public persona. Irish, Stage-Irish, expatriate, women's writer, Joyce acolyte, Colleen: interviewers and critics alike have labelled O'Brien in a multitude of ways throughout her career. Her awareness

of the different roles that she plays, and has been made to play, informs an understanding of the possibilities available in the construction of memory and of the self (Pelan, "Stage Irish" 71-2). Asked about autobiographical readings of her work, O'Brien once responded that "whether a novel is autobiographical or not does not matter. What is important is the truth in it and the way that truth is expressed" (qtd. in Greenwood 7). Even her memoir, *Country Girl* (2015), features prose that at times sparkles with imaginative possibilities bordering on the tall tale; storytelling, for O'Brien, accesses truth through its potential for self-liberation and political critique based on subjective experiences. After all, writing *The Country Girls*, O'Brien recalled in a retrospective for *The Guardian*, "was a way out of County Clare" ("Causing a Commotion"). In *The Country Girls*, narrative structure offers an avenue for self-liberation even if its potential has limits.

Halfway through the novel, Caithleen receives a letter from her family friend Jack Holland while away for school at a convent. One paragraph of the letter puzzles her: "And, my dear Caithleen, who is the image and continuation of her mother, I see no reason why you shall not return and inherit your mother's home and carry on her admirable domestic tradition" (*TCG* 81). Her response to the letter is dismissive in a rather curious way: "I wondered if he was going to give the place back to me; but another thought flitted across my mind and I laughed to myself" (81). She then moves on, never explaining that thought. At this point in the novel, Caithleen has already revealed Jack's infatuation with her mother; he was left heartbroken after her death in a boating accident. That Caithleen is not only the image but the "continuation" of her mother implies that Jack wishes to eventually marry the daughter of his lost love. Caithleen recognizes this as well since it seems to be the other thought that flits through her mind. Or, rather, it "flitted." The past tense indicates that Caithleen narrates from a future-oriented position. Caithleen already knows that during her next trip home at Christmas, Jack will officially propose

marriage to her. She could narrate the thought that flitted through her mind, but chooses not to. As such, the passage represents a moment of paralipsis, or "an alteration that consists in giving less information than should presumably be given" (Prince 69). The reason for this paralipsis has to do with the way that Caithleen structures her memories to highlight the limited roles offered to women in the Irish nation.

The expectations that underlie Jack's letter can be traced onto ideal citizenship for Irish women as outlined in the constitution. Keeping the "domestic tradition," to use Jack's words, echoes the sanctity of the family and the domestic space as the realm for women to exercise the role of motherhood. In *The Country Girls*, mother figures are almost always associated with restriction and death. Even before her death, Caithleen's mother lived a constrained existence at the hands of her feckless husband, whose alcoholism, physical abuse, and unreliability with money took a visible toll. Throughout the opening chapter, Caithleen remembers how her mother consistently looked as though "her mind was far away" (*TCG* 6); rarely can she remember her mother being happy. Similarly, Baba's mother cuts a frustrated, stifled figure. "She wanted two things from life and she got them—drink and admiration," Caithleen notes of Martha, though this point is preceded by the recognition that "strangers and commercial travelers…thought she looked sad" (31). Part of the reason that Caithleen admires Martha is that she travels out of the home. Martha frequently goes to the local hotel or pub to have drinks. Including the detail about the perception of strangers, though, suggests an underlying anxiety about the limitations of Martha's lifestyle. Ultimately, Baba's mother remains tethered to Mr. Brennan—her outings more a pantomime liberation meant to cover up a dissatisfaction with life at home.

Against the anxiety about motherhood that underlines Caithleen's experiences in the novel, her paralipsis in relation to Jack's letter suggests a critical function in the way that she organizes

her memories through her narration. Because she delays the information about Jack's marriage proposal, she establishes an innate connection between a future of motherhood and a life of slow decay and death. Jack proposes to Caithleen in his bar while his jaundiced mother sits beside the two. Caithleen fixates on the old woman: "the yellow skin stretched like parchment over her old bones, and her hands and her wrists were thin and brown like boiled chicken bones. Her knuckles were bent with rheumatism, her eyes almost dead, and I hated to look at her. I was looking at death" (*TCG* 94). Caithleen's only reaction to the proposal, to the suffocation that she remembers feeling in this moment, is to get away. Maureen Grogan argues that "O'Brien employs the function of memory to give her narrators a degree of objective distance from their own tales, allowing them to use their inner visions in much the same way she uses her own: to create lucid, credible, and perhaps more easily acceptable versions of their own lives" (11). For Grogan, Caithleen's memory separates her from past traumas and allows her to find pathways out of these moments of crises. In that sense, the romance fantasy with Mr. Gentleman seems immediately to offer Caithleen a way of framing a "more acceptable version" of her life. When read as a commentary on citizenship, though, Caithleen's memories and her fantasies take on a critical and imaginative capacity that has sometimes been dismissed in accounts of the novel.

Focusing on the structure and language of Caithleen's narration recognizes her agency as a storyteller. At times, the overall arc of the trilogy has detracted from the critical capacity that Caithleen demonstrates in the first novel. Writing a review of the trilogy for the *The Guardian* in 2008, John Mullan followed a common critical formulation that the narrative arc exemplifies a trajectory of innocence lost ("The More Deceived"). O'Brien herself gave fodder to such readings in an essay written for *The New York Times*: "coming back to [Caithleen and Baba] I knew that Baba's asperity had to prevail. Heroines don't have to be good anymore, because more

women are writing fiction and are eager to express the more volatile part of themselves" ("Irish Heroines"). As such, Elizabeth Weston argues that, caught in the thrall of childhood trauma, Caithleen is denied narrative subjectivity (87). Pelan in turn suggests that Caithleen epitomizes "the pathetically fearful and ill-equipped narrator of much of O'Brien's fiction" ("Nora Barnacle" 58). Certainly over the course of the trilogy and epilogue, Caithleen seems to fade away from the vitality shown in the first novel. By the third novel, *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, she is no longer the narrator; in the Epilogue, Baba suggests Caithleen committed suicide.

Julia Obert argues that *The Country Girls* offers a potential for Caithleen to move outside the repressive patriarchal nation. For Obert, the absence of an idealized maternity in the first novel of the trilogy moves "beyond lamentation or complaint" and attempts to imagine existing beyond the discursive limitations set for women in the nation (284). Obert sees the liberating potential in a "transnational poetics," especially through Caithleen and Baba's landlord in Dublin named Joanna, a figure who has received very little scholarly attention. Figures oriented towards the continent give Caithleen a map for escaping the physical and mental boundaries of small-town Ireland. Returning to the moment of paralipsis in response to Jack's letter shows the possibilities that narration also affords Caithleen to think about "a way out" of the idealized role of citizenship with which she is expected to align, at least within the scope of the first novel of the trilogy.

Caithleen may not be polemical in her reading of the past, but as the paralipsis with Jack's letter indicates, she organizes her memories on more than just a chronological level of plot. An emphasis on the agential choices that Caithleen makes in the narration of her memory in the first novel of the trilogy provides an impetus to think about her romance fantasy with Mr. Gentleman as an imaginative space from which to proceed towards a version of the future not fastened to

ideal citizenship. Caithleen falls for the suave, older, married Frenchman in part because he represents a certain degree of exoticism. A love affair with Mr. Gentleman hardly replicates the "domestic tradition" of Caithleen's mother; the affair is adulterous and he is not Irish. He also appears rather predatory, often showing up when Caithleen is emotionally and psychologically at her most vulnerable. Amanda Greenwood suggests that, ultimately, Mr. Gentleman exemplifies a "negative romance" evident throughout *The Country Girls* trilogy. Derek Hand rather dismisses the romance plot because "even though [O'Brien] fulminates against patriarchal power [she] actually re-inscribes it by slavishly viewing the world of sexuality from a male perspective" (*Irish Novel* 241). In these views, Mr. Gentleman is the incipience of a series of bad relationships that eat away at Caithleen's sense of self. According to Danine Farquharson and Bernice Schrank, in O'Brien's early novels "characters' romantic longing and sexual experiments are shaped by a patriarchal world from which they seek to escape" (111). As a result, "cultural critique is available to the reader (not the characters), and then only between the lines" (111). Certainly, a particular, and culturally engrained, narrative of heterosexual belonging houses Caithleen's romantic longings. Romance fantasy may not be in and of itself a viable endpoint for liberation from the strictures of patriarchal society. Read as a symbol of an entrenched patriarchal world, Mr. Gentleman seems to epitomize Caithleen's naïveté because she is so willing to frame him as a saviour despite knowing that he inevitably abandons her at the end of the novel.

Just as she constructs her reactions to Jack's proposal in order to highlight the repressive ideals of the nation, Caithleen creates a version of Mr. Gentleman that imagines romance fantasies as liberating. He is a character in the version of the past that she constructs. Even his name suggests such construction of fantasy; Caithleen only refers to him as "Mr. Gentleman"

despite knowing that his real name is Mr. de Maurier (*TCG* 12). With its correlation to author, the name "de Maurier" serves as a reminder that Caithleen is an avid reader of complex narratives about relationships. Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, James Joyce's "The Dead," and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* are all referred to in the novel. Greenwood argues that intertextuality is "instrumental to O'Brien's analysis of the compromised nature of female subjectivity" (24). On the one hand, these intertextual references hardly offer sound relationships or models of subjectivity for Caithleen. On the other hand, these particular texts indicate that Caithleen is an astute reader aware of the aesthetic possibilities afforded by narrative structures.

As such, Caithleen organizes her memories around a romance fantasy that liberates her from a restrictive future of ideal citizenship. Mr. Gentleman tends to show up in the novel whenever Caithleen finds herself at a moment of crisis. After the awful scene of Jack's proposal in the bar, Caithleen runs out into the street only to find Mr. Gentleman in his car, its "headlights were blinding" (*TCG* 94). He offers Caithleen a ride home, an escape, and another offer for a second ride on Christmas day. Time and again in the novel, Mr. Gentleman appears in Caithleen's life to assuage her fears, anxieties, or doubts, which is perhaps one of the reasons that the romance fantasy can be so limiting: it depends on Mr. Gentleman's presence. When, at the end of the novel, he fails to appear to take Caithleen away to Vienna, the romance fantasy reaches a damaging conclusion. Yet, knowing how it all ends, Caithleen narrates the fantasy anyways. One possible reason for this construction of the past is to consider that it allows Caithleen to imagine an obligation, duty, and sense of belonging entirely distinct from the "domestic tradition" that Jack proposes. After all, she does eventually leave Ireland in the subsequent novels. The fantasy version of her romance with Mr. Gentleman allows Caithleen to navigate a world where her ideal future is not determined by her duties within the Irish home.

The descriptive language that Caithleen uses to narrate her desires, fantasies, and interactions with Mr. Gentleman provides as much a sense of liberation as the actual presence of her love object. In the Christmas car ride with Mr. Gentleman, Caithleen remembers how "that moment was wholly and totally perfect for me; and everything that I had suffered up to then was comforted in the softness of his soft, lisping voice, whispering, whispering, like the snowflakes" (90). Her lyrical prose and emphasis on sensorial descriptions create a harmonious world. Descriptive language plays a distinctive role in the construction of these fantasies because, as Caithleen articulates, the act of noticing operates as an internal survival mechanism: "always on the brink of trouble I look at something, like a tree or a flower or an old shoe, to keep from palpitating" (107). Mr. Gentleman offers her a consistent object to look at, one that allows her to narrate the past as a world abundant with rich details to observe. More than a matter of ignorance or innocence, these observations characterize Caithleen's narration as world-building.

And in this world carved out of fantasy, Caithleen attempts to recuperate an existence denied to her mother. Buying a "white lace handkerchief" at Easter leads Caithleen to fantasize about "the summer when [she] would wear it stuck to [her] Mama's silver bracelet…While [she] was out boating with Mr. Gentleman, it would blow away, moving like a white lace bird across the surface of the blue water, and Mr. Gentleman would pat my arm and say, 'We'll get another.'" (114). The presence of the bracelet vicariously incorporates Caithleen's mother into the fantasy. She creates a space in which her mother is no longer bound by her duties to a home run into the ground by her husband, a world in which she is not legally obliged to remain connected to him. Even the fact that the fantasy occurs on a boat ride recuperates the world in which Caithleen's mother had to live. There are no accidents in this world, no untimely deaths. Mr. Gentleman offers a steady, material, and paternal comfort—a handkerchief can float away

without care, since they can just get another. In this world, Caithleen and the spectre of her mother can live untethered to the home and to domestic duties.

If Mr. Gentleman provides a rehearsal of life outside ideal citizenship, he also ensures that Caithleen stays within the boundaries of permissibility. As Helen Thompson notes, few scholarly readings of lesbian desire in O'Brien's novels and short stories exist despite a general acknowledgement of the subtext amongst readers (21). Yet Thompson's call to "not relegate lesbian readings to margins and parentheses" seems to have only been partially heeded (21). *The Country Girls* has not been extensively written about in terms of lesbian desire. Although relatively muted compared to other O'Brien texts such as "Sister Imelda," "The Mouth of the Cave," or *The High Road*, queer desires arise throughout *The Country Girls*. Near the beginning of the novel, Caithleen recounts some taboo tickling with Baba, knickers off: "the greatest secret of all" (*TCG* 8). Unlike acts of permitted citizenship, such as finding work at a grocer's, homosexuality requires great secrecy for Caithleen. As Joni Crone noted in the 1980s, "there are no laws against lesbianism in Ireland. This does not mean that we live in a lesbian utopia. The taboo status of lesbianism functions as an unwritten law, suppressing not only the practice of lesbian sexuality but the awareness of its very existence" (qtd. in Palko 188). Tickling Baba represents a fleeting moment in the text. When the more sustained interest in Cynthia enters the novel, Caithleen maintains her secrecy through a recourse to Mr. Gentleman.

Cynthia, as an older mentor to the younger girls, provides an even more culturally taboo love object than the married Mr. Gentleman. The senior takes to Caithleen immediately and one night, "when [Caithleen] was going to bed, Cynthia kissed [her] on the landing. She kissed [her] every night after that. [They] would have been killed if [they] were caught" (*TCG* 78). The fears of being killed for their transgression rings with the hyperbole of the schoolyard. Based on the

laws of the country and the prescribed ideal for Irish femininity, though, a real threat of exclusion persists. Mr. Gentleman becomes a conduit for the complex desires at play in the scene. First, Baba uses him as a way of expressing her own jealousy upon seeing the two girls kiss: "all that talk about old Mr. Gentleman was a joke" (78). Second, after Caithleen parts from Cynthia for bed, she returns her thoughts to her primary love object, thinking about the letters she writes to Mr. Gentleman (79). Whereas Mr. Gentleman as "liberating" love object indicates the impossibility of upholding the ideal home and family that the nation prescribes, as a "normalizing" figure he shows the limits of permissibility. An Irish woman might be permitted to achieve gainful employment, but she cannot participate in a sexual relationship if it does not garner the potential for reproduction.[26]

Caithleen's structuring of her narrative about the past creates a number of complications, especially with the tension between the ideal and the permitted. Because Caithleen does not always directly comment on some of the less felicitous behaviours of the characters in her world, critics have tended to dismiss her potential critical functions. Indirectness, though, stems from the larger prevailing culture, upheld by ideal citizenship. Navigating the gulf between permitted and ideal citizenship, between fantasies that liberate and fantasies that normalize, involves narrating from a position within society that expects complicity with duties restricted to the home. Throughout the novel, Caithleen includes details that suggest the violence underlying these expectations. Although her narration never explicitly frames Mr. Gentleman as a predatory figure, that sense remains in the text ready to be gleaned. In fact, the infrastructure for the harm

[26] Focusing on reproduction also limits the term "mother" to a biological function. Abigail L. Palko unpacks some of the complicated tangles of motherhood in both Irish and Caribbean contexts in her book *Imagining Motherhood in Contemporary Irish and Caribbean Literature* (2016).

and abandonment of women that Azoulay theorizes can be seen in all of the men with whom Caithleen interacts. Mr. Brennan, Baba's father, puts his arm around Caithleen's waist when he is drunk at Christmas; Martha promptly tells him to go to bed. Jack loiters around town waiting for Caithleen on a number of occasions. Even Hickey, her first love, at one point threatens to pinch Caithleen's bottom if she takes too long to get ready.

Without the platform to make the violence of this patriarchal culture explicit, Caithleen turns to the structures of narrative and of romance fantasy to explore alternative forms of belonging. Her desire to escape a future of ideal citizenship means that her narration explores the limits of permissibility. The examples of mothers around her, after all, demonstrate the unreliability of the ideal values upheld in the Irish constitution; where mothers are sanctified in the constitution as of immense importance to the moral and social welfare of the nation, in Caithleen's experience mothers are imprisoned to an unhappy home, unable to ever achieve dreams of self-liberation. Although romance fantasies ultimately fail as a form of liberation for Caithleen in the rest of the trilogy, the attempt to remember the past as something beyond the expectations of ideal citizenship amounts to a way of opening up a space of permissibility.

Unreliable Institutions in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*

At the time of its publication, Roddy Doyle's fifth novel, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, was something of an outlier for a writer who had made his name depicting the lives of North Dublin youth in his *Barrytown Trilogy* and had won the Man Booker Prize for his fourth novel, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*. Whereas his first four novels focused on male-dominated, homosocial worlds, Doyle turned successfully to the voice of Paula Spencer for *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, a character he first created as a part of his television miniseries *Family*.

Similarly situated in North Dublin, the novel opens with a young Gardaí informing Paula that her estranged husband Charlo has been killed by the police during a botched kidnapping. The news prompts Paula to narrate her past with Charlo, which eventually goes back further to her childhood and adolescence. Because of the abuse and her subsequent alcoholism, Paula struggles with the minute details of her memory. Caramine White claims that "although he asks questions about narrative reliability, Doyle seems to be more concerned with Paula finding her own truth, making sense of truth, and building on it to survive" (140). But the movement to the past, to the time before Charlo's abuse, suggests that this sense of truth goes beyond her relations with individuals.

