

‘A BRUTALIZED CULTURE’:
THE HORROR GENRE IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

LAURA G. ELDRED: 'A Brutalized Culture': The Horror Genre in Contemporary Irish Literature
(Under the direction of Weldon Thornton)

This dissertation argues that contemporary Irish authors use the horror genre to critique postcolonial nation-states' pretensions to coherent national identities. The horror genre, with its interest in hybrid identities and constructions of monstrosity, allows a unique consideration of possible futures for recently postcolonial societies. I begin by situating contemporary authors like Patrick McCabe and Martin McDonagh historically, through comparisons to writers like J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey who included on-stage violence to undercut an emerging stereotype of the Irish "national character" as dependent on certain religious (Catholic), political (nationalist), and geographic (rural) affiliations. This "Gaelic Romantic" stereotype remains powerful today, and contemporary authors use horrific material for reasons remarkably similar to their Irish Literary Renaissance counterparts: as part of a demythologizing project. The first chapter defines the horror genre and argues that it often is explicitly concerned with constructions of national identity, mainly due to its constructions of monstrosity as that which lies beyond the pale of an accepted "national character." My second chapter, shows that characters associated with a Gaelic Romantic construction of Irish national identity meet with a grisly, horror-film-style end when they are, quite literally, killed off. The third chapter argues that these contemporary authors believe such stereotypes of national identity should be bloodily dispatched not only because they are

repressive and false, but also because the articulation of an ideal of what the nation *is* requires the simultaneous articulation of what it is *not*. The construction of national identity necessitates the abjection of those groups perceived as a threat to that nation, and those groups become a society's monsters. Contemporary Irish authors are both fascinated by this process and critical of it. They ultimately suggest that abjection cannot provide sufficient ground for a coherent individual or national identity. The final chapter argues that the monstrous emerges in these works as a site of possibility, and that the authors suggest that today's abjected identities must become tomorrow's full citizens of the state for a better Ireland to emerge. The necessary hybridity and fusion inherent in the monstrous provides a blueprint for conceptualizing more fluid, less atavistic identities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Decomposing fathers, dismembered neighbors, exploding cats . . . If this sounds like a B-grade 1960s horror film, you are not far off. Many contemporary Irish authors use horrific images to emphasize violence and brutality in their works; so many, in fact, that such seems to be the rule rather than the exception. From the IRA hitman of McNamee's *Resurrection Man*, to Banville's philosophical murderer in *The Book of Evidence*, to McDonagh's vicious community in the Leenane trilogy, and finally to the maladjusted and murderous Francie Brady of McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, the halls of contemporary Irish literature are stalked by a great many shady and psychopathic characters. Certainly this is not a new phenomenon, or an exclusively Irish one. One might think of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* or of Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* as contemporary American and British works that utilize brutal violence.

Scholars such as David Krause and Vivian Mercier have, however, made the case that the grotesque is, and for centuries has been, central in Irish literature and humor. If it is not an exclusively Irish feature, it is still a particularly Irish one. Irish literature, from the mythological cycles to McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, often emphasizes the brutal, the violent, and the horrific. The famed twentieth-century playwrights J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey provide two famous examples of violent, horrific material presented in order to disturb an audience.

However, these contemporary examples, such as Banville, McCabe, McDonagh, and McNamee, seem to differ from Synge, O'Casey, and their other predecessors in more than degree. One might expect contemporary authors to kick the horror quotient of their works up a few notches; as the century has progressed, horrific entertainment has become common and audiences more desensitized. It takes more to shock the average audience than it would have in 1907, so these contemporary works are bloodier and gorier than their literary ancestors. I believe, however, that the differences between these writers are deeper than this.

Contemporary writers who choose to use the horrific as material for their stories have available new precedents and new sources. The ways in which the horrific is used have changed due to the power and range of horror entertainment and literature in the mid to late twentieth century. These authors make use of an extensive lexicon of horrific images, films, and plots made available by the popularity of horror literature and film.