While *The Country Girls* focuses on the way that social interactions operate through expectations of reliable citizenship, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* examines how institutions of the nation and state, as gatekeepers of citizenship, create Paula's sense of her own unreliability. Voices of the nation consistently interject against Paula's fragmented narrative. Doctors, teachers, friends, and family all interrupt her narration by asking questions aimed at invalidating her memory. The trajectory of the novel centers on Paula's recognition that her fallible memory does not invalidate the truth of her experiences. Unlike Greta Olson's designation of fallible narrators as epistemologically deficient, Paula's fallible memory extends from the predisposition to disbelieve her perceptions that underpins her experiences with the institutions of the Irish nation.

The Woman Who Walked into Doors dramatizes the ways in which medical and educational institutions hone ideal citizens for a status quo of silence. Adolescence conditions Paula to avoid reporting acts of violence or harassment to authorities, since her teachers automatically treat her complaints with, at best, skepticism. At worst, these teachers actively

participate in sexual harassment. Secondary school indicates to Paula the cultural assumption that she ought to be a bodily entity first and foremost, which effectively dismisses her intellectually. When she marries Charlo, and the cycles of abuse begin, Paula feels as though she has few places to turn. Her frequent trips to the hospital indicate that the skepticism of her teachers was part of a larger infrastructure in the Irish nation and state that reinforces the predisposition to deny the reality of abuse. Ignoring the obvious signs of domestic violence, Paula's doctors instead find reasons to blame her, such as smelling alcohol on her breath. Relegated to her home, with no allies in the institutions of Ireland, Paula turns to alcohol as a coping mechanism, which begets some of her struggles with memory. Hence the complicity of the nation and the state: institutions continuously suppress Paula's voice to the detriment of her memories.

In the first half of the novel, Paula struggles to find validation, desperately seeking to have her memories align with those around her, especially her family members. Often this validation hinges on the discourse of particulars; Paula seeks confirmation that the details of her childhood memories are accurate. In the early stages of the novel, this desire to confirm minute details often detracts from the larger emotive impetus, or truth, of the memory:

> When I think of *happy* and *home* together I see the curtain blowing and the sun on the wall and being snug and ready for the day, before I start thinking about it like an adult. I see flowers on the curtains—but there were never flowers on the curtains in our room. I asked my mammy when I was over there last week did we ever have flowery curtains and she said No, they'd never changed them, always stripes. (Doyle 7)

Paula's narration typically finds recourse to this mode of qualification—of uncertainty and, perhaps, fallibility. In other words, she invites skepticism onto her memory in part because she is surrounded by skeptical voices. Yet the passage also calls attention to the nature of reliability in the first place; why do we necessarily believe her mother's memory over Paula's own sense of her childhood home? Why does Paula? *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* examines the political links between skepticism and the evaluations of reliability at a readership and cultural level.

The claims of uncertain childhood memories precede the first instance in which the institutions of the Irish nation-state fail to acknowledge the abuse enacted on Paula. Only a few pages after she draws attention to her own fallibility, a brief chapter exemplifies the failure of Paula's doctors to notice or report signs of abuse: "*the doctor never looked at me. He studied parts of me but he never saw all of me. He never looked at my eyes. Drink, he said to himself. I could see his nose moving, taking in the smell, deciding*" (23; original emphasis). As a hallmark of the narrative structure, the passage will repeat later in the novel, with the full context of Charlo's physical abuse leading to several hospital visits. Many reviewers of the novel recognized the link between Paula's instability with her memory and traumatic abuse. Mary Gordon for *The New York Times* compared Paula to the great heroes of modern literature: "Memory, language, the struggle to comprehend and name a self, to separate the true history from the false one: these tasks fall to Paula Spencer as they fell to Proust's Marcel or Joyce's Stephen Dedalus" (Gordon). Few locate the source of Paula's great struggle beyond the home and the interior self. Illustrated by the negligence of the doctors, the institutions of the nation play a major role in Paula's anxiety about her fallible memory.

Secondary school marks the beginning point for Paula's anxiety because it conditions her to accept blame for acts of violence, sexual or otherwise, whether or not she is at fault. Part of this conditioning arises from the mitigation of her intellect and the emphasis on her presence as a bodily entity in the world. The educational system ensures that Paula be viewed only in terms of a limited capacity: she is placed in the second lowest section in the school, Class 1.6, where the seating arrangements are conducive to abuse. Teachers force Paula to sit beside the bully Derek O'Leary: "He grabbed me again, right up my leg this time because I was turned away from him. It frightened me this time; he wanted to hurt me. I punched him right in the face" (Doyle 30). Paula resorts to violence because she has no other alternative; replicating the social and political predisposition to disbelieve women, the teachers implicitly grant Derek O'Leary the benefit of the doubt, letting him "sit down and [making Paula] stand up for the rest of the class" (30). The male teachers in the school ensure that the disavowal of her capacity as a reasoning and thinking person establishes a version of cultural reliability built upon a bodily and domestic presence. Mister Waters, the English teacher, uses his lessons to instill this doubled marginalization by simultaneously chastising Paula's mind while fondling her body: "He never let us forget that we were dense, that we were a waste of his time. Another ladies' man; he put his hand on my shoulder once and he kept it there and kept it there while he bent over and changed Their to There" (33). As someone who once loved primary school because she excelled at storytelling, Paula unsurprisingly sees herself getting worse and worse at her subjects, with the exception of "Domestic Science" (31). Quite the contrary to failing the students, Paula's secondary school fashions its pupils into ideal citizens for the Irish nation, especially for the women—giving nominal access to education while reinforcing the duties of motherhood in the home.

Paula's experiences in adolescence illustrate the precarious ambivalences of idealized Irish femininity. Laura Sydora, writing about Anne Enright's novel *The Gathering*, argues that the Irish nation establishes a concept of women as "pure, asexual, but reproductive [mothers]" (250), which also captures the overriding ambivalence that Paula experiences as a teenager. Patriarchal foundations of the Irish nation idealize women as paradoxically sexless but also as objects for sexual reproduction (Meaney 232). Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary are inscribed into one complex that Paula correlates to her years in secondary school: "you were a slut if you let fellas put their tongues in your mouth and you were a tight bitch if you didn't—but you could also be a slut if you didn't. One or the other, sometimes both. There was no escape; that was you" (Doyle 47). Entering adolescence coincides with entering the maze of Irish femininity determined by the men of the nation. Within this maze, identity becomes contingent on the impossible tight-rope act of being both virginal and reproductive. The bitch/slut distinction that Paula remembers also aligns this paradoxical plurality of identity with a predisposition to disbelieve; no matter what a girl did, no matter what she said, her reliability was already determined by those around of her. Distrust coincides with any missteps: if Paula does not toe the many lines set out for her by her teachers, doctors, family members, and friends, she has her reliability brought under scrutiny—as witnessed by the fact that she is punished for Derek O'Leary's transgressions.

The interjecting voices of the nation that arise throughout Paula's narrative replicate these socially, culturally, and politically engrained motives to discredit her experience. Exterior voices of doubt, well-rehearsed within the national discourse, infiltrate Paula's narrative to question her reliability: "*Did you fall down the stairs, Paula? Did you walk into a door, Paula? What made him do that, Paula? What made* you *do that, Paula? Did you say something to*

him?[…]*Why did you marry him then, Paula?*" (171). Institutions of society reinforce the sense of instability that Charlo instills. As a result, she oscillates between blaming herself—"I fell"—and blaming Charlo—"He felled me" (163). Her experiences of traumatic violence mirror the ambivalence of the bitch/slut dichotomy of her adolescence. That those two contradictory sentences occur one after the other explicates Paula's struggle with the reliability of her own account of the abuse, until she finds herself feeling "brainwashed and braindead, a zombie for hours, afraid to think" (176). Like a skeptical reader, Paula rereads her own experiences continuously in search of errors. In Paula's case, then, unreliability is not a marker of individual failure or deficiency; it is a symptom of the predisposition to disbelieve women engrained in the structures of ideal citizenship in Ireland.

Paula's narrative works through the precarious nature of memory in order to understand truth as more than an absolute, myopic perception of official discourse. By the end of the novel, the interjecting voice of the nation stops being a source of anxiety and becomes a rallying cry for affirmation. Eventually Paula can rebut all of the infringing questions she receives from doctors, friends, and her community: "Do I actually remember that? Is that exactly how it happened? Did my hair *rip*? Did my back *scream*? Did he call me a cunt? Yes, often; all the time. Right then? I don't know. Which time was that anyway? I don't know. How can I separate one time from the lot and describe it? I want to be honest. How can I be sure? It went on for seventeen years" (184). Demands for facts and a linear narrative issue from a particular ideal of reliability. Asserting the actuality of her abuse over and above the minutiae of factual detail is necessary for Paula because, as she states, "that's the thing about my memories. I can't pick and choose them. I can't pretend" (197). In the end, all she has is her own assertion over her memories. Against the narratives imposed on her by Charlo, her teachers, doctors, and the nation at large, Paula makes

the revelation that her unreliability accesses the truth of her experience better than could ever be achieved through the validation of minute particulars.

Doyle's use of textual markers normally associated with unreliable narration disrupts the often unproblematically assumed association between reliability and truth. In Paula's experiences, reliability, which equates to silence, is incompatible with the truth of her trauma. After all, for so long she reliably performs the role of lummox for Charlo and the doctors. Merely speaking about events that she experiences is an act of unreliability against state ideals where the family reigns supreme. Paula Spencer does not just narrate amidst her trauma, her alcoholism, and her fallible memory, she narrates against a deeply-rooted patriarchal understanding of reliability and citizenship. Within the span of the last few pages, an interaction between Paula and her daughter Nicola occurs twice, which prompts a final test for skeptical readership:

> –What now? Said Nicola.
>
> –God knows, I said. –But one thing's for certain. He's not coming back in here again.
>
> Her face said it: she'd heard it before.
>
> –He's not, I said. –I'll bet you a tenner.
>
> –Okay, said Nicola.
>
> It was a great feeling for a while. I'd done something good. (225)

The second reads:

> –What now? Said Nicola.
>
> –God knows, I said. –But one thing's for certain. He's not coming back in here again.

She'd heard it before.

–He's not, I said. –I'll bet you a tenner.

–Okay, said Nicola.

It was a great feeling. I'd done something good. (226)

Two differences occur across the otherwise verbatim repetition of an exchange between mother and daughter. The second passage seems more confident and definitive, especially with the removal of the qualifier "for a while." At the same time, the repetition invokes one last confrontation with the skeptical reader. The impulse of the implied reader to look back and to verify—to see what changes across the two passage—mimics the impulse to scrutinize those who survive abusive situations. Like Paula's doctors, the skeptical reader searches for something wrong in her narration. In this way, Paula challenges the politics of reliability and asks from which political position one reads skeptically.

Unreliable Homes in *The Gathering*

The political underpinnings of reliability that Paula confronts in the mid-1990s coincides with the national revelations about systemic abuse in Ireland. The exposure began in the 1980s but the full reach of the abuse was only beginning to be uncovered in the 1990s when it was picked up by national media outlets. For example, in June 1996, *The Irish Times* reported a sharp increase in reported cases of child abuse in the West of Ireland: "there was a total of 489 reported cases in 1995 under the categories of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect/emotional abuse, which represents a four-fold increase since 1987" ("Suspected cases"). *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* indicates the institutional conditions that allowed for a culture of abuse to proliferate through a status quo of silence. *The Gathering* in turn emphasizes the silence in the home alluded

to in the Ryan Report. Although the specific act of violence that Veronica witnessed occurred within her grandmother's home, the personal nature of the abuse indicates the full consequences of the kind of culture procured through ideal citizenship in Ireland. The impetus for Veronica's need to narrate Liam's molestation arises from occurrences within the nation. "I never would have made that shift on my own," Veronica intones, "if I hadn't been listening to the radio, reading the paper, and hearing about what went on in schools and churches and in people's homes" (*Gathering* 173). As the state was forced to reckon with systemic abuse, Veronica begins to recognize the consequences this culture of silence had on her childhood. In other words, Enright's novel brings to a national scale the anxiety and implicit violence that Caithleen associates with motherhood in *The Country Girls*.

Whereas Caithleen does not distinguish between romance fantasy and reality, Veronica makes the movement towards imagined scenarios of the past an explicit part of her process in unveiling her suppressed memories. Veronica opens her narration by declaring that she must "bear witness to an uncertain event" after she learns that Liam has committed suicide in England (1). As a child of nine, Veronica saw Lamb Nugent, a friend of her grandmother Ada, molest her brother in their grandmother's house. Veronica might also have been abused by Lamb; she cannot be sure. Beyond the trauma of witnessing the molestation, part of the reason that Veronica cannot be sure of her memories is due to the silence imposed by the Hegarty household: whenever anything unsavoury occurs, the common refrain in the family is "don't tell Mammy" (9). The mother figure becomes a repository for blame throughout Veronica's narrative. Unable to cross a threshold of communication, Veronica has been forced to keep silent her entire life about what she witnessed as a child. One of the key developments in the novel, as Laura Sydora has argued, centers on this relationship between Veronica and her mother; the

inability to speak, the novel intimates, rests in patriarchal structures enshrined in the Irish nation by the state and not necessarily because of any inherent flaw in Veronica's mother. The Hegarty family replicates a larger impetus in the socio-political structures of Ireland to render the truth of child abuse untenable or illegitimate. Ideal citizenship for Irish women, in Veronica's experience, compounds this structure of silence. Faced with these dual structures of reliability in Ireland—the sanctified family and the idealised role of motherhood—Veronica reflects on the possibilities afforded through narration of the past and present as a means of uncovering the processes that allow for the continuation of silence in the nation and state.

Differences between the discourses of the three narrative layers in the novel throw light on the conditions that Veronica must navigate in order to speak to an event that has been shrouded by a culture that privileges silence over disclosure. As such, *The Gathering* shifts the focus of unreliability away from judgements about Veronica's fallible memory and onto the infrastructure of the Irish state as it shapes reliable citizenship for Irish women in terms of the family unit. Throughout the first narrative layer, which consists of the present and the events that follow Liam's suicide, Veronica frequently comes up against the limited roles idealised in the constitution for Irish femininity. Problems in her marriage arise in part because her husband Tom wishes to reinforce the role of motherhood and domestic duty onto Veronica's experience, just as Veronica's father had done to her mother. By drawing connections between her present circumstances with Tom and her life growing up in a restrictive and silencing household, which comprises the second narrative layer, Veronica establishes a causal relation between her fallible memory of family life and the structures of the Irish nation. As Liam Harte argues, "Veronica's unreliable narration of her memory of her immediate response to the sight of Liam being abused is even more revealing of the disjunction between affect and understanding that attended this

moment of traumatic witnessing" ("Mourning" 194). Harte, like Laura Sydora and Carol Dell'Amico, sees *The Gathering* as a rejection of singular, patriarchal evaluations of truth. Rather than being a symptom of patriarchal constructions of the past and of history, Veronica's frequent commentary on her unreliability signals an attempt to narrate past these cultural and national limitations. A third narrative layer is required in order to circumvent the anxiety of a fallible memory that initially causes a tension between the first two narrative levels. Creating an imagined romance between Ada and Lamb allows Veronica to uplift the underlying truth of her experiences beyond the cultural need for an exact picture of events, which in many ways is symptomatic of a culture that upholds silence as reliable citizenship.

Much of the tension in Veronica's marriage, as depicted in the first narrative layer, stems from the fact that reliability is anything but neutral or static. The gendering of economic roles in modern Ireland means that Tom continuously shifts the parameters of reliability for Veronica:

> When Tom was starting out in his own business, and I had a small baby, I left that baby with a minder and worked day and night to keep up with the mortgage repayments. But when he began earning again, it was clear that his money was much more important than any money I might earn, that his job was an important job, that he couldn't be expected to be doing pick-ups and Pampers and snot and drop-offs with so much importance around. And, eventually, I gave up work so that we would not be so much *in his way*. (*Gathering* 151).

Whatever supposed liberation brought about by the emergence of Ireland as a global economic player during the Celtic Tiger can scarcely be viewed in Veronica's circumstances. When it becomes convenient, Tom subordinates Veronica's breadwinning to her role as a mother within the home. While the separation of spheres is hardly a new or specifically Irish concept, the Irish

context provides insight into the ways that state mechanisms reinforce larger ideological infrastructures. Tom has the constitution on his side, after all. Just as historically the status of women as citizens in the independent nation-state has at times lacked reciprocating reliability, gendered labour roles put Veronica on uncertain terms. Permitted to work when necessary, the impetus for Veronica's existence in Irish society eventually returns to the duties of motherhood and domesticity. The qualifications that Tom places on Veronica's labour mirrors her own qualifications that she places onto her memories of the past.

As some critics have pointed out, at the core of the novel rests Veronica's deeply entrenched challenge to her own mother for a perceived inability to protect her children from the molester Lamb. Motherhood, in other words, exemplifies the way that "Enright critiques the inability of modern Irish women to reconstitute an identity amidst an unreliable, silent, and patriarchal past" (Sydora 239). Veronica at least partly recognises the way that patriarchal structures have influenced her mother's general aloofness. Although the novel never moves towards complete reconciliation between mother and daughter, oscillations between the various narrative layers help contextualise the behaviour of Veronica's mother within state models of the sanctified family. Veronica's father, after all, instills and enforces the silence that allows Veronica's mother to stay detached from traumatic events in the lives of her children: "*There's no need to tell your mother now*, as if the reality of his bed was all the reality that this woman should be asked to bear" (*Gathering* 9). And bear it she does, as exemplified in the first narrative layer when the Hegarty family gathers for Liam's funeral. Veronica takes the opportunity to confront her mother about the past: "do you remember a man in Granny's?" (213). Since this was a burden she did not have to bear within the framework enforced by Veronica's father, the conversation amounts to an exchange of stops and starts; the only way that Veronica's mother

can respond to the line of questioning is to ask "what man?" or declare "I don't know" (213). Once again the personal conversation dramatizes a political and cultural thread in Ireland, perhaps exemplified best in a debate within the Dáil Éireann from the 1950s, which considered the right for women to sue their husbands. One Fianna Fáil TD argued that women ought not to bring domestic assault to the courts because "if the whole world knows about it, it will be much worse…it is much better to have them fight at home" (qtd. in Connolly 74). What happens in the home ought to stay in the home given the status of the family as the primary social unit in Ireland. Of course, the debates in the Dáil, the aloofness of Veronica's mother, and the language of the constitution all take on different socio-political vectors; yet together all three illustrate the way that the status quo of silence in Ireland works in terms of infrastructure.

Veronica's conversation with her mother during Liam's funeral exemplifies the interpersonal consequences that result from the status quo of silence. In place of collaboration sits absence of communication. Since the confrontational conversation occurs towards the end of *The Gathering*, Veronica has nearly completed a trajectory towards affirmation of the "uncertain event" to which she must bear witness. Thus, although Veronica cannot get to the truth through a dialogue with her mother, she does have recourse to narrating an interior life that allows her to establish a sense of agency over the past: "I am saying that, the year you sent us away, your dead son was interfered with, when you were not there to comfort or protect him, and that interference was enough to send him on a path that ends in the box downstairs. That is what I am saying, if you want to know" (213). She never speaks these lines. Rather than an act of spontaneous assertion of blame, Veronica's narrated response to her mother has required careful work and contemplation. Being able to narrate to herself with such clear determination comes as the result

of a continuous reflection on the nature of her memory, the unreliability of a factual narration of her past, and her abilities as a storyteller.

Veronica's reflection begins with the process of uncovering the two main culprits that have created a sense of unreliability in the narration of her past. The first culprit is Tom, since he constant shifts the nature of Veronica's reliability as a citizen, worker, and mother according to the ideals of Irish society. Secondly, the shifting boundaries of patriarchal acceptance manifest through the status quo of silence that creates a void of meaning when it comes to Veronica's memories, which renders any attempt to narrate Liam's abuse in a cohesive and singular manner an impossible act. These two elements are the result of stipulations of reliable citizenship since Irish women are idealised as mothers within the home and, due to the sanctity of the family, what occurs within the home should remain unspoken, which is the very problem that Paula encounters.

Because of this absence of definitive and corroborative meaning with regards to the past, Veronica's narration in the second narrative layer creates disorienting pluralities while describing traumatic events that could be associated with unreliability. "What struck me was the strangeness of what I saw," Veronica intones as she attempts to recount the scene of molestation for the first time, halfway through the novel:

> It was as if Mr Nugent's penis, which was sticking straight out of his flies, had grown strangely, and flowered at the tip to produce the large and unwieldy shape of a boy, that boy being my brother Liam, who, I finally saw, was not an extension of the man's member, set down mysteriously on the ground in front of him, but a shocked (of course he was shocked, I had opened the door) boy of nine, and the member not even that, but the boy's bare forearm, that made a bridge of

> flesh between himself and Mr Nugent. His hand was buried in the cloth, his fist clutched around something hidden there. They were not one thing, joined from open groin to shoulder, they were two people that I knew, Mr Nugent and Liam. (143)

The strangeness in the passage lies not in the truth of the experience—Veronica is keenly aware that this is an abusive act—but rather it lies in the malleability of perception. Liam is first an extension of Mr Nugent, then he is separate; Mr Nugent's penis turns into Liam's forearm; Liam is then joined to Mr Nugent by *something*; Liam and Mr Nugent are finally separated into two different people. Contours and images shift constantly in the brief paragraph. The passage chaotically oscillates between certainty and uncertainty in a way that reflects Veronica's circumstances. Veronica seems implicitly to ask what a reliable narration of this traumatic scene would even look like. Just as she must operate between mother and breadwinner, always at the behest of Tom, she must also be malleable in her perceptions of the past.

For the first half of the novel, however, malleability causes a great strain for Veronica between perception and truth. Veronica's central struggle in the first half of her narrative is to reconcile two versions of imagining truth: "even though I know it is *true* that [Liam was abused], I do not know if I have the true picture in my mind's eye" (144). The distance between the subjective truth of lived experience and a true picture of events in one's own memory is at the heart of the various narrative layers that Veronica creates, in a similar fashion to Paula in Doyle's novel. And this distance mirrors the disjunction between Veronica's experience with motherhood and the "true picture" of motherhood idealised by the Irish state. Mothers are meant to tend to their duties within the home, to avoid neglect. Veronica's mother cannot protect Liam,

and in turn Veronica. As an almost natural reaction to these ruptures, Veronica sees her fallibility as a direct consequence of her mother's failure to protect her.

Because Veronica feels anxious about the mutable pictures in her mind's eye, the childhood memories that dot the first half of *The Gathering* operate in tension between rigid singularity and uncertain plurality. During one memory of a childhood Christmas at Ada's house, Veronica remarks how "that Christmas morning was as clean and crisp as it always is—my memory will not allow it to rain" (86). Just as she must grapple with a void of meaning, Veronica's memory will only allow certain images to form in her memory. Tension arises between the plurality of the molestation scene and the absolute singularity of her other memories, which once again brings about the question of reliability. This tension can be read in the ambiguous temporality of Veronica's narrative grammar—the memory "was" as it "always is." Grammatical plurality brushes up against mnemonic singularity, which in many ways frames the anxiety that Veronica experiences as a narrator of her past. Yet the mere process of acknowledging these uncertainties and discontinuities becomes an integral part of Veronica's trajectory towards understanding the truth of her past as valid even if she is not able to completely outline every detail. By accessing the permitted roles of chronicler, narrator, and historian, Veronica breaks the cycle of silence. Because of the quasi-inviolability of the family unit in the Irish nation-state, the past becomes, necessarily, a matter of confrontation. When Veronica listens to the radio or the television, she listens to a confrontation between private citizens and the organs of the state for the crimes of the past, the crimes that have been otherwise silenced. Hearing such confrontations spurs Veronica to negotiate the tensions of singularity and plurality—the shape and form of her narration of her fallible memory—as a way of

understanding the potential in non-cohesive or non-uniform storytelling for critiquing the politics of reliability in Ireland.

In place of the anxiety that mounts through the tension in Veronica's narration of the past, the third narrative layer creates a space for speculative and imaginative storytelling. New ways to tell the story of the past take center stage in the third narrative layer, which means Veronica can work through the process of narration as a means of negotiating truth and validity. The recuperative work done in this narrative layer allows Veronica to overcome her anxiety about the past because it denies the primacy of silence in the terms of reliable, ideal citizenship. The imagined romance fantasy between Ada and Lamb plays through the kind of confrontation that Veronica finds difficult with Tom and with her mother because they represent immediate ramifications of citizenship and interpersonal relationships. Creating a romance history allows Veronica distance and the opportunity to imagine a world where things need not be left unsaid or, worse, silenced. Susan Cahill argues that, although "Veronica continuously reminds us of the uncertainty of her memory, the unreliability of her narration, and her recourse to creative imagination" (182), she does so because of the "failure on behalf of the state to protect the vulnerable" (182). One way for Veronica to overcome her perceived fallible memory is to imagine a world before the traumatic event occurred. This way she can speculate on Lamb's motivations, which she was never allowed to do amidst the family embargo against speaking. In effect, Veronica's created version of the past overcomes the status quo of silence that never allowed her to grapple with the events that she witnessed as a child and thus created her own sense of unreliability.

As was the case with Caithleen, romance, with its fictitious forms, yields the necessary conditions for Veronica to explore the trauma of her past given the silence imposed upon her at

so many junctures. Veronica thus frames her imagined fantasy of Ada's past through the lens of recuperation: "If I want to tell Liam's story, then I have to start long before he was born. And, in fact, this is the tale I would love to write: history is such a romantic place, with its jarveys and urchins and side-buttoned boots. If it would just stay still…If it would just stop sliding around in my head" (*Gathering* 13). Fictionality begets self-creation, something denied to Veronica time and again throughout her life. When infrastructures are meant to abandon and to harm women, to render lived experiences invalid, as Azoulay suggests is the case, fiction can present alternative platforms for assertion. Affirming fiction as a space for the expression of a truth denied begins to turn Veronica's understanding of her own memory away from anxiety.

The third narrative layer of *The Gathering* allows Veronica to narrate the uncertain as certain. Before the first attempt at narrating Liam's molestation, with all of its strangeness, Veronica concretises her imagined characters of Ada and Lamb. For the most part, the pair have been imagined across a series of hotel bars, car rides, and adventurous escapades. Just prior to her attempt to narrate her childhood trauma, Veronica declares that she must "get to the *truth* of it—of man's essential bookieness and woman's essential whoreishness" (139). But these are not truths on the face of it; Ada is a whore and Lamb is a bookie only in Veronica's created version of the past. Veronica's mother only suggests that Lamb was around in Ada's house because he was the landlord. Such essentialist language abounding from gendered stereotypes seems at odds with the plural representations of the past that otherwise proliferate in Veronica's narrative. Perhaps, then, the truth to which Veronica refers is in the rupturing of the divide between certainty and uncertainty—a rupturing that demands the negotiation of truth, voice, and validation.

The ability to render these two characters legible out of nothing but imagination provides Veronica with the platform to reconfigure her own sense of the past. Through this reconfiguration, Veronica connects unreliability to a larger cultural impetus. Uncertainty can still reach towards an affirmation of her experiences. As such, unreliable narration provides the impulse to question the nature of reliability in the first place. Where the first half of *The Gathering* presents unreliability as anxiety, the second half of the novel suggests that the unreliability of an imagined past circumvents reliable citizenship in order to speak to an underlying truth obscured by the structures of the state.

Manifesting this shift requires a change in the nature of affirmation for Veronica. Towards the end of the novel, the first and second narrative layers coalesce as a space where Veronica can confirm her understanding of past events. The most affirmative moment in Veronica's narrative, paradoxically, occurs when she lists the things that she does not know:

> These are the things I don't know: that I was touched by Lamb Nugent, that my Uncle Brendan was driven mad by him, that my mother was rendered stupid by him, that my Aunt Rose and my sister Kitty got away. In short I know nothing else about Lambert Nugent; who he was and how Ada met him; what he did, or did not do.
>
> I know he could be the explanation for all of our lives, and I know something more frightening still—that we did not have to be damaged by him in order to be damaged. It was the air he breathed that did for us. It was the way we were obliged to breathe his second-hand air. (224)

Bleakness breeds affirmation through the acceptance of an impossibility: Veronica will never have a "true picture" in her mind's eye. Traditional readings of unreliable narration may fix

attention on these statements of uncertainty, of what remains unknown. In *The Gathering*, what remains outside Veronica's grasp in effect confirms a larger issue within Irish life—the home and the family are not the protective and ideal units that have been imagined in the constitution. The constitution, or at least the ideals of the state, seem to be couched in Veronica's choice of the word "obliged." Due to the widespread silence around systemic abuse, Veronica makes clear that the event does not reverberate around the actions of one man. She and Liam were always obliged to live in a place that facilitates the actions of men like Lambert Nugent.

Absence underlies Veronica's affirmation of her experiences because silence has conditioned her life. The quasi-inviolable position of the family in the structure of the Irish state ensures that reliable citizenship for so long meant maintaining a status quo of silence in the face of circumstances that undermine the ideal Ireland upheld by the constitution. This reliable citizenship of silence coincides with the absence at the heart of the infrastructure for the harm and abandonment of women, especially since Azoulay traces the origins of this infrastructure to the absence of women in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. By asserting what she does not know—cannot know—about Liam's molestation, Veronica recognises this inherent absence at the heart of her experience. In the first half of *The Gathering* this absence freezes Veronica and forces her to turn in on her own memory; in the second half of the novel, Veronica sees her unreliable narration as part of an imaginative fiction that gets to the heart of her truth, rather than forging a fabrication of events. Unreliable narration offers the plurality of vision necessary to overcome the reliable citizenship of silence that seeks to invalidate any narrative of the past that does not meet an absolute, and arbitrary, definition of cohesion, unity, and fact.

Enright remarked in a 2015 interview with *The Guardian* that she had long understood that "there was a disjunction between what was really happening in people's lives and how it

was reflected in the institutions and the laws of the country" ("Interview"). In terms of citizenship, Enright seems to be describing the divide between the actions of permitted citizenship that Veronica, as well as Paula and Caithleen, naturally partake in on a daily basis and the ideals of a nation-state that still maintains the patriarchal configurations first established in the 1920s and the 1930s. Veronica uses this disjunction as a means to turn permitted actions—the narration of an imagined past—into interrogations of state ideals that are unreliable when it comes to her own wellbeing. Family dynamics are not just a matter of interpersonal relations; they are about the politics of reliability in a society that constitutionally privileges the sanctity of the home over and above the wellbeing of the individuals residing within. *The Gathering* ultimately seeks to explore the imaginative possibilities of unreliable narration as a means of exposing the disjunctions between the ideal version of citizenship in Ireland and the violence perpetrated within homes.

Conclusion

In late 2017 and early 2018, a high profile sexual assault trial played out in the pages of the press and in online social media platforms. Four men were charged with the rape of a young woman. The trial was particularly high profile because two of the accused, Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding, were star rugby players for Ireland and Ulster. As is often the case with sexual assault and rape trials, public commentary centered on the reliability of women. When Jackson and Olding were acquitted in the Belfast courtroom, social media threw into relief the lines of division. On Twitter and other social media outlets, a wave of support for the complainant came in from across Ireland and globally and took the form of the #IBelieveHer hashtag campaign. For all those who felt the acquittal an injustice, others countered that the trial was a triumph of due

process for wrongly accused men. The divide in the public mirrors the voices of the nation that coincide with Mary's experiences in Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River*, which, as Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica reveal, demonstrates the precarious nature of reliability. The reactions on social media highlight the need to understand the politics of reliability because it highlights the difficulty in negotiating or contesting the values upheld under the rights of citizenship.

Defense lawyers framed the trial in terms of belief and reliability, rather than in the terms of innocence or guilt. The lawyer made the case to jurors that they must assess truth: "consistency is the hallmark of truth. Liars deviate" (McKeown). And the logical extension of this view of truth is that artifice and authenticity are irreconcilably opposed. Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica are all, to varying degrees, inconsistent in their narration; each narrates the truth of her experiences. *The Country Girls*, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, and *The Gathering* suggest that the form of reliability predominant in institutions, like the courtroom, is not necessarily conducive to certain kinds of truth, especially when that truth ruptures the held ideals of the nation. As Paula inquires towards the end of her narrative, how could she possibly be consistent about every detail of abuse that occurred for the better part of two decades? In terms of institutional norms, who decides how much detail, consistently rendered, is enough to tell the truth? The problem with tallying truth through the consistencies of a victim who suffered traumatic episodes, Paula contends, is that it operates from the side of the abuser.

Also occurring in 2018, the referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment similarly invoked questions of reliability. Repealers asked that the nation trust women—that they alter collectively the politics of reliability in Ireland. Narrators such as Caithleen, Paula, and Veronica, demonstrate the forms that such alterations can take. Because they disrupt the strict dichotomies between authenticity and artifice, reliability and unreliability, these narrators

indicate the malleability in the conditions of citizenship. Fictional engagements allow for an imagined constitutional world with different parameters of reliability than those outlined in the actual constitution. In the novels examined in this chapter, reliability is associated with the unsustainable ideals of an outdated, patriarchal state whereas unreliability becomes the imaginative platform in which to negotiate new values for interrelation. These novels imagine what it might look like if in Irish society there was not a predisposition to disbelieve women, especially when they suffer abuse within the homes and institutions of the nation.

Chapter Four:

Why They Left: Emigration as Detachment from Ideal Citizenship

Emigration poses a number of questions about reliable citizenship, usually beginning with why and how citizens move outside the home nation. If, as Donna Gabaccia suggests, "we can write the story of nations from their borders" (qtd. in Green and Weil 8), the reasons for crossing those borders, and for writing stories of border crossing, reveal much about the relationship between the citizens of a nation and the official narratives of belonging upheld by a state. For Nancy Green and François Weil, a study of the policies that a state maintains towards emigration can provide a glimpse into its power structures: "At one extreme, countries have expelled their citizens for political or religious reasons…At the other, totalitarian regimes have prohibited their citizens from leaving, creating everything from administrative barriers to physical walls" (1). Wherever such barriers are erected, physically or metaphorically, literature tests their resilience, as with those writers in exile from authoritarian regimes, or, like Kafka, critiquing from the boundaries of so-called "minor literature."[27] As Green and Weil are quick to point out, most policies exist within a complicated middle ground as opposed to either of these extremes. For Ireland, where periods of mass emigration characterize its modern history, that middle ground highlights one of the major issues posed to the state when it comes to the project of nation-building. The independent Irish state must configure some narrative that accounts for the movement of its people around the world; British colonialism, famine, and war just so happen to provide readymade accounts of the dispersal of the global Irish diaspora. Irish writers have at times aided in defining and crafting these state narratives; but in Kate O'Brien's *Mary*

[27] Deleuze and Guattari, in their essay "What Is a Minor Literature," argue that Irish writing is categorically minor literature because it is always political (19).

Lavelle (1936), John McGahern's *The Leavetaking* (1976; 1984), and Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), moving away from Ireland counteracts narratives of emigration as they are invoked in the Irish constitution. Emigration instead operates as a contestation of ideal citizenship for the characters in these novels. By contrast, Spain, London, and Brussels provide spaces in which the émigré explores the boundaries of permissibility.