Despite the fact of this difference, both sets of writers pursue similar goals. First, horrific images are used to destabilize and disturb the audience. Shocking a reading or viewing audience with extreme violence or gore will make that audience less complacent, and has the potential to make that audience more engaged with the material. Both groups of writers use the uncomfortable moments produced by horrific material in order to advance concerns regarding the state of Irish society. More specifically, all of these writers use horrific moments in order to destabilize a Gaelic Romantic ideal of Irish identity, tied to rural and Catholic values, such as that codified in Ireland's 1937 constitution. Though this seems to be a common goal on the part of all these writers, the late twentieth century authors approach it differently. Their generation has lived through the creation of an Irish state and the state-sponsored solidification of that particular stereotype of Irishness, as well as

repressive governmental social policies. In a postcolonial period of national identity consolidation, as well as increasing globalization, Irish identity through the last fifty years has simultaneously been coalescing and dissolving.¹ Furthermore, as Ireland becomes increasingly globalized, traditional notions of Irishness increasingly fail to fit the Irish populace. These contemporary authors, then, not only attack a repressive and incorrect stereotype of Irishness, but they also look forward in time and consider how Ireland could achieve a more inclusive identity. The use of horrific images and plots serves several functions. First, in general, horrific material furnishes the stage with appropriate props for a pessimistic, sometimes almost nihilistic, meditation on Ireland and Irishness. Secondly, the use of horror genre plots allows these authors to pit potential identities in a fight to the death; their novels and plays function as a sort of enclosed dog fight, in which possible Irishnesses do bloody battle. Third, the horror genre's emphasis on monstrosity and its construction allows for these authors to investigate who is allowed into—and who is cast out from—the stereotype of Irishness that we've been discussing. The use of horror for these authors is then, on the one hand, part of an Irish tradition, a tradition that emphasizes the use of brutality in order to critique the state of the Irish nation. But it is also innovative, using popular entertainment—namely horror movies—as a tool that allows these authors to express their visions of Irishness in the past and for the future.

¹ Unfortunately, you can't use the word "postcolonial" beside the word "Ireland" without some justification, largely due to the fact that Ireland became technically part of England in the 1800 Act of Union. As Clare Carroll says, Ireland was "the first of England's colonies, the training ground for the colonists to North America, and the context of the first English discourse on why and how to conquer and colonize," and "It is not as though the only options are either than Ireland was never a colony or that it suffered 800 years of continuous colonial oppression" (3). Much of the argument on the Ireland-is-not-postcolonial side seems, in Bart Moore-Gilbert's terms, like a distasteful "beauty parade in which the competitors are made to press their claims to have been the most oppressed colonial subjects or to be the most 'truly' postcolonial subjects" (qtd. in Carroll 17). Edward Said, postcolonial theory's progenitor, states that "The signs of many such common [postcolonial] features [in Ireland] seemed to me to have been unmistakable" (177). I will thus assume that postcolonial theory—at least as far as the postcolonial attempt to define and articulate a national character—has some relevance for Ireland.

In this introduction, I will set the stage for a consideration of the use of horror in contemporary Irish literature by briefly looking back to two Irish Renaissance writers, J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey. The dissertation's first chapter, "Aliens, Mad Scientists, and Psychos," will provide an overview of the horror genre and the gothic, and will introduce where and how the genre crops up in contemporary works. "Killing off the Nation," the second chapter, argues that characters associated with stereotypical Irish identities are killed off in these works, and the third chapter, "Making Monsters," investigates how the key component of the horror film—its monsters—is used by these authors. Finally, my last chapter, "Stitched Selves," turns to the possible futures that these authors present for Ireland. In all of these chapters, my argument is guided by considering how the images, themes, and plots of the horror genre prove particularly useful for writers in nations struggling with creating or redefining a national identity, especially emerging postcolonial nations like Ireland. These authors' extensive invocations of twentieth century horror film require readers to ask not only where the genre crops up in their works, but how the genre's themes and key preoccupations could help us to understand the authors' own political and social goals.

The Horrific Tradition in Ireland

The Irish Renaissance writers John Synge and Sean O'Casey provoked the fury of Irish audiences who expected Irish plays from Irish authors to idealize the country's people. Indeed, most of the literary movement's plays fulfilled these expectations, thereby displaying the Theatre's ties with the cultural nationalism of organizations such as the Gaelic League, which sought to recover Irish sports and pastimes as a path toward cultural and national pride. Of course, many people interested in cultural nationalism at the time were also persuaded by political nationalism, but this was not always or necessarily the case. In seeking

to restore Irish pride and foster cultural unity, culturally nationalist art attempted to elevate the Irish character and Irish history. This cultural nationalist goal of elevating Irishness was one questioned by several Renaissance writers. Writers like Synge and O'Casey rejected this expectation by including horrific and disturbing subject matter that allowed them to critique or express reservations about Irish society. They were suspicious of the Abbey's cultural agenda and the audience's idealized expectations.