When composing the Irish Constitution, Eamon De Valera had to strike a balance between cultural nation-building and legal obligations in his attempt to encompass the history of mass emigration from the island. Repatriation of the global Irish diaspora was simply a logistical impossibility for the independent state. Such a relatively small island did not have the infrastructure to grant the legal status of citizenship to the vast number of people who claimed Irishness around the world. Those who identified as Irish in America alone far exceeded the entire population of Ireland. Part of their solution to this problem was to foster an emotional, cultural link. Article 2 of the Irish Constitution claims that "the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage" (Irish Const. Art. 2), which in effect establishes a call to return "home"[28] for the global Irish—a call that is spiritually, not legally, binding. As far as legal ramifications go, article 2 is, at best, ambiguous. Yet the writers of the 1937 constitution succeeded in firmly establishing a republican nationalist narrative for emigration: the global Irish diaspora was the result of a forced detachment from native soil as a consequence of colonialism and the independent state sought to reattach those who identified as Irish around the world back to the ideals of the nation.

The pretext for the second article of the constitution is the demarcation of the Irish as a

[28] The Constitution reinforces this notion of "home" through the particular language of Article 2. "Affinity," "ancestry," and "heritage" create an etymological continuum in which the terms all relate in some degree to kinship, land, and property ("Affinity").

historically wronged race forced to endure mass emigration as a result of colonial policies imposed by the British Empire. Seamus Heaney's poem "Act of Union" (1975) plays on the well-established literary tradition that frames Britain as ravisher of Ireland: "I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder / that you would neither cajole nor ignore" (ll. 9-10). Such traditions provided a foundation for Republican nationalists and, eventually, De Valera and Fianna Fáil; the "special affinity" outlined in the constitution thus idealizes the Irish abroad as protectors of the values of the homeland. The famine of the 1840s and the economic precariousness that culminated in the first phase of the Land Wars (1879-1881) were at the heart of mass emigration influxes throughout the nineteenth century, and were also, if not entirely the result of colonialism, compounded by the practices of empire. There is no doubting the intrinsic link between mass emigration from Ireland and colonial violence. And, indeed, the history of emigration has included the attempts to foster international coalitions to help Ireland win independence—Wolf Tone in France and the Fenians in the United States, as two examples. Within the official narratives of the independent Irish state, though, colonialism explains the root of emigration narratives *in toto*. Although this narrative is designed to simplify the project of nation-building, it does little to explain why large-scale emigration patterns continued well into the post-war decades of the twentieth century and beyond. Nor does it explain what historian Enda Delaney understands to be the heterogeneity of emigrant experiences (5).

The binary model of a colonially imposed detachment and cultural reattachment explains to some degree why, despite this heterogeneity of experiences, narratives of emigration tend to follow uniform patterns. Clair Wills examines this phenomenon in the context of Irish emigration to Britain: "why, despite actual differences in social background and social outcome for individual migrants, did ideas, opinions and representations of Irish migrants turn on such a

narrow range of stock formations" (*Best Are Leaving* 10)? For Wills, part of the answer lies in the fact that "the experiences of individual Irish emigrants were overlaid by and fed back into fantasies, or to use a term with different connotations, ideologies, of emigration, which helped shape the ways in which those experiences could be understood" (10).[29] To a certain extent, social customs favoured some ways of telling stories over others. As the American author Mary Doyle Curran put it at the beginning of her novel *The Parish and the Hill* (1948), "in telling the stories, there was always one man or woman who was favoured, depending on the number of supernatural visions he or she had had. The one with the longest memory was best, for he could tell visions that were none of his own, but belonged to those dead ones whose names were forgotten" (4-5). A few figures are entrusted with the stories of an entire community. At the same time, the Irish tourist industry banks on nostalgic tours of the "old country," which requires the continuation of fantasies about global Irishness. Irish writers, even those critical of the ideology purveyed by the state, have participated in establishing this kind of nostalgic tourism in Ireland.[30] Relatedly, the binary of detachment and reattachment surfaces frequently in Irish novels and short stories.[31] Irish writers continue to recognize the historical truths underpinning elements of the state narratives about mass emigration from the island. *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, and

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[29] This uniformity can be gleaned from other socio-historical accounts of Irish emigration, such as Kerby A. Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985) and Tony Murray's *London Irish Fictions: Narrative, Diaspora and Identity* (2013).

[30] One example of a travelogue meant to, at least in part, promote Ireland to the English was Seán O'Faoláin's *An Irish Journey* (1940). Similarly, Irish travel writing was a popular genre within Ireland, especially as tourism of the Gaeltacht was a major part of the program for nation-building in the early years of the independent Ireland.

[31] Often the binary surfaces in the tensions between home and belonging, usually illustrated through narrative oscillations between Ireland and another country. Some examples include: Elizabeth Bowen's *The House in Paris* (1935), Sean O'Faolain's *Come Back to Erin* (1940), Jennifer Johnston's *The Illusionist* (1995), Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn* (2009), Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2014).

The Blackwater Lightship, however, represent a strand of Irish literature that has increased in prominence since the mid-twentieth century—a strand that challenges the nefarious potential for the narrative of reattachment to overwrite acts of emigration from Ireland that contest the values of ideal citizenship.

Another effect of the spiritual call to the global Irish diaspora is that emigration of Irish citizens becomes about maintaining a particular identity and heritage. In other words, those who emigrate from Ireland ought to continue to aspire towards the tenets of ideal citizenship outlined in the constitution. The characters who emigrate in O'Brien's, McGahern's, and Tóibín's narratives do so out of a desire to evade the social expectations and effects of ideal citizenship. Underlying these evasions is an attempt to contest the equivalent values determined by the constitution. The contestation remains fairly implicit in *Mary Lavelle* but becomes more explicit with *The Leavetaking*: either ideals must change or citizens experiencing the limits of permissibility must leave. Both novels highlight the need to renegotiate the equivalent values of the Catholic, patriarchal Irish nation-state. *The Blackwater Lightship* takes up more explicitly this negotiation of values by aligning political and geographical detachment from Ireland as necessary to social alterations upon return. Tóibín's novel represents a new dimension of emigration for Irish citizens arising in the last decades of the twentieth century: the free movement of people between nations belonging to the European Union. The trajectory from *Mary Lavelle* to *The Blackwater Lightship* charts possibilities for population movement to reconfigure the boundaries of belonging within Ireland.

Each of these novels uses an emigration narrative to rewrite detachment as a personal endeavour that avoids any fidelity or reattachment to the tenets of ideal citizenship upheld by the Irish state. When Mary travels to Spain in O'Brien's novel, she does so with the intention to

work and live as a governess for a year, after which she will return to marry her fiancé and begin the second of her "life's two accepted phases" (O'Brien 30). By the end of the novel, O'Brien's protagonist has decided to end her engagement, collect the inheritance from her grandmother, and leave Ireland once again for pastures new. Patrick Moran, narrator of *The Leavetaking*, spends the first half of the novel remembering the trauma of his mother's death when he was a child and the second half recounting his time in London on a leave of absence from his position as a teacher in Dublin. While in London, Patrick marries outside the Church, an act that will cause him to lose his job as a teacher; the novel ends with Patrick and his wife, Isobel, leaving Ireland for a new life in England. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, three gay men return to Ireland as one of them, Declan, is dying of an AIDS-related illness. Their return does not enact a spiritual reattachment, but rather begins a process of modification and social change on a small, familial scale. Emigration in these narratives becomes an act of detachment from a particular version of Ireland; at no point do these characters wish to reattach to that version. Instead, they use their experiences of detachment to negotiate away from a "special affinity" to patriarchal and conservative ideals.

The liberating impulse behind the border-crossing in these novels redirects focus away from the reliability of citizens to maintain fidelity to the state and towards the inability of the state to provide a hospitable space of belonging for non-ideal citizens. In other words, characters in the novels come up against the limits of permitted citizenship. Characterological acts of detachment, as a personal kind of liberation, intersect with the larger political framework of emigration in order to question, if not outright undermine, the historical narrative proposed by the state. In other words, emigration as a physical act of political detachment need not amount to a sense of exile or desired reattachment, physically or spiritually, to Ireland. Essential to this

intersection of the political and the personal is a third level of detachment, centered on the narratological.

Though the structures of leaving and returning in *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, and *The Blackwater Lightship* resemble the tensions at the heart of the reattachment narrative, each of these works hinges on principles of reorganization that work as a form of critique. Being formally divided into two distinct parts, *The Leavetaking* demonstrates the most conspicuous narrative reorganization of all three novels. The childhood memories that dominate Patrick's narration in the first half of McGahern's work are non-linear. In part two, Patrick reorganizes the narrative order so that the story of his journey to London and subsequent marriage is presented with relative linearity. With regard to *Mary Lavelle*, the reorganizational principle resides in agency and voice, rather than narrative order. Psycho-narration in the first half of the novel brings to the surface Mary's desire for "self-governance," which has been subordinated to the expectations of a patriarchal social order in Ireland. By the end of the novel, the feelings that once needed to be relayed through the omniscient narrator are finally voiced by Mary herself. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, the reorganizational principle is found in the character Paul, who lives in Brussels with his partner François. While Declan is on his death bed, Paul becomes a modifying figure for the dysfunctional Devereaux family. Their inability to communicate manifests stylistically throughout the first half of the novel in the form of persistent interruptions in dialogue and a staccato narrative rhythm. Near the middle of the novel, Paul tells the longest, uninterrupted story of any character and occasions a slow change in the Devereaux towards reconciliation, which in turn is rendered through a more lucid prose style. Narrative reorganization thus correlates to the negotiation of equivalent values in all three works. When the ideal fails to sufficiently reflect the experiences of the characters, they explore the boundaries of

the permitted in hopes of negotiating, if implicitly at times, new values for Ireland.

The intersection of emigration as political and characterological detachment places *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, and *The Blackwater Lightship* both inside and outside common tropes in the extensive history of emigration narratives in Irish literature. Disillusionment about patriarchal, isolationist nationalism built upon a foundation of rigid and conservative Catholic dogma, connects to what Terry Eagleton argues is a tradition of the "internal émigré." In Eagleton's view, even Irish literature that is not about leaving Ireland often features characters who feel a sense of dislocation from their home and community. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, who famously considered "The Universe" the endpoint for the address that he wrote in the front of his geography notebook, exemplifies this persistent sense of unease and disenchantment with native surroundings (*Crazy John* 244). Of course, the "internal émigré" also butts against the stories of the nation told at the border. "Eveline" from Joyce's *Dubliners*, Elizabeth Bowen's *A World of Love*, and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* all end at a port of call; Eveline stands at the docks of Dublin unable to leave Ireland, while Bowen's and Enright's novels both end at airports. The characters of these narratives all end up at points of departure because they feel that Ireland has ceased to be a place of belonging, and in that sense they are connected to *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, and *The Blackwater Lightship*.

The tension between dislocation, a sense of place, and the idea of Ireland as a home parallels another major trope of modern Irish writing: that of the writer in exile. While commenting on the parochialism of Irish politics in an essay for *The Commonweal* in 1932, Seán O'Faoláin noted that "under such circumstances it is natural that the Irish writer, ignored or misunderstood at home, should gravitate away from his own people—often in bitterness and disgust—even though he knows at the same time that all his interests and sympathies are forever

anchored deeply and firmly in their lives" ("Literary Provincialism" 35). The exilic Irish writer looks to escape the isolationist and conservative state but always returns to Ireland, if not necessarily in a physical sense. Joyce and Beckett inevitably come to mind in this regard,[32] but O'Faoláin also cites Kate O'Brien as one such writer who needed to "gravitate away" from Ireland—she spent much of her writing life in Spain and England. Had McGahern and Tóibín been around in the 1930s, they too might have appeared alongside O'Brien in O'Faolain's essay. Patrick Ward recognizes that the definitions of exile can vary depending on who does the defining.[33] As much as O'Brien, McGahern, and Tóibín align with some of these tropes of modern Irish writing and writers, the emphasis on "home" as a space of belonging does not translate to the trajectories of *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, or *The Blackwater Lightship*. In that sense, considering these texts through the lens of exile literature cannot accord with the way that the reorganizational principles governing the narratives gesture towards a process of detachment from ideal citizenship, because such political detachment requires a structural change. O'Brien and McGahern set up the terms of this negotiation between the ideal and the boundaries of permission while Tóibín considers the social benefits of political detachment. In other words, the politics of reliability surrounding emigration from Ireland is turned towards a critique of ideal citizenship.

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[32] Plenty of critical work focuses on the way that Joyce went to the continent to write back to Ireland. Similar arguments are becoming more prevalent in the appraisal of Beckett's French writings. In a recent article for *The Irish Times*, Emily Bloom notes that the BBC initially rejected Beckett's English translation of *Waiting for Godot* because it contained "too many Irish inflections and idioms" (Bloom).

[33] Ward uses Daniel Corkery's *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (1931) to make this point. Corkery's reading of exilic Irish writing stressed the fact that Irish writers of the English language were always writing about Ireland under the influence of outside forces (Ward 3-7).

Mary Lavelle and Detachment from Patriarchal Nationalism

"Mary's consciousness was at that moment confusingly turned upon herself" (*ML* 30), the narrator of *Mary Lavelle* reveals as the protagonist ponders whether or not to accept the job offer of being a "miss" to a wealthy Spanish family. Part of the reason that Mary ends up accepting the governess position is because she frames it as interstitial—as "a little space, a tiny hiatus between her life's accepted phases" (30). Spain offers a space where Mary might find some liberating, and perhaps unexpected, truth. Mary designates a finite timeframe for her journey in order to maintain some semblance of fidelity to Ireland. The impulse to assure fidelity to Ireland upon leaving its shores surely resonates with the 1922 setting of the novel; Mary leaves just as Ireland achieves independence from Britain.

Published in 1936, O'Brien's novel exists at a crossroads between the idealism of 1922 and the increasingly isolationist stance of the Irish state that ratified the 1937 Irish Constitution. By the mid-1930s, the questions of reliable citizenship that accompany Mary's decision to travel to Spain were being framed as central components of the independent nation state, as made evident in the 1937 constitution which declared that "fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State are fundamental political duties of all citizens" (Irish Const. Art. 9.3). As Anthony Roche argues, O'Brien was keenly aware of the "particular constraints suffered by women" within the model of constitutionality and citizenship that De Valera crafted ("The Devil Era" 113). When Mary determines that she will return to Ireland after a year in Spain so that she can begin her second phase of life, she pre-emptively designs her detachment from the nation with an assurance of reattachment. However, these accepted phases of life, which, in the patriarchal structures of early twentieth-century Ireland, are designated as girlhood and motherhood respectively, sit at the core of Mary's desire to travel to Spain in the first place. Deep within her

consciousness, Mary's personal detachment from the space of Ireland amounts to a political detachment from the social structures of the nation-state. *Mary Lavelle* depicts this entwined connection between the personal and the political. What Mary desires, after all, is not a sense of home or belonging, but a sense of self-liberation through self-governance.

At first glance, the plot of the novel seems to submerge the political components of Mary's journey. Most of O'Brien's fiction centers on a romance plot that brings about a moral crisis in a character or set of characters, and *Mary Lavelle* is no exception. The first half of the novel focuses on Mary's attenuation to life in the fictional Spanish town of Altorno, where she works for the Arreavagas, a wealthy mine-owning family. Her admiration for Spanish life and culture contrasts with the group of other Irish misses that she meets frequently in the Café Aleman. With the exception of Agatha Conlon, with whom Mary becomes close friends, the Irish misses exude provincialism in demeanour and attitude: they chase after the English engineers working in the town and refuse to learn Spanish. Mary's budding love of Spanish life leads her to an affair with the married son of the Areavagas, Juanito. The affair finally convinces Mary that the life promised for her back in Ireland, where she would marry her fiancée John MacCurtain, does not provide her with any sense of the liberation that she desires. Thus, at the end of the novel, Mary leaves Juanito and Spain but only to return to Ireland briefly. She will collect her inheritance from her grandmother and leave Ireland once again for a new destination.

Politics, at least on the national scale, appear subordinate to the dilemmas of faith and romantic desires that shape much of O'Brien's oeuvre. Eavan Boland suggests that, if anything, "[O'Brien's] subversions, her politic, would be deeply private" (20). From this view, the move to Spain in 1922 suggests that *Mary Lavelle* does not hold national politics as a pretext so much as a discourse in need of evasion. Yet the novel is hardly anomalous amongst O'Brien's works in

its use of specific political and historical contexts. For example, setting *The Ante-Room* in 1880 during the Land War heightens the sense of doomed stasis permeating the Catholic, land-owning Mulqueen family; the 1915 setting of *The Land of Spices* (1941), a novel primarily concerned with the doubled *bildungsroman* of a nun and her pupil, is essential to O'Brien's critique of parochial, isolationist nationalism; *The Last of Summer* (1943) features a love affair between a young French woman and her Irish cousins on the eve of the Second World War, with Irish Neutrality a frequent topic of conversation. In a similar fashion, the 1922 setting of *Mary Lavelle* situates Mary within the context of patriarchal nationalism. Mary even participates, if indirectly, in the Anglo-Irish war; when her brother Jimmy joins the IRA, Mary continuously meets him in stealth, "on errands for him or his flying column" (*ML* 22). Apolitical readings of the novel must also contend with the "Don Pablo" chapter that outlines the family history of the Areavaga family—an outline that doubles as a history of the growing tensions between democratic, leftist Spain and Royalist Spain.