The project that eventually became the Abbey Theatre began with lofty goals. The advertisement put forth by Yeats and Lady Gregory firmly rejected an English tradition of the stage Irishman, an oaf used for easy laughs, and asserted the proud heritage of the Irish people: "We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism"; they go on to suggest that the people have become "weary of misrepresentation" (qtd. in Clarke 167). This proclamation reveals two goals, goals that would eventually come into conflict: one of an *accurate* representation of the Irish people who had long been demonized and mocked, and one of representing the "ancient *idealism*" of the people.

Early plays, like *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *Deirdre* pleased wide audiences with a favorable depiction of the Irish temperament. Brenna Katz Clarke notes, quoting the *United Irishman*, "The plays not only touched something deep in Irish tradition and history, but pointed up unique qualities of Irish life which helped to remind and give the audience pride 'that we were once a people with institutions of our own and a manner of life and art unique and peculiar to ourselves'" (21). These initial plays showed an "emphasis on the romantic and spiritual," certainly giving center stage to that all important "idealism" (5). The emphasis on "idealism" reveals the Theatre's ties to the cultural nationalist movements of the late 19th

and early 20th centuries, and the Theatre's apparent mission to present an idealized vision of Irish peasant life in direct opposition to exploitative fictions advanced by the English. Indeed, Lady Gregory wrote that "Our theatre was caught into that current," referring to the Gaelic League—a league interested in "giv[ing] pride to a nation struggling for identity" (*Our Irish Theatre* 76; qtd. in Clarke 92-93). Clarke asserts that *Kathleen ni Houlihan* "met the *nationalistic* desire to show Ireland to itself"—a desire, again, that would produce a fairly rosy mirror (italics mine 21). Through plays like Yeats's and Lady Gregory's, the Abbey's audience came to see the "Irish peasant as a symbol of their lost identity" (94). This desire to idealize created a certain type of Irish character common in early twentieth century Irish plays—the rural, Western, Catholic Irishman. As George Watson describes, "Their treatment of the peasant naturally did not run much on the mysteries of the Rosary, but there is an obvious overlap with the Catholic native idealisation. And equally clearly, the writers are reacting against the English stereotype" (23). Furthermore, most nationalist movements depend on similar symbols; as Robert Miles points out, "nationalism likes to see itself as the ascendant expression of an ancient 'low' or peasant culture" (53). Emerging nationalisms often turn to an idealized peasant culture as a source for constructing a nation's ethnic unity and particular personality.

Given the powerful strain of idealization and cultural recovery within the Irish Theatre movement, audiences' reactions to Synge's plays are fairly understandable. Popular responses to and criticism of his play revolved around his failure to properly idealize the figure of the Irish peasant, which landed him the charge of unrealism. The figure of the rural, Western, Irish peasant was becoming clearly associated with all the good and possibility of the potential nation of Ireland; this charge of unrealism, then, really seems to be one of un-

idealism. One should note here that these same critics found the peasant plays of Colum, Yeats and Gregory quite realistic. William Boyle chose to remove his works from Abbey circulation following the furor over *Playboy*, writing to the *Freeman's Journal* to protest “against any present attempt to set up a standard of National Drama based on the vilification of any section of the Irish people, in a theatre ostensibly founded, for the production of plays to represent real Irish life and character” (qtd. in Clarke 160). Clarke notes that Boyle here “voiced the feelings of a large section of the Abbey audience who were staunch Nationalists” (161). In his 1907 diaries, Holloway called *Playboy* the “outpouring of a morbid, unhealthy mind” (qtd. in Clarke 161). The *Freeman's Journal* labeled the play an “unmitigated, protracted libel upon Irish peasant men, and worse still upon Irish girlhood” (qtd. in Clarke 161). Certainly, a great many people were furious at Synge’s portrayal of the Irish peasantry. If Synge’s plays seem rather tame to us now—for, after all, our culture offers us much more violent and disturbing fare as entertainment—we should remember that these audiences were less accustomed to such material and appear to have been genuinely scandalized.

And, it is fairly clear, Synge meant to scandalize them. In *The Theatre of Nation*, Ben Levitas argues that “Synge, for his part, was frustrated by petty-bourgeois nationalism, annoyed at the League’s policy of standardizing Irish, and impatient with the conservatism of the Catholic Church” (119). Synge himself said “I do not believe in the possibility of ‘a purely fantastic unmodern, ideal, breezy, springdayish, Cuchulanoid National Theatre’” (qtd. in Watson 60). Synge’s resistance to the standard line on Irish nationalism and Irish identity finds expression in his plays, and certainly in his audiences’ reactions to those plays. As Watson notes, “Naturally, Synge’s refusal to idealise without qualification the peasant life he depicted would have been—and was—offensive to those reared solely on a sickly diet of

undiluted Celticist pap” (70). Instead of the idealized Western Irish farmer, Synge gave them Christy, a wandering boy with poetic words and a special touch with the lloy. Instead of romance, Synge offers violence—Pegeen branding Christy’s leg, Christy about to be strung up and hung outside.