The politics of *Mary Lavelle* have to do with the desire to break away from the stipulations of ideal citizenship. Travel throws into relief "the isolationism of de Valera…in a *bildungsroman* that works as an allegory of a nation that will fulfill its potential in the free exercise of its will, however directionless, or illicit" (Mentxaka 71). Eibhear Walshe frames O'Brien's concern with isolationist Irish nationalism in gendered terms. After the censor banned *Mary Lavelle*, O'Brien sought to "[realize] a viable defence against censorship and, by implication, against the constructions of a centralised and masculinist nationalism" (*Kate O'Brien* 151). *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938) was hastily written and published as a response to the proscription of *Mary Lavelle*. The polemical anti-censorship novel may not bear the complex character studies of O'Brien's other novels, but it does indicate that she was a writer very much

engaged with the political scene of Ireland. Like O'Faoláin and O'Connor, O'Brien became increasingly disenchanted with the conservative nature of Irish politics towards the end of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s, although she did not have the same nationalist starting point as her contemporaries. Mary Breen reads Mother Helen Marie's European predilections and disdain for Irish nationalism in *The Land of Spices* as a "critique…of conservative patriarchal ideology…[through] its detachment from Irish nationalism" (167, 169). The arguments that Walshe and Breen make about O'Brien's work of the late 1930s and early 1940s are helpful for illuminating the politics behind the "accepted" phases of Mary's life. Mary's brief hiatus amounts to a disregard for the second phase especially, which, according to the Irish state, ought to be motherhood.

Without the bravura anti-censorship of *Pray for the Wanderer* nor the direct commentary of *The Land of Spices*, *Mary Lavelle* demonstrates the struggle of self-liberation indirectly through narrative intervention. In part, the need for this intervention arises from the uncertainty that Mary faces as her worldview changes. Mary has essentially abandoned the safety of the known for the excitement of the potentially dangerous unknown. Because of the uncertainty that accompanies her emigration from Ireland, Mary maintains a pretense that she will return to the second of her accepted phases of ideal female citizenship in Ireland. Kate O'Brien's idealization of European liberalism stands in stark contrast to the version of ideal citizenship to which Mary accepts she will return at the end of her hiatus in Spain (Cronin, *Impure Thoughts*, 97). The liberal politics of O'Brien, which reject the privileging of conservative family models under De Valera, transfer onto the submerged desires of Mary, and, as such, represent the site of intersection between political detachment and characterological detachment in the novel. Fleshing out the tension between the political and the personal becomes the central task for the

third-person omniscient narrator.

Pyscho-narration, as was the case with Bowen's narrator in *The Last September*, breaks down the barrier between the safety of fidelity to Ireland and Mary's own desire for liberation from the patriarchal social structures offered by her life in Mellick. Dorrit Cohn's point about the abilities for narrative fiction to render interior processes of an individual in a variety of voices presents a working definition for the role of the narrator in O'Brien's novel. Mary's unspoken thoughts correlate to a childhood desire for "perpetual self-government" (*ML* 24), which contravenes her idealized place within the Irish home. The safety offered through the accepted phases of life explains why Mary has consistently dismissed her childhood fantasy as youthful silliness. Yet the desire persists. In *Mary Lavelle*, psycho-narration, or "the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness" (Cohn 14), functions to keep the desire for self-governance at the forefront of the novelistic design.

Even though Mary makes outward gestures of homesickness throughout the first phase of the novel, the narrator establishes a tonal rift between these overtures to the expected and an underlying sense of distance creeping into Mary's psyche. At the beginning of the novel, three letters—one to her father, one to Mother Liguori who organized the job for Mary, and, lastly, one to John—establish a disjunction between the formal manifestations of Mary's persona and the underlying desire to break away from Ireland. At face value, these letters contain all the hallmarks of homesickness. The novel shifts in tone when describing Mary's family history and her life back home. In a passage that might otherwise validate the persona of homesickness through sentimentality and emotion, Brad Kent notes that "Mary describes both Mellick and her family with a cool distance" ("Literary Criticism" 50). These cold descriptions come from the narrator who focalizes through Mary, not Mary herself. This distinction illustrates the way that

psycho-narration operates in the novel to expose the point of tension between personal and political detachment. Mary understands that her desire to escape Ireland amounts to a betrayal of the only life that, until her travel to Spain, she has known—a betrayal that just so happens to coincide with Irish independence from Britain. Narration brings the interior struggle about detachment to the surface, which in turn characterizes all of Mary's interactions with Spanish life within the intersection of political and personal detachment.

The opening sequence of the novel, where Mary writes the three letters posted back to Ireland, establishes the role of psycho-narration as one that exposes the competing strands of Mary's desire: the stability of acceptance and the liberating qualities of self-governance. Since John represents Mary's most significant tie to a future in Ireland, the fact that she writes a letter to him last—after the letter to her father and to Mother Liguori—already flags an internal sense of delay and hesitancy. Full of yearning, the letter to John contains many of the sentiments one might expect to find in a letter home to a betrothed: "it's funny that, apart from missing you, I miss just being home very much" (*ML* 10). Amidst these confessions, Mary writes that the sights and sounds of the Spanish village of Altorno and the bay of Torcal "are growing familiar already" (9). Mary's hesitancy to comment on the familiarity that she feels towards Spain signifies a fear and unwillingness to completely detach from Ireland.

In the first phase of the novel, the responsibility for revealing Mary's underlying desire for detachment falls to the narrator. Immediately after Mary ends her letter to John, the psycho-narration provided by the narrator gives voice to the competing strands of Mary's desires that otherwise go unspoken: "when she had written in this letter that already she felt familiar with her new surroundings, the statement rang curiously to her, but she had let it stand, knowing the phrase as true as she, unpractised in writing or thinking about herself, was likely to achieve. She

did not re-examine it at present" (10). Mary's self-denigration exemplifies the very need for the narrator. "Unpractised" though she may be, her initial impulse is to avoid re-examining the competing strands pulling at her existence. That the narrator presents this information to the reader is no mere act of reporting. In the process of psycho-narrating the internal struggle that Mary avoids, the narrator performs the act of "re-examination" instead. The re-examination and the excuse that Mary makes for refusing to re-examine her "curious" statement point to the source of disquiet back in Ireland.

Without psycho-narration, the text would reproduce Mary's subordination of her own desires for autonomy and agency to the second accepted phase of her life within the home. Acceptance, then, amounts to an act of reliable citizenship since it reconstitutes the narrative of reattachment to the ideals of Irish nationalism. Were Mary to enact a path to reliable citizenship, she would continue to subordinate her own desires for self-governance to an ideal citizenship built upon a "patriarchal social order based on the family unit" (Hanafin 156). After all, the expectations placed onto Mary by her father—a representation of patriarchal Ireland—make her childhood wish for "perpetual self-government" duplicitous to the family fortunes. Becoming an idealized Irish woman at the incipience of an independent Ireland, at least according to O'Brien, pushes self-governance to the periphery. Tracing this version of ideal citizenship for Irish women back to 1922 also means that O'Brien, like her contemporaries O'Faoláin, O'Connor, and Bowen, recognizes the problem as more than a rhetorical configuration by De Valera. If Mary were to adhere to these ideals, she would replicate her sycophantic Aunt Cissy who, Amanda Tucker argues, "provides an exemplary model of Irish womanhood: she runs the house successfully on a small budget, prays constantly" (87). Aunt Cissy never speaks for or against anything without the tacit approval of her brother, Mary's father. Like Mary's cold feelings

towards Mellick, the sycophancy of Aunt Cissy also comes out through the narrator. The mechanism of psycho-narration consistently performs the re-examinations that Mary seems unwilling to perform herself. In other words, the narrator returns the desire for self-governance from the periphery to the center of Mary's experiences in Spain.

The second phase of the novel explores the possibility that Spain could offer an alternative space of belonging. Upon travelling alone in Altorno for the first time, six weeks into her tenure as a miss for the Areavaga family, Mary remarks that the town square made her feel "a little at home" (O'Brien 65). Unsurprisingly, the personal detachment from Ireland associated with finding an alternative home in Spain does not come without reservations or anxiety:

> But sitting here, in green shadow, while the Spanish afternoon dreamt and the strange sky gleamed with familiar homely tenderness—[Mary] felt an unexpected solemn movement in her heart; something like premonition took her, oppressing, puzzling. She felt not sadness but the inability to ward it off; not love but something like resignation to its possible pain. (65)

All Mary has ever known exists back in Ireland. Uprootedness, no matter the agency involved nor the desires achieved, always complicates Mary's self-liberation. Utopic exultation coincides with something a little greyer. The passage never makes any specific claim that the "solemn movement" of Mary's heart relates to Ireland at all. Solemnity could be the result of leaving Ireland or it could be the result of finding a sense of home in a foreign land. Or, the solemnity could refer to a realization that "home" is a feeling constructed and not naturally acquired. Home, in this final sense, correlates to the imposition of idealized values, which, as characterized by Aunt Cissy, prove counterintuitive to Mary's personal constitution. By that same logic, the future-oriented language of the narration, seen in words such as "premonition," reveals Spain to

have more in kind with this patriarchal construction of the world than first grasped.

Beyond the affinity that Mary feels for Spanish culture—Don Pablo Areavaga refers to her as a hispanophile—*Mary Lavelle* frames the political landscape of Spain as an alternative version of patriarchal Irish nationalism. Alternate but not equivalent, the culture of Spain provides Mary with opportunities she otherwise would not receive in Ireland: "Mary's relocation to Spain provides more than her childhood's abstract dreams of adventure; it also offers the certainty of economic and social autonomy" (Tucker 88). While Mary makes her own money, she is also a visitor and not a citizen. The position as visitor with some autonomy ultimately allows Mary to encounter the limits of permissibility, which are highlighted by her friends Agatha Conlon and Rosie O'Toole. Rosie marries a Spanish man and fully transplants from Ireland to Spain. Agatha's same-sex desire is perhaps part of her reason for leaving Ireland. Spain, to a certain extent, permits these women to live outside the ideals of the Irish nation. By the end of the novel, though, Mary recognizes that these women have crossed a threshold of permission and become entrenched in other orders: Agatha enters a convent and Rosie's marriage means she is now a part of the Spanish patriarchal political framework. The "Don Pablo" chapter, curious in the novel because it shifts focalization away from Mary and onto the political history of the Areavaga family, poses a number of challenges to any reading of Spain as the source for Mary's liberation.

In the chapter, O'Brien outlines the tension between Don Pablo, a socialist-leaning mine owner and intellectual, and his wife Dona Consuelo, a staunch Royalist and daughter of an aristocratic family, in order to illuminate the patriarchal nature of Spanish political and public life. Although within the chapter Dona Consuelo is shown to hold some influence over Don Pablo, the family dynamics ultimately resemble Mary's own family back in Ireland. Dona

Consuelo may hold some sway over the politics of her family, but it is an influence deployed from within a domestic space. Those who enter the public sphere, especially the political sphere, are always the men of the family. Likewise, Mary's economic autonomy is bound up with domesticity. Although the circumstances and parameters may differ, Spain, like Ireland, maintains certain ideals that must also be negotiated. As Juanito articulates to Mary in their rendezvous in Toledo, he "[passes] as a serious citizen" (O'Brien 213). Citizenship in both nations is about living up to social, political, and cultural expectations. Political aspirations may not be on Mary's mind per se, but even if that were the case, Spain would present another set of limitations.

The reorganizational principle of the narrator plays as important a role in revealing the political limitations of Spain as when bringing to the surface Mary's desire to detach from Ireland. The passage where Mary begins to "feel a little at home" immediately precedes her first visit to the Café Aleman, a local gathering spot for the Irish misses in the region. On the surface, these two scenes appear to contrast Spanish culture favourably to the misses who are ignorant to the language and customs of the land. While the women gossip and fawn over the English engineers in the café, Mary cannot help but feel they represent the very limited, provincial attitudes that she was leaving behind (71). The other Irish misses resemble Aunt Cissy. Since the political landscape does not actually afford the "self-governance" that Mary desires, the narrator works to align the limitations of Spain to those of Ireland. Between Mary's configuring of Altorno as "a little like home" and the passage in the Café Aleman, hyphenated words proliferate—a total of twenty-five in a three page span.

Hyphenates suggest linkage in that they bind words together, even if such a binding seems arbitrary or is the result of syntactical necessity. At such an important interval in Mary's

detachment from Ireland, when a new sense of belonging in Altorno should be bolstered by the taxing display of the Irish misses, the use of hyphenated words undermines any conspicuous disconnection. Altorno and the Café Aleman are both introduced through hyphenated descriptors. The "tall-housed" Spanish village sits in "deep-scarred" hills and features a "primitive-looking" cinema (65, 64); the Café is the "club-house" where the Irish misses have "tea-time" amidst the "English-looking" men (66, 69). The ratio of hyphenated words in this passage far exceed any other passage in the novel. Although not quite psycho-narration by classic narratological definitions, the narrator still relays an internal process that has already started to push back against any claims for Spain as an alternative home. Hyphenation interprets the "premonition" Mary feels towards the familiarity of Spain as an implicit recognition that an alternative home will not actualize any sense of liberation.

The bullfight that Mary attends with Agatha Conlon shortly after the pair meet at the Café Aleman for the first time offers the crux of political and personal detachments for the novel; entranced by the spectacle, Mary realizes that she must make a personal detachment from her past self in order to solidify the political detachment from the ideals of patriarchal nationalist structures. Detachment dominates Mary's reaction to the brutal, beautiful, and perhaps even sublime, pageantry of the expert bullfighter Pronceda. At first the narrator takes the opportunity to cement Mary's detachment from Ireland: "She was beginning to put two and two together with more method and detachment than John, for instance, might have thought quite necessary" (92). John, after all, had warned Mary against attending the bullfights because he felt she could not stomach the scenes. Mary turns away from John at last, though Spain is not there to receive her. Due to the sublime rhythms of Pronceda's bullfighting, the almost mystical descriptions of how he maims the bull, the detachment from Ireland extends to Mary's own sense of self. As

Pronceda makes his final stroke, killing the bull, Mary feels lost to the rituals of the sport and "detached from herself" (101). No matter the affinity that Mary might hold for Spanish culture, at the climax of the bullfight the psycho-narration of the narrator brings to the surface a realization that Spain cannot provide Mary with her own ideals. Basking in the triumph of Pronceda's glory, Mary nonetheless remains distinct from the crowd surrounding her: "Mary stood among the shouting Spaniards, not knowing whether she shouted too or not" (100). She stands among the Spaniards; she is not one of the shouting Spaniards. The bullfighting scene thus works as a doubled detachment from two patriarchal national structures.

Through the correlations and divergences between Ireland and Spain that Mary explores, her desire for detachment from political ideals becomes a matter of negotiating the boundaries of permission. Whereas in the first half of the novel, Mary turns away from Ireland and towards Spain, the second half of the novel is about discovering how existing between these ideals affords her the opportunities to "self-govern." The space is one marked by precariousness since permitted behaviours of a visitor can quickly turn to exclusion. Similarly, a complete disavowal of Ireland might mean the loss of Mary's forthcoming inheritance from her grandmother. However, the space between ideals is not meant to be permanent—ideals remain constant in abstract while permissions can be granted and revoked. Instead, Mary's space between ideals helps her to conceive of ways to exist outside of such parameters. Her affair with Juanito, as a double of John, pushes against the ideals of patriarchal state structures and tests the limits of permission.

The third phase of the novel, which focuses primarily on the romance plot between Mary and Juanito, demonstrates how detachment from patriarchal ideals of belonging provides Mary with a voice for her self-liberation. Critics have puzzled over what the romance plot means for a

novel that moves towards a liberating, and liberal, view of Europe (Cronin 98). "[O'Brien] gives far more imaginative energy to that *relinquishing* of agency to which Mary is moved by her awakened passion for Juanito, than to the representation of Mary's making her own of her life which is the larger concern of the novel," Patricia Coughlan writes while addressing the stylistic shift from Victorian realism to popular romance fiction when Juanito becomes the central love object in the novel (70). Although Juanito presents the novel with its moral dilemma, customary in Kate O'Brien's oeuvre, his pursuit of Mary appears to move towards a dominance of her. But when the moment arrives, Mary initiates sexual intercourse with Juanito, which establishes her own sense of agency.

Just as hyphenates worked to draw political links between Spain and Ireland, the language accompanying the tryst creates a personal link between John and Juanito. Brad Kent notes that the actual scene of lovemaking in the hills can best be described as a series of "contradictory terms" ("Literary Criticism" 52), which includes the fact that Mary initiates the climactic action despite Juanito establishing the prior momentum in the relationship. Political detachment, as a lens through which to read the romance plot, offers some solutions to these contradictions. Though he may pique Mary's passions, Juanito amounts to a double of John, just as the patriarchal nationalism and social structures of Spain offers a double, if more liberal in guise, of Ireland. One of the ways that the novel signals a detachment from Ireland is through the "killing off" of John, who increasingly becomes a phantom in Mary's mind; while smoking a cigarette in Agatha's apartment the night before going to the bullfight, for example, Mary thinks about how John would disagree with the scene, and at that moment "she smiled again to his ghost" (*ML* 88).

Prior to the tryst in the hills above Altorno, Juanito also becomes a phantom because he

has completed his role in Mary's detachment from the ideals that once governed her life. As soon as she decides to leave Spain for good, Mary reflects on the "ghostly peace of Juanito's arms" (234). Like John, he has been "killed off." Even post-coital chatter solidifies Mary's detachment from the now phantom Juanito, as she lies "half-dead" but also "perfectly happy" (272). This final proclamation, a recognition of a love that must be left, comes directly from Mary through dialogue. At the climactic moment, Mary voices her rejection of the relationship proposed to her by Juanito and completes the act of personal detachment that mirrors the political detachment of leaving Ireland. In the end, Juanito becomes another surrogate of John, another figure from whom she must detach: "she was going home with a lame and hopeless story, a wicked story that would be agony to John, and had no explanation, no defence. And afterwards—she would take her godmother's hundred pounds and go away. That was all. That was the fruit of her journey to Spain" (300). O'Brien, then, configures detachment as a kind of anguish. Nevertheless, the anguish is real, "as real as the bullfight—and, oh God, oh God, as beautiful" (300).

Emigration brings with it a dual sense of pain and liberation in Mary: pain because anxiety as Mary moves towards a precarious future, liberation because that very precariousness coincides with autonomy. By moving to Spain, Mary learns of the passion that can be found in life, a passion found in Juanito but not John, even if the two end up in the same position. Home, ultimately, does not exist for Mary as the novel ends. Nor is it clear that Mary has found the space of self-governance that she has desired since childhood. Instead, Mary discovers through the intersection of political and personal detachment a set of values not dependent on patriarchal ideals of life within the home. If the fates of Juanito and John suggest that this detachment isolates Mary from social interactions, the novel recuperates the importance of interconnection through the figure of Agatha Conlon, which in some ways looks ahead to the importance of the

social in *The Blackwater Lightship*.

Although mostly a secondary character in *Mary Lavelle*, Agatha proves to be an essential figure for Mary as she attempts to navigate passion and belonging in the town of Altorno. According to Tucker, "that it is Agatha—not Juanito—who takes Mary to the bullfight suggests the particular influence that female relationships have on Mary's development" (91). That development extends to both spiritual and romantic matters. Agatha, as revealed towards the end of the novel, likes Mary "the way a man would" (O'Brien 248). As Emma Donoghue suggests, "Agatha is no stereotype, and compared to the tortured lesbians of Djuna Barnes' lurid *Nightwood* (1936), for example, she is full of life" ("Kate O'Brien" 42). Indeed, Agatha, a woman hardened to the world around her, becomes a confidant precisely because Mary sees parallels between Agatha's desires for her and her own forbidden desires for Juanito. As such, Agatha provides a model for Mary to escape the two expected phases of her life, since she "has escaped both these roles, by allowing her 'hiatus' to last for twenty years" (42). Like Mary, Agatha finds that "Spain allows her the space (and privacy, and employment) to come to terms with herself" (48). Spain provides a space for negotiating ideals from the margins of permission, but not a national infrastructure or alternative home. That is why Spain is not the source of self-liberation, though it is a vessel of sorts. Both Mary and Agatha leave Ireland for similar reasons, an initial "hiatus" that is really a disavowal of patriarchal nationalism. The psycho-narration of the narrator is essential for re-organizing Mary's actions and thoughts to bring forth the subordinate desires for self-governance; Agatha, as a foil to Aunt Cissy, presents a social model with which Mary can reject the life expected of her.

The Leavetaking and the Politics of Narrative Order

The contestation of ideal citizenship remains fairly abstract in *Mary Lavelle*, in part due to the historical context of which, and in which, O'Brien was writing. John McGahern's *The Leavetaking*, by contrast, takes the principles underpinning Mary's emigration narrative and more succinctly ties them to ideal citizenship as outlined in the Irish Constitution. The respective endings of Mary and Agatha are somewhat open-ended in terms of political motivations. Patrick Moran in *The Leavetaking*, on the contrary, makes the political intentions of his emigration explicit. McGahern's novel views emigration as a rejection of the conservative values outlined by ideal citizenship in Ireland at a time when the Catholic Church still held great sway over the nation and state. When Patrick's marriage to Isobel defies the Church, his role as an ideal citizen is pushed to the periphery of permitted citizenship because his wife cannot cross the boundaries of exclusion. Originally published in 1974,[34] at the onset of the period of judicial activism when the Supreme Court was beginning to exercise its interpretive powers over the Irish Constitution, McGahern's novel coordinates the intersection of political and personal detachment with constitutional principles of the Irish state.

McGahern's novel follows the activities of Patrick Moran on his last day before being relieved of his duties as a schoolteacher in Dublin. Patrick's infelicitous behaviour is rooted in

[34] John McGahern published two editions of *The Leavetaking*. The preface to the second edition explains his decision to revise the novel after working on the French translation with poet Alain Delahaye: "The more I saw of it the more sure I was that it had to be changed. The crudity I was attempting to portray, the irredeemable imprisonment of the beloved in reportage, had itself become blatant. I had been too close to the 'Idea,' and the work lacked that distance, that inner formality or calm, that all writing, no matter what it is attempting must possess" (*The Leavetaking* 5). A curious parallel dawns upon the word "distance," as if invoking the sublime detachment that Mary feels at the bullfight. This chapter uses the second edition of the novel, in keeping with the critical norm. Denis Sampson, in *Outstaring Nature's Eye* (1993), and Dermot McCarthy, in *John McGahern and the Art of Memory* (2010), offer overviews of major differences between the two editions of the novel.

his mistrust of the institutions of the Irish nation. As McGahern notes in his preface to the Second edition of *The Leavetaking*, the two parts of the novel are "deliberately different in style" (5). Layers of childhood memories dominate the first part of the novel as Patrick goes about his daily routine on the schoolyard. Presented in a non-linear order, these childhood memories focus primarily on the death of Patrick's mother and the cruelty of his father. Part Two consists of a relatively linear retelling of Patrick's career as a teacher, his leave of absence for a year in England, and the various romances in which he participates along the way. The last of these romances, to an American woman named Isobel, presents the very reason that Patrick will be relieved from his post as a schoolteacher. The two halves of the novel set up a possible negotiation between different sets of values. Patrick wants to find a way to negotiate with the society that reprimands him for not adhering to ideal citizenship; that desire is never reciprocated by his superiors on the board of education and so he must leave the nation.

Just as Eavan Boland cautioned against overt political readings of Kate O'Brien, critics have a tendency to shy away from reading McGahern's realist fiction as overtly tied to national politics. Belinda McKeon emphasizes the way that McGahern has always been quick to distance himself from suggestions that he chronicles everyday life (84). McGahern himself seems to foreground much of the critical analysis about his work in his essay entitled "The Image," which first appeared in the *Honest Ulsterman* in 1968. The image, McGahern writes, "is an attempt to create a world in which we can live" (10). Images and objects often unify McGahern's "plotless," lyrical novels; in other words, "his novels and short stories give birth to images which serve either as a simple representation of realist objects, setting the scene of the text or, more importantly, as the very *object* around which the text itself takes shape through an almost obsessive repetition" (Goarzin 28-29). *The Leavetaking* is no exception. Several images—

seagulls, water, and the school bell—circulate to create the world of Patrick Moran. The sense of rhythm, pattern, fluidity, and impingement that these images invoke mirror Patrick's internal struggle to break away from certain patterns while constructing new ones.

McGahern's interest in the personal has extended to an almost *de facto* autobiographical reading for many of his novels. Certainly, the childhood of Patrick Moran parallels many aspects of McGahern's own childhood, from the death of his mother to the cold aloofness of his police constable father. Patrick's fate as an employee of the Dublin educational board maps onto a similar situation for McGahern, who was fired from his job in a Dublin school after his second novel, *The Dark* (1965), was banned by the censor. Later in his career McGahern insisted that "all autobiographical writing is by definition bad writing unless it's strictly autobiographical" (qtd. in D. McCarthy 124). "The way I got sacked," McGahern continues, "and the way that sacking is described in *The Leavetaking* really have nothing to do with one another" (124). Dermot McCarthy remains unconvinced: he notes that several extended passages in *The Leavetaking* appear almost verbatim in McGahern's *Memoir* (2005).[35] More importantly for McCarthy, autobiographical readings help understand "McGahern's art of memory as a process of unconcealment" (13). The unconcealment of personal memory, a relinquishing of past traumas and grievances, does not always stand apart from political revelations.

Especially given the way that McGahern so often depicted the social ills and dysfunctions of Ireland, such as widespread child abuse, before the rest of the country was ready for such exposure, the personal stories of McGahern's novels have inevitable consequences in relation to

[35] McCarthy's reading at times relies on accepting McGahern's *Memoir* as a distinct work of non-fiction. As has already been encountered in Edna O'Brien's memoir *Country Girl*, which rewrites several passages from her earlier novels and at times invents anecdotes, just because a work receives the label "memoir" does not negate the possibility of its fictionality.

the nation-state. Peter Guy's reading of McGahern in light of the Murphy Report, which coincided with the Ryan Report but focused specifically on the sexual abuse scandal of the Catholic archdiocese in Dublin, makes explicit the connection between the personal stories of abuse and trauma at the heart of novels such as *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking* and the functions of the Irish state (92). This movement from the personal to the "universal" has occupied much of Eamon Maher's work on McGahern, especially the way in which "the Catholic Church of McGahern's youth worked hand-in-glove with the emerging State and together they controlled a generally docile population who were happy to do what they were told most of the time" (16). The personal memories and experiences of Patrick Moran in *The Leavetaking* similarly work towards a widescreen view of the Irish nation-state and its institutions.

Whether undertaking formalist, autobiographical, or political readings of *The Leavetaking*, critics have paid little attention to the impact of citizenship on Patrick's disposition throughout his narrative. The use of constitutional language punctuates the climactic scenes in each of the two parts of the novel. If images in McGahern's work help to create a world, the presence of language from the Irish constitution creates a constitutional world. Constitutional language arises in the two formative moments that lead to Patrick's personal detachment from Ireland: the death of his mother and the termination of his teaching position. Personal detachment thus intersects with political detachment. The "leavetaking" that Patrick undertakes at the end of the novel stems from his personal disavowal of the conservative moral authority of the Church, but since the Irish state sanctions that authority, this personal disavowal also amounts to an act of political contestation.

The memory web that characterizes Patrick's narration in the first part of *The Leavetaking* depicts ideal Ireland as byzantine, oppressive, and even fatal. The layers of memory

include stories about the death of Patrick's grandmother, the early career of Patrick's father in the Gardaí, the early teaching career of Patrick's mother, her illness and eventual death, the funeral that Patrick is forbidden to attend, and his removal from the family home to join his father in the police barracks. If one were to take a cue from McGahern's own words in his essay "The Image," the constitutional world created in Part One of *The Leavetaking* is one beset with death and insularity. Given the occupation of Patrick's father, the state resides at the center of this world. In that sense, the Irish nation-state is complicit in the death of Patrick's mother in part because she falls ill after reliably performing the duties stipulated as a part of idealized Irish femininity.

Just as Veronica Hegarty constructs an imagined history in Anne Enright's *The Gathering*, Patrick constructs a version of the past in Part One of *The Leavetaking* meant to connect personal trauma with ideal citizenship. Early in the web of memories, when Patrick walks along a cliffside with Isobel, he tells her that it is the same cliff walk that his grandparents took on the day after they were married. "How do you know they took this path," Isobel asks Patrick, who responds that his mother told him (*LT* 43). In other words, not all of Patrick's memories are based on his experiences, and he consciously constructs which stories to tell. From this conscious construction of real and imagined memories, Patrick connects his mother's death to her adherence to ideal citizenship. Patrick's father, as a member of perhaps the most visible manifestation of state power in the form of the police, becomes an invading force within the layers of memories. Patrick's memories of his cold, brutish father juxtapose and undercut happy memories of a childhood spent with his mother. The death of Patrick's mother is thus presented as a culmination of state intrusion.

Despite warnings from her doctors that she must avoid pregnancy because she is in remission, Patrick's mother must concede to the sexual desires of her husband. Patrick's father, "starved for sexuality," demands that his wife oblige his needs (65). She does not so much consent to the potentially fatal act as acknowledge that "it was her duty" (65). As Eamon Maher rightly points out, the power of the Church in Ireland at the time was such that "Kate's commitment to comply with her husband's sexual needs, even at such fatal cost to her own health, is not unrealistic" (72). Maher does not comment on the particularity of "duty," a word surely not chosen at random. Once again, the constitution specifically refers to the ideal citizenship of Irish women as pertaining to their "duty within the home" as mothers (Irish Const. Art. 41.2.2). Patrick's mother puts the ideals of the nation and the state ahead of personal security. As such, the narrative ordering of Patrick's memories equates death with the reliable performance of ideal citizenship. And the death of the mother precipitates the need for personal and political detachment from the nation-state.

Culminating with the funeral of his mother, when the narrative slips into the present tense, Patrick revisits the trauma of his childhood throughout Part One in an attempt to understand the personal and political motivations for his emigration in Part Two. Both stylistically and in terms of narrative focus, the two parts of *The Leavetaking* stand in stark contrast to each other, which, as a number of critics have pointed out, suggests a movement towards Patrick's liberation from Ireland. For McCarthy, the shift underscores the process of "unconcealment" at the heart of McGahern's art, while for Denis Sampson the stylistic shifts between Part One and Part Two configure a movement "from constriction to freedom, from shadow to light" (*Young McGahern* 127). The word "mechanical," which occurs so often in the schoolyard passages of the novel, perhaps best exemplifies this sense of constriction in Part One.

McGahern associates mechanization with the Irish language, the first official language of the state. Marching commands are routinely barked out in Irish to the students on the schoolyard: "*cle, deas, cle, deas*" (*LT* 20, 21, 22, 24, and 25). The Irish language is never used in a colloquial or conversational way. In an interview with Sampson, McGahern remarked that *The Leavetaking* was a necessary wrecking ball meant to break down the barriers of his writing, for otherwise he "would actually have stopped as a writer unless [he] had broken out of [his] own moulds" (qtd. in *Young McGahern* 110). By way of breaking such moulds, McGahern counters the stilted, mechanical, and knotted rhythms of Part One with a fluid, lucid linearity in Part Two.

If the schoolyard represents the space of a reliable, ideal citizenship, then Patrick's unreliability as a citizen who chooses to leave Ireland breaks free from a mechanized existence. Patrick's mother, reliable in performing her "duties within the home," ends up withering away, even as Patrick's father dismantles the home around her. Emigration, at least initially made through a sojourn to England, offers everything that, according to Patrick's experiences, a life in Ireland cannot. The representatives of the Irish nation-state, namely the hierarchy of the schoolboard, initially meet Patrick's request for a leave of absence with skepticism. "What do you want to go away for?" Father Curry asks Patrick upon his request, "Isn't there everything you want in this country" (*LT* 101). London, in Father Curry's summation, is a place for foolish thoughts: "away isn't like here" (101). Fidelity to Ireland, which denotes one of the fundamental duties of Irish citizens, underpins Father Curry's seemingly innocuous comments. Ireland, from his perspective, offers anything and everything that a citizen could desire, which perhaps only further signifies the hand-in-glove alignment between the Church and state. In other words, the terms of belonging in Father Curry's definition of Ireland, as an echo of Jeremiah Donovan and Stevey Long, are not up for negotiation.

Although Patrick never frames his time in England in explicitly political terms, his relationship to Isobel highlights the way that emigration as a form of detachment can invoke the political through the personal. When Patrick meets Isobel, an American woman who is the last in a series of relationships forged in London, he reaches the terminus point for any sense of belonging that the Ireland he left behind might supply. Isobel embodies the opposite of what the Irish state deems to be an ideal, reliable female citizen. A foreigner, divorced after a bad marriage in New York, Isobel has also had two abortions (116-117). When Patrick asks whether these abortions made her feel guilty, Isobel responds, quite plainly, in the negative: "No, I felt great" (116).[36] In Part One, Patrick only ever refers to his brother born from the pregnancy that killed his mother as either the "cancer child" or the "child of her cancer" (72, 81). Had Patrick's mother been afforded the same opportunity for abortion as Isobel, the juxtaposition suggests, she might still be alive. Isobel offers a set of values totally different from those that Patrick knows in Ireland. Reliably performing the duties of ideal citizenship proves fatal to Patrick's mother, whereas the act of unreliable citizenship that is the civil union with Isobel, which pushes against the boundaries of permissibility, generates a clear sense of purpose and dedication for Patrick.

Critical reception of *The Leavetaking* has at times stressed Patrick's passivity in the face of his sanctions for marrying Isobel. Terence Killeen recognizes a "quiet dignity" in Patrick's "passive acceptance of [his fate], while refusing any recantation" (76). Quiet though Patrick's acceptance of his dismissal may be, he demonstrates far more agency than might otherwise be associated with passivity. Patrick's quietness seems have more to do with resignation to the fact that there is no negotiation to be had with the authorities in Ireland. He also does not simply

[36] Isobel's second abortion was a detail added in the revised edition of the novel, which further emphasises the point that her actions defy the moral authority that the Church wields alongside the Irish state.

capitulate to his superiors such as Father Curry; even if Patrick accepts being fired from his post as a teacher, he sees the matter through all the way to the end. Without the possibility to negotiate social values, Patrick turns to contestation. As he admits in his own mind, he will make his superiors fire him because he knows that his dismissal is unjust and socially backward.

Patrick consistently refuses to tender his resignation, despite the pleas of the headmasters, because he wishes to expose the entwinement of the Church and the state as it was enshrined in the constitution. In other words, Patrick's failure to comply is an act of *non serviam* to the consensus power. The headmaster can barely wrap his head around Patrick's insubordination to the Irish nation and state: "I've always found you reasonable and sensible…I don't know why it should happen this way. Life should be simpler" (*LT* 161). Patrick, drawing on his experiences away from Ireland, makes it clear just how deep the complications run in life, and in doing so exposes idealized, simple, Irish life to be an unreliable construction of nationhood:

> It's written down in black and white in the official *Notes for Teachers* on history that the cultivation of patriotism is more important than the truth. So when we teach history Britain is always the big black beast, Ireland is the poor daughter struggling while being raped, when most of us know it's a lot more complicated than that. And yet we teach it. (162)

Couched within this critique of the imagined Irish community resides all of the resonating anger that Patrick harbours over the death of his mother. If Ireland was the victim of colonial violence, the independent Irish state has equal potential to become that "big black beast" to its more vulnerable citizens. When Patrick confronts the headmaster and, later, Father Curry with the inadequacies of the official narratives of Ireland that the state designates as inviolable, he does so with the agency born from his own experiences outside the nation. These hegemonic narratives

of isolation are unreliable for those who do not wish to adhere to the stipulations of belonging set out by the Catholic Irish state. Very little room is afforded to acts of permitted citizenship when it comes to the curriculum that Patrick, as a teacher, is meant to hand down. A future iteration of Ireland, McGahern implies, might allow for a different kind of meeting between Patrick and Father Curry, one built not around confrontation but around negotiation.

The second instance of constitutional language in the novel, which precedes Patrick's meeting with Father Curry, indicates the need for a different iteration of Irish citizenship. On his way to the meeting, Patrick stops in at a local pub to have one last drink with his friend Lightfoot. "At least you're married in law," Lighftoot argues, "you could take it to the courts" (164). Patrick notes the futility of that option: "There's that special relationship the Church has" (164). Although no specific date is ever given for the setting of the novel, this line indicates that *The Leavetaking* must take place prior to 1973, when the Fifth Amendment removed the "special position of the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church" from the constitution (Irish Const. Amend. 5). With this in mind, McGahern offers Patrick's emigration narrative as a contestation against the lack of negotiation inherent in the power given to a conservative hierarchy such as the Church. Patrick's contestation implicitly imagines a space that could be open to a more negotiable set of social values, where one institution does not hold a special position over society.

London, to some degree, hints at the potential to find that space of negotiation abroad, where Patrick can more fully live in a world of permissibility as opposed to the unhappy adherence to rigid ideals. The shift in the style and order of the narrative gestures to that potential in emigration as personal and political detachment for the purpose of contestation. That breaking of the mould, which McGahern sought through *The Leavetaking*, provides Patrick with

the same current of individualist liberalism that brought Mary to Spain in Kate O'Brien's novel. Patrick's first-person narration presents an obvious point of departure from *Mary Lavelle*, and perhaps that departure is symptomatic of the period of judicial reform in which McGahern was writing. What Mary detached from was still an abstract ideal of patriarchal nationalism. Patrick, in comparison, interacts with those implemented ideals as they are borne out in the constitution. Thus his travel to London comes up against tenets of citizenship, such as fidelity and loyalty, in a far more direct manner. O'Brien, writing prior to the 1937 constitution, had fewer concrete examples from which a character may need to find liberation, whereas McGahern understood more succinctly the overreach of authority possessed by the Catholic Church.

As with *Mary Lavelle*, the constitutional world in *The Leavetaking* cannot be changed within the span of Patrick's narrative. However, London suggests a possible space in which to proceed towards the kind of negotiation of values not offered in Ireland. When Patrick and Isobel leave Ireland at the end of the novel, they recognize the need for this open-ended negotiation. They will not participate in the "special affinity" of the global Irish diaspora because they will not participate in the moral codes of ideal citizenship in Ireland. The novel ends with this gesture outwards and in that sense never explicitly moves beyond Patrick's contestation of ideal citizenship. The move outside Ireland, as a form of continuation for Patrick and Isobel, promises the potential for a new way of conceiving of belonging, even if that potential is never realized in the novel itself. Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*, in turn, expands on what that potential might entail, and how it might be beneficial for imagining the continued change to Irish society that Patrick desires.

Return, Communication, and Social Change in *The Blackwater Lightship*

Although emigration as individualist liberation suffices for the acts of contestation in *Mary Lavelle* and *The Leavetaking*, any change to the nation-state derived from that contest, given the amending formula of the Irish constitution, requires community building. In Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*, the return to Ireland of those who emigrated occasions an exploration of how permitted citizens must negotiate this community building from the margins of ideal citizenship. Set in 1993, just after the Irish state decriminalized homosexuality, the novel presents the interactions of three gay men—Declan, Larry, and Paul—with Declan's dysfunctional family, the Devereaux. Larry and Paul have followed Declan back to his grandmother's house in Wexford because he is dying of an AIDS-related illness. While at the house, Declan's sister Helen, his mother Lily, and his grandmother congregate at his side. The primary focus of the novel resides in the revelations and healing of old wounds in the Devereaux family. The reconciliation between Helen and Lily takes on a political dimension when considered alongside Paul's emigration from, and return to, Ireland.

Paul may be a secondary character, but the novel hinges on his role as interlocutor with Helen. The rupture between Helen and Lily renders communication between the two almost impossible. In general, Helen feels adjacent to several planes of communication that exist in her life; her sons, Cathal and Manus, speak to each other in a secret language (*BL* 6), while her husband speaks to his friends in Irish, a language that Helen does not fully understand (17). Barriers to communication proliferate in the novel. In other words, the social milieu in which these characters exist is laden with the implications of the Irish constitution. Language politics, family law, sexual politics, and the gendered roles of the nation are all interwoven into the interactions of the characters. Because of his experiences negotiating so many of the potential

barriers erected within the cultural and political malaise of Ireland, Paul becomes a figure who facilitates communication.

Whereas *Mary Lavelle* and *The Leavetaking* housed the reorganizational principle within the respective narrators of the novels, *The Blackwater Lightship* entrusts this responsibility to Paul. The narratological detachment of the novel can be located specifically within the emigration narrative that Paul tells Helen halfway through the novel. Prior to Paul's story, which is by far the longest uninterrupted story that any character tells, a stilted rhythm characterizes the narrative while passages of dialogue are persistently cut short, as when Helen and her mother drive from the hospital back to Wexford:

> "How long have you known about Declan?" her mother asked.
>
> "Since yesterday. I told you."
>
> "I mean, how long have you known that he had friends like Paul?"
>
> "Like what?" Helen asked.
>
> "You know like what." Her mother sounded irritated.
>
> "I've always known."
>
> "Don't be so stupid, Helen."
>
> "I've known for ten years, maybe more."
>
> "And you never told me?"
>
> "I've never told you anything," Helen said firmly. (110)

The conversation is full of fits and starts, false-meanings and double-entendre. Nobody can say just what they mean. Part of this, of course, has to do with the politics of homosexuality in Ireland in 1993. Yet it also points to a deeper rift within the family. The primary role of the narrator in the first half of the novel is to articulate the barriers to communication that create

these interruptions. When Paul tells Helen the story of his life in Ireland, his coming out, and the life he shares with his partner in Brussels, it marks a stylistic shift in the prose. Paul's lucid storytelling instigates a slow recuperation of communicative possibilities between Helen and Lily, which results in longer passages of uninterrupted dialogue between characters throughout the latter stages of the novel. Paul also makes it clear that his emigration from Ireland is an essential aspect of his abilities to empathize, listen, and effectively communicate with those around him. As Ireland opened up to the European Union, emigration took on a different role—one that could allow a different kind of return, such as that enacted by Paul as interlocutor from the margins of permissibility.

With the inclusion of Paul, a potentially problematic pattern begins to emerge across all three novels in which marginalized figures are used to open up imaginative spaces of change for less marginalized protagonists. Although Mary, Patrick, and Helen are all in some ways hindered by the Irish nation-state, Agatha, Isobel, and Paul occupy even more precarious positions. Both Terry Eagleton and Eibhear Walshe have commented on the way that Tóibín uses marginalized figures for the benefit of the heterosexual family. Walshe notes that while Tóibín commendably introduces a sympathetic AIDS narrative into mainstream discourse at a time when such a thing was unheard of in Ireland, he does so at the expense of the homoerotic subjectivity of his gay characters (128). Another issue stemming from the novel pertains to what Jasbir K. Puar terms "homonationalism." In other words, Paul may be a manifestation of queer acceptability and inclusion in order to uphold the neoliberal values of the European Union in the beginning of the 1990s.[37] Although Walshe and Eagleton write before Puar's theorization, their arguments touch

[37] Puar's argument pertains specifically to the case of the United States in the age of the War on Terror. According to Puar, "as the U.S. nation-state produces narratives of exception through the war on terror, it must temporarily suspend its heteronormative imagined community to

on a similar criticism of the way that homonormativity becomes a part of the accepted discourse for the nation-state. However, Paul does not simply transfer European liberal values into Ireland. Although potentially problematic, Tóibín aligns Paul with the negotiation of social values that can arise from escaping the conservative silence of Ireland.

Like Mary and Patrick, Paul's personal reasons for emigrating from Ireland have political underpinnings. After college, Paul tells Helen in their conversation on the strand, he moved to France with his partner François; the reason Paul leaves Ireland relates specifically to communication, as he wanted to "get away from [the] sniping and sneering and cheap stupidity" (*BL* 185). The personal reasons for emigration in many ways present a foil to the dysfunction between Helen and Lily. At the heart of the Devereaux feud lies the death of Helen's father. At the time of his death, Helen felt betrayed by her mother and so grew cold and distant; while in France, François' parents die in a car accident that threatens to break Paul and his partner apart. While Helen and Lily let a misunderstanding result in decades of fighting, Paul, having escaped the communicative barriers of Ireland, works to repair any division growing between himself and François. Instead of drifting apart, the two get married. The scenario casts Paul as a figure who can negotiate the boundaries of division and acceptance, which is where the personal act of detachment from Ireland due to communicative barriers intersects with larger political questions stemming from the institutions of the nation.

Paul's marriage to François offers the clearest intersection of the personal and the political in the novel. The point of intersection relates to the difference between European Catholicism and Irish Catholicism. Though dogmatically the same, Irish Catholicism and

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consolidate national sentiment and consensus through the recognition and incorporation of some, though not all or most, homosexual subjects" (3).

Western European Catholicism had nonetheless developed along different tracks since the nineteenth century (Fuller 480-1). This distinction between Ireland and mainland Europe helps position the marriage of Paul and François as a political critique of Ireland. Paul, a staunch Catholic, attends group meetings with other gay Catholics alongside François—Declan wittily, if acerbically, calls it "cruising for Christ" (*BL* 171). When Paul and François get married, they find an old, curmudgeonly French priest who is willing to perform the sacrament in secret. Following the ceremony the priest even invites the newlyweds to dine with him in a *Babette's Feast* of indulgence.

When reviewing *The Blackwater Lightship* for the *London Review of Books*, Terry Eagleton derisively suggested that Paul's wedding story "is an extravagant utopian fantasy, a lavish piece of Catholic homosexual wish-fulfilment" ("Mothering" 8). As extravagant, and perhaps farfetched, as the scene may be, it nonetheless demonstrates that Paul is a figure who can negotiate between that which is idealized and that which is permitted. Whenever Paul enters a different social sphere, he adapts to the demands of that space, as when he attends mass with Helen and Lily: "[Paul] dressed conservatively and could have fitted in as a local farmer's son, a staunch pillar of the community" (*BL* 237). Fitting in could be aligned with a kind of cultural assimilation, a way in which, to paraphrase Walshe, mainstream society effaces Paul's homoeroticism. Or, Paul's ability to "fit in" could just as equally demonstrate an implicit awareness of how social interactions operate. In other words, Paul can easily identify the boundaries of acceptance that people, or groups of people, establish to safeguard against change. He can negotiate that which is ideal, in terms of citizenship and in terms of the community, with that which is permitted. Because Paul can negotiate these distinctions, he can identify the barriers in social interactions that hinder communication.

As was the case in *Mary Lavelle*, *The Blackwater Lightship* finds in Europe a space in which to imagine ways of belonging that are alternative to ideal citizenship in Ireland. The personal and political detachment from Ireland that Paul undertakes, though, differs from Mary's in that it was always a way of searching for communal and communicative liberation over and above the individual. Paul's home with François in Brussels acts as a kind of enclave for Larry and Declan, who visit often. Declan, especially, becomes an almost surrogate son for the pair: "François always joked about adopting him" (174). Compared to the dysfunctional family awaiting Declan in Ireland, Paul's home in Brussels offers an open space in which to belong—a space predicated on Paul's detachment from an Ireland antithetical to expression and communication. The backdrop of Europe as a space for modification also aligns the novel with the real world events that are at the heart of its political subtext. The European Union offered marginalized voices in Ireland an outlet to oppose conservative voices in the Dáil. David Norris, the gay rights activist who spearheaded the campaign for decriminalization in Ireland, turned to the European Convention on Human Rights when his initial case failed in the Four Courts (Conrad 48). Since Ireland was a signatory on the ECHR, Norris' case was aided significantly by the ruling of the Convention. Paul, who works for the European Commission, is not a gay rights activist, but his connection to the institutions of Europe is not arbitrary either. As small and personal as the story of *The Blackwater Lightship* may be, it is set against a much larger vista of political change for Ireland in the early 1990s. In this division between the local and the international, Paul once again becomes the interlocutor who negotiates forms of belonging.

That oscillation between the local and the international, the small space and the large vista, pertains to Tóibín's position on legislative change as being only one half of the equation, which he first explored in *The Heather Blazing*. The life stories that both Paul and Larry tell

Helen illustrate how social change and political change must intersect. An episode from Larry's life elucidates the tensions between political identity and familial relations. Invited to a dinner hosted by President Mary Robinson, Larry recalls that "all the newspapers were there, and radio and television. Mary Holland was there and a fellow from the RTÉ…I realised that he was from the six o'clock news and they were going to film us all having tea with the president" (144). What should amount to a momentous political moment suddenly floods Larry with fear: he has not come out to his parents yet and they are devoted viewers of the six o'clock news. As Patrick Hannafin remarks, the "dialectic between the text [of the constitution] and people is an ongoing one, facilitative of change in societal identity rather than restricting such change" (150). But negotiating values can be full of obstacles and uncertainties. For Larry and Paul, cultural and social inclusion requires change at both the level of the nation and the level of the state. Since the novel focuses primarily on the dysfunctions of the Devereaux family, Tóibín never prescribes an explicit argument for such change; in lieu of such arguments, he presents the communicative abilities that Paul gains by detaching from a version of Ireland where expression is not of primary importance.

The perspective that Paul gains from leaving Ireland endows him with the ability to break down the barriers of communication among the Devereaux. Communication does not come easily for Helen, who tries many times to explain to Paul the nature of her row with Lily and her grandmother. The infighting, Paul recognizes, must run deep since Helen did not invite her mother or grandmother to her wedding, nor has her mother ever met Cathal and Manus. When Helen tells Paul the fighting started by the fact that Lily did not let her go to America with Hugh after the first year of college, Paul does not buy in: "What you've told me isn't reason enough" (*BL* 184). As Paul keeps probing, Helen eventually confesses that it has everything to do with the

fact that she felt her mother abandoned both her and Declan as children after the death of her father, when she began to "[associate] love with loss" (188). Paul's persistent interlocution, his questions and active listening, even modify the role of the narrator. While the narrator in the first half of novel primarily functions to signpost types of communicative barriers, after Helen's conversations with Paul the narrator changes to present Helen's memories of her father's death in uninterrupted passages.

In *The Blackwater Lightship*, detachment from Ireland because of marginalization positions reattachment as an act of negotiating ideal citizenship within the nation-state. Paul, Larry, and Declan return to Ireland shortly after homosexuality has been decriminalized but not *because* homosexuality has been decriminalized. Return signals an attempt to change the cultural understanding and expression of Ireland—a change that was beginning to be legitimized by the state through legal reform. Declan and Helen's grandmother perhaps best embodies the difficulty of cultural change in relation to legislative change. "I suppose we're all modern now," their grandmother says at one point, and often puts on pretenses of acceptance for Paul and Larry (130). Yet the eldest Mrs. Devereaux constantly refers to the gay men as "them." Her othering of Paul, Larry, and, to a certain extent, Declan, illuminates the gulf between social, cultural, and political change. The importance of the return to Ireland, especially for Paul, rests in the project of building new homes and new communities without communicative barriers—to negotiate a space where the permitted and the ideal are less far apart.

Being granted the sacrament of marriage in union with another man, performed by a Catholic priest, does stretch the boundaries of realism that Tóibín otherwise treads carefully; nonetheless, part of Tóibín's project has always been to imagine ways that change occurs within society, as he suggested in his interview with Channel 4 on the eve of the referendum on

marriage equality. Liam Harte argues that Tóibín's revisionism often explores how the texts of a state and the interactions of individual citizens align or diverge, as is the case in *The Heather Blazing* ("History" 56). *The Blackwater Lightship* may not address the constitution in as direct a fashion as *The Heather Blazing*, but the novel does propose how certain constructions of Irish society require malleable perspectives from the outside in order to imagine change. Or, in other words, as Walshe suggests, "Tóibín's texts explore the uncertain, even ambivalent, responses of his imagined characters to the collapse of dominant modes of belief and identity in Ireland" (*Colm Tóibín* 2). If *Mary Lavelle* and *The Leavetaking* illustrate the potential for political critique involved with emigration, *The Blackwater Lightship* integrates that critique into the social milieu in order to imagine a changed constitutional world.

Where to Next?

These three emigration narratives at heart critique the foundations of ideal citizenship upheld by the independent state. Kate O'Brien's novel depicts a personal detachment from the patriarchal nationalism of 1922, the year of Irish independence. Spain offers Mary an imaginative space to exist outside idealized citizenship for Irish women that coordinates to the home and motherhood. The duties attending to this position within the home are inextricably linked to the childhood trauma depicted in McGahern's work; Patrick's mother dies because she becomes pregnant while battling cancer, a pregnancy brought on because she could not avoid her "wifely duties" to her husband. Patrick's reaction is to critique and abandon the institution that defines the moral underpinnings of ideal citizenship in Ireland: the Catholic Church. This moral authority in part defines how Paul, Declan, and their friend Larry, interact with Ireland in *The Blackwater Lightship*. As three gay men who have returned from mainland Europe shortly after

the Irish state decriminalized homosexuality, the friends are keenly aware of the precarious position that queer citizens occupy in modern Ireland. When Paul discloses that he left his homeland because of the inability of the Irish to express themselves openly, he seems to also be critiquing the way that the state had formerly marginalized his identity to the point of exclusion. What these three novels share in common, then, is the possibility that political movement—that of border-crossing—can take on the agential quality of critique.

Twenty-two years after homosexuality was decriminalized in Ireland, the country became the first in the world to legalize same sex marriage by popular referendum. Of particular interest to the teleology of detachment and reattachment enshrined in the constitution was the "Home to Vote" movement that arose as the referendum date drew closer. Popularized on social media with the hashtag #HomeToVote, Irish citizens living abroad returned to Ireland in large numbers to vote in the referendum. In this context, the "special affinity" for those living outside the island of Ireland takes on a very different meaning. Fluid movement and change overtake any sense of reattachment to the old ideals of Ireland as a moral beacon for the world; return suddenly hinges more on geographical terms than spiritual, historical, or traditional. The success of the "Yes" vote in the referendum suggests a certain amount of power in the "Home to Vote" strategy. Indeed, the hashtag was used once again during the referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment in 2018. In many ways, the political exigency from within Ireland called out for the support of internationally-based citizens. Paul's ability to mend wounds for the Devereaux family holds significantly less political weight than this phenomenon of actual Ireland, but the principles behind both share many similarities.

Even with a more progressive and outward perspective overall, the question of identity and emigration still circulates frequently in Irish discourse. Indeed, a perusal of the major Irish

newspapers, or of Irish television, in the past few years indicates that the global Irish diaspora poses prominent questions for the popular imaginary. Human interest stories in *The Irish Times* or *The Journal* include exposés on Irish emigrants who complicate any singular notion of identity. "I am not an expat. I'm an Irish millennial economic migrant," reads one headline in *The Irish Times* (Toms); "Moving back to Ireland was as hard as emigrating to Australia" reads another (McDonald). Matthew Ryan contextualizes fraught terms of contemporary Irishness to the problem of nation in a globalized world. According to Ryan, writers must ask "what alternatives might be gleaned from contemporary Irish novels, especially those presenting a post- or anti-national position" (19). In O'Brien's, McGahern's, and Tóibín's novels, an answer to that question arises when novels explore the tensions that result from at once aligning and diverging from the official narratives of emigration held by the state.

These questions will continue to be important for Irish writers well into the twenty-first century. Neutrality in World War Two and the isolationism of Eamon de Valera's government seem a long way off amidst contemporary debates about the effectiveness of the European Union and the future of immigration, emigration, and international relations. Ireland sits ambiguously at the crossroads. In 2004, "Ireland ranked first in the table of 'most globalized' countries [in the EU]" (Byrne et al. 2). At the same time, "the Irish government proposed a national citizenship referendum to eliminate an Irish-born child's automatic right to citizenship when the parents are not Irish nationals" (2). Just because Ireland has, to a certain degree, moved away from the isolationist policies of De Valera and his party does not mean that Ireland has become an entirely inclusive nation. These tensions and ambiguities have only become more acute in the post-Celtic Tiger years of economic austerity.

Saskia Sassen argues that "the destabilizing of national state-centered hierarchies of

legitimate power and allegiance has enabled a multiplication of non-formalized or only partly formalized political dynamics and actors. These signal a deterritorializing of citizenship practices and identities, and of discourses about loyalty and allegiance" (42). Amongst the flux of these changing political policies and narratives, *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, and *The Blackwater Lightship* imagine some of the ways that change can occur to the discourse about loyalty and allegiance, or, in their cases, reattachment. Although in this case their works remain tethered to the nation-state, whereas Sassen imagines what citizenship can look like beyond the centrality of the nation-state, deterritorialization of the characters in all three novels in turn allows for new perspectives and critiques of ideal citizenship in Ireland. From these new perspectives, as Mary Lavelle makes especially clear, the stories told at borders are not so much about reliability to traditional ideals as they are about imagining the next destination.

Conclusion:

Repealing the Past, Imagining the Future

In his essay "Roaming the Greenwood," Colm Tóibín suggests that Irish writing "seems at its most content when there is a dead father or a dead child…and domestic chaos. No Irish novel ends in a wedding. Images of domestic bliss occur in novels like *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Roddy Doyle's *The Snapper*, only to be mercilessly destroyed. The strongest images in Irish fiction, drama and poetry are of brokenness, death, destruction. The plays are full of shouting, the poetry is full of elegy, the novels are full of funerals" (26). Tracing modern Irish literature back to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* confirms in part Tóibín's analysis. Famine, colonialism, and emigration—all have fostered an imaginary in which death circulates with great frequency. Oscar Wilde's lone novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and his fairy tales like "The Happy Prince" explore death as a matter of decadence or self-sacrifice; in Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* the Mulqueens await the death of their mother and the novel ends with a suicide; Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine* explores death in the west of Ireland during 1845. Death looms in all of the novels and short stories examined in this dissertation. Some characters are executed, as in Frank O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation" and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*; some die in accidents, as when Caithleen's mother drowns in *The Country Girls*. Others die, or are dying, from illness—Carmel in *The Heather Blazing* and Declan in *The Blackwater Lightship*. Some commit suicide, as does James in *Down by the River*. Some even die because they perform the duties of ideal citizenship, as is the fate of Patrick Moran's mother in John McGahern's *The Leavetaking*.

Yet the consistent presence of funerals and wakes does not mean that death dominates Irish literature to the exclusion of any other possibility. Tóibín's own novels often end with the possibility of reconciliation, if not forgiveness. Eamon takes his grandson Michael swimming in the sea at the close of *The Heather Blazing*; Helen begins to heal the old wounds with her mother at the end of *The Blackwater Lightship*. These are not grand moments of catharsis; instead, they suggest ways to proceed. Edna O'Brien ends *Down by the River* with an invitation. Patrick emigrates at the end of *The Leavetaking* so that he can continue his life with Isobel. Paula closes her narrative in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* by emphasising a renewed trust in herself and a validation of her past experiences of abuse, trauma, and rape. Ways of proceeding operate at the heart of all the narratives explored in this dissertation. Proceeding, rather than reflection or death, opens avenues to the future.

In this sense, the argument of this dissertation deviates from current overviews of Irish literature since independence. Seamus Deane and Derek Hand both, to a certain degree, read the Irish novel as a commentary on the past. Hand, for example, reads the Big House as continuing to dominate the novels written during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, novels such as J.G. Farrell's *Troubles* (1970) and William Trevor's *The Silence in the Garden* (1988), long after the Big House ceased to occupy a significant political and cultural place in Irish society. In other words, Bowen's *The Last September* and Somerville's *The Big House at Inver*, remain relevant to a subset of writers, even as Irish society largely turns the page on these class dynamics (Hand 232-3). Hand takes a cue from Deane's intertwining of Irish literary tradition and nation-building. For Deane, nation-building in the eighteenth century arose from the Burkean balance between energy and mass, which required "a governing and explanatory metanarrative, the story of stories, organized to take account of the requirements of the political present by a persuasive account of

the political past" (20). The struggle for national character thus becomes a struggle over competing metanarratives.

Anticolonial nationalism frequently turned to mythological pasts as a means of creating a metanarrative of a distinct Irish nation and national character. Hence writers of the Irish Literary Revival, W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory among them, frequently used mythopoeic figures like Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Cú Chulainn to imagine a new age of Irish independence. Robert Anthony Welch suggests the Revivalists were hardly unique in this glance towards mythological Ireland. For Welch, one of the central organizing symbols that governs the whole of Irish literature, since the time of the Bards, is the Hag of Beare. This shapeshifting woman, Welch claims, continues to take on new forms in contemporary Irish drama, poetry, and literature. Welch's reading shares with Deane's and Hand's the innate interconnection between the past and the present. While a sense of return proliferates in many Irish novels and short stories, and many of the novels studied in this dissertation harken back to previous historical moments, stopping at these temporal summaries elides their intricacies. Seán O'Faoláin, Frank O'Connor, Liam O'Flaherty, Kate O'Brien, and Elizabeth Bowen may have been looking back from the 1930s to previous historical moments—the War of Independence, the Land Wars, the Famine—but within their individual works characters are deeply concerned about their futures. In that sense, the past becomes an amalgam of the writers' present, not, as Deane contends, to avoid speaking about the present, but rather to imagine futurity from previous points of crisis.

By focusing on future-oriented aspects of Irish narrative fiction, this dissertation suggests new ways of reading the literary canon of Ireland. Irish novels and short stories since independence, even when glancing back to a particular historical moment, explore possible political futures for the nation. The unnamed narrator of Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*

may have been rejecting the authority of the novel when he proclaimed that a good book can have "one hundred times as many endings" as beginnings (3), but the point also evokes a way of reading the consistent interactions between Irish literature and the Irish constitution. Considering these writers as future-oriented, while also historically and politically located, in turn frames citizenship as an ongoing process of negotiating values, which in Ireland includes the gap between the ideal and the permitted citizen.

Novels and short stories give form and structure to the intangible qualities that coincide with citizenship—qualities less likely to be defined through specific policies or laws. For instance, reliability as a character trait associated with good citizenship cannot be gleaned from any one specific stipulation in the constitution. Article 9 may articulate fidelity and loyalty to the nation and state as duties of all citizens, but reliability as a characteristic is not the same as fidelity, nor is it the same as loyalty. Instead, reliability pertains to the way that an individual citizen interacts with a nexus of various ideals. In that sense, reliability gets to the heart of the divide between the ideal and the permitted in terms of Irish citizenship. Novels are particularly well-equipped for exploring reliability because they dramatize the network of obligations, duties, and rights binding individual citizens with the state. Paula Spencer in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* exemplifies the political pressures and possibilities that coincide with explorations of reliability as it pertains to citizenship. Narrative fiction can thus turn the problem of reliability back onto the definitions of ideal citizenship within the state.

The structures and form of narrative fiction express intangible qualities of citizenship, such as reliability, as ways of proceeding towards new iterations of the constitution. Writers were already engaged with these possibilities while Irish constitutionalism was in flux between 1922 and 1937. Although ambivalence cannot ultimately prevail in the stories of Seán O'Faoláin or

Frank O'Connor, the decision by certain characters to move away from republican nationalism towards an ambivalent understanding of belonging within Ireland suggests an alternative trajectory of constitutional reform to the one proposed by Eamon De Valera. That alternative trajectory was not realized immediately, but the movement towards ambivalence prefigured the need for constitutional change when an urbanizing and industrializing Ireland outgrew De Valera's rural ideals. While writers in the 1930s were keenly aware of the category between citizen and noncitizen, and the violence of exclusion that can befall the noncitizen, subsequent writers configured the dichotomy as a gap between the ideal and the permitted citizen. Permitted citizenship requires a certain amount of obedience due to the sense of an authority granting or withholding privileges, whereas a noncitizen is excluded altogether. Ideal citizenship operates as an obstacle for characters to maneuver around, rather than as a set of stipulations that provide protections or guarantees. Whereas Lukács and Slaughter suggest the chief correlation between the novel and citizenship is through the problematic individual, Irish writers are more often concerned with the negotiations of society at large, in which individual characters, as citizens, take part.

Narrative techniques elucidate this negotiation and navigation that may otherwise defy explicit statements, just as characteristics of citizenship (loyalty, responsibility, reliability) defy being designated through single articles in the constitution. The techniques examined in this dissertation are representative rather than exhaustive. Narrative ambivalence allows the narrators and characters of "Midsummer Night Madness," "Guests of the Nation," and *The Last September* to imagine existing beyond destructive patterns of nationalism. Trajectories of inconclusiveness in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Heather Blazing*, and *Down by the River* highlight the limitations of the court system to imagine structural changes to the state. Markers of unreliability disrupt the

presumed correlation between reliable citizenship and objective truth in *The Country Girls*, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, and *The Gathering*. Building on this problem of reliability, narrative reorganization in *Mary Lavelle*, *The Leavetaking*, and *The Blackwater Lightship*, locates the blame for emigration in the Catholic, patriarchal conservatism of the independent nation-state.

The emphasis in this project falls on liberal writers, due to the future-oriented nature of their political positions. Of course, Irish writers throughout the twentieth century also participated in the calcification of state ideals. Moralists and travel writers were at times part of the formulations of the conservative nation and state in the first half of the twentieth century. Narrative fiction can certainly reflect and strengthen state ideals and power dynamics. Most Irish writers who made a lasting impression across generations of readers, and those who continue to find the most success in Ireland, tend to be liberal in mindset—liberal in this sense being in relation to the specific Catholic conservatism of Ireland throughout much of the twentieth century. Even the most popular writers in Ireland engage with the hopes of a more liberal nation and state. Maeve Binchy, often dismissed as a women's fiction writer, provided a sympathetic reading of abortion in her debut novel, *Light a Penny Candle* (1982), at a time when Catholic campaigners were pushing for the Eighth Amendment. Post-Celtic Tiger austerity and the ongoing housing crisis in Ireland will inevitably yield writers who imagine further iterations of Ireland—perhaps beyond the boundaries of the liberal nation-state. In other words, the future-oriented gestures of Irish writers correlate with the process of shaping and re-shaping the nation rather than an engagement with the nation as a fixed form.

Eimear McBride's award-winning novel *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013) represents one new direction for Irish writers. Along with contemporaries such as Kevin Barry, McBride

reinvigorates the experimental techniques of modernism with the political dimensions of writers such as Edna O'Brien, Roddy Doyle, Anne Enright, and Colm Tóibín. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* at times borders on the conventional with its absentee father, abused young narrator, dead brother, and mercilessly pious mother. The unnamed narrator's uncle rapes her, the townspeople ostracize her, and she slowly loses her sense of self. The language of the narration, an extended pastiche of Molly Bloom in the "Penelope" episode from *Ulysses* and ALP's final monologue in *Finnegans Wake*, breaks apart as the narrator becomes less and less able to confront a society that dehumanizes her: "I no. Stop that fuck and rip. Scin. Stop heeel. Tear my mouth. Garble lotof. Don't I come all mouth of blood of choking of he there bitch there bithc there there stranlge me strangle how you like it how you think it is fun grouged breth scald my lungs til I. Puk blodd over me frum…Roll. I roll. For it. He. Turn on the. I. Hear his zip. Thanks for fuck you thanks for that. hear his walking crunching. Foot foot. Go. Him away" (McBride 194). In this second rape scene, the narrator loses the logical bindings of language. Letters are misplaced, words are misspelled, and the extra spaces after full-stops near the end of the passage suggest an encroaching void of nothingness or dread of what comes next.

The novel ends with the narrator embracing nothingness because her community and the Irish nation have given her few, if any, alternative options. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* ends with suicide by drowning:

> Turn. Look up. Bubble from my mouth drift high. Blue tinge lips. Floating hair. Air famished eyes. Brown water turning into light. There now. There now. That just was life. And now.
>
> What?

My name is gone. (203)

On the one hand, the final lines from the narrator seem to cut off any possible futurity. Unlike Mary McNamara being invited to the microphone in *Down by the River*, or Bonaparte standing traumatized at the threshold of the old woman's house in "Guests of the Nation," the narrator of McBride's novel seems to elide anxieties about the future by cancelling any possibility of going on. And yet the question—"what?"—remains only partially answered. Her name is gone, but the brown water turns into light and that just was life. Even in a novel with a bleak and, seemingly, final ending, questions of futurity persist.

Read in terms of futurity, McBride's experiments with language pose similar inquiries as Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River*. Certainly, the breakdown in conventional grammar reflects trauma, as is the case in O'Brien's novel. In light of the questions asked by the narrator at the end of the novel, the breakdown in language may substitute for failure within a system of ideals. "That is no country for old men" (66), Yeats famously wrote in the opening of his poem "Sailing to Byzantium;" *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* suggests that Ireland is no country for young women either. And now, what? If Ireland is no country for young women, something must change. In other words, the breakdown in language demands new forms of expression. By raising such questions, Eimear McBride's novel follows an Irish literary tradition that focuses on what comes next. Whether an anxiety about the future, an invitation into a new future beyond trauma, or a desire to continue life beyond the ideals of the Irish nation, the future underlies much of Irish literature, even if the initial emphasis appears to be historical or backward-oriented.

A focus on Irish literature as forward-looking better attends to the intersection between the works of writers and the political negotiations of citizens. As Irish citizens continue to engage with popular referendums in the hopes of amending the constitution, Irish writers continue to imagine a world where such amendments are needed or already exist. After all, when Irish citizens negotiate the equivalent values of the social contract, they invoke the past, the political present, and the imagined future. Too often, the imagined future has been excised from critical receptions of Irish literature. Not only does a future-oriented critical position provide new insight into the political engagements of Irish writers, it also suggests new ways of reading formal techniques in narrative fiction. Writers and their works need not be tethered to a literary and political past. Commentators frequently understand literary genres like science fiction as having the capacity to predict the future; why must that imaginative understanding of literature change if the central topic changes to politics and citizenship?

Emma Donoghue's novel *Room*, about a woman and her child imprisoned by a man named Old Nick, posits a particular value for reading when it comes to the interactions of individuals in society. In order to explain the conditions of their captivity to her son Jack, "Ma" uses reading as a metaphor: "We're like people in a book, and he won't let anybody else read it" (Donoghue 116). Ma's explanation simplifies an experience for her son, but it also gestures to the potential generated by narrative fiction. Donoghue proposes that reading creates the negotiation of values among individuals within a society, hence why a man like Old Nick refuses to "let anybody else read" the book that he creates—a book of captivity, misogyny, and violence. The moral boundaries of *Room* may be stark in comparison to novels such as *The Country Girls* or *The Leavetaking*, which merely hint at the violence of patriarchal and Catholic expectations. In *Room*, narrative fiction creates a structured world, much like a constitution, that interrogates

the values governing interactions within that world. Hence narrative fiction can create a constitutional world, which provides an alternative—negative, positive, or somewhere in between—to the actual constitution of Ireland. These alternatives may or may not come to fruition. If alternative iterations of the constitution do arise through amendments, though, they must first be imagined. *Room* ends, like so many novels from contemporary Irish writers, on the threshold of what comes next. After escaping, Jack and Ma visit the bunker where they were once imprisoned. Upon leaving, Jack looks back and remarks: "It's like a crater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door" (415).

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