Along with Maureen Waters, Clarke, and most current critics, I find no reason to believe that the riots occurred because of the use of the scandalous word “shift.” Rather, the Irish people resented Synge’s satiric impulse and strongly preferred optimistic peasant plays that depicted the Irish people favorably. Waters understands the riots in the following terms:

The Irish were hardly pleased by images of themselves as ignorant, backward, weak-spirited fools. They had suffered long and bitterly from derogatory images both at home and abroad, and it should be noted that the emphasis in the early productions was on *realism*; emphasis on the comic and the fantastic came at a later date. Maurice Bourgeois observed in 1913 that the Irish people as they are portrayed in *The Playboy* ‘are anything but fit for self-government. Synge’s comedy when viewed in this light, certainly constitutes the most tragic exposure of his fellow-countrymen’s besottedness.’ Quite understandably, the strongest reaction to Synge’s play came from nationalists like Arthur Griffith, who were carefully developing the image of the heroic and high minded patriot. (79)

Synge’s particular blend of the comedic and horrific thus alienated audience members who viewed the theatre as a vehicle for recovering the lost glory of the Irish people; they did not want to think of the Irish peasantry in anything less than noble terms and preferred the images of witty, intelligent rogues seen in Yeats’s works about Hanrahan or Lady Gregory’s play *The Rising of the Moon*. Lady Gregory’s Irish are generally perceived by audiences as quick-witted, jovial, imaginative, patriotic, and optimistic—charming peasant rogues and young ladies. Synge’s are certainly quick-witted, but he pairs his sense of Irish wit with what Maureen Waters calls the “darkness and vitality of the folk”—a representation that was not always favorable (81). Christy gains a reputation as a charmer with a way with words, but this is, in part, because of his power as a skull-cracker and his winning ways with a lloy.

The later playwright Sean O'Casey caused a similar uproar—riots occurred at the first performance of his *The Plough and the Stars*—for very similar reasons. The play displays an increasing rift between the filthy, overcrowded and sometimes horrific life of the Dublin slums and the nationalist rhetoric of the Easter uprising. Waters ascribes these riots to discomfort and anger at the depiction of the nationalist movement in the play:

It is little wonder that Dublin audiences were enraged and that some of them climbed up on the stage of the Abbey Theatre to get their hands on Fluther. This scene underscores the fact that Irishmen were drawn to the nationalist movement by the sheer spectacle, the sheer self-indulgence of the parades, the music, speeches, the sense of importance they generated. Peter Flynn's most coveted possession is his glorious green uniform, complete with plume and sword, but the closest he'll ever come to militant action is his annual pilgrimage to the grave of Wolfe Tone. Even more infuriating is the fact that in this scene Fluther's boasting and posturing directly parodies the actions of the Irish rebels, thereby reducing their tragic sacrifice to the foolishness of clowns. The solemn moment in which the Volunteers, fired by the words of Pearse, pledge themselves to Ireland is undercut by Fluther's comical defense of Rosie. Clitheroe and his companions are willing to die for an ideal that has become—according to O'Casey—debased and false, that offers no solution to ordinary people whose problems are primarily economic rather than political. (154)

O'Casey's plays in general often seek to highlight that gap between a romantic or nationalistic idea of life and a realistic, often horrific and dirty, engagement with actual circumstances. Brenna Clarke groups Synge and O'Casey, and the riots related to both their works, in just this problematic gap.

Like O'Casey later, Synge detested nationalistic abstractions and wanted to flatten the idealism of nationalism. For this reason, both he and O'Casey caused the greatest stir, despite the reality of their pictures—or perhaps because of them. Synge wrote in his preface to *Poems and Translations* that before poetry could 'be human again it must learn to be brutal.' Synge was brutally truthful in his portrayal of the Irish peasantry in all its varied moods, vices, and virtues. However, the audience did not want truth, but an idealized version of the peasant. (164)

While Clarke's assertion here that Synge and O'Casey's works are realistic may be troublesome, it does seem that Irish audiences were not troubled by the works of Synge and O'Casey because they were unrealistic but because they expected and strongly preferred

clearly positive images of the Irish peasant. Synge and O'Casey were not interested in producing propaganda for anyone; if they did participate in the cultural nationalist project, they did so solely on their own terms. Idealistic and propagandistic plays that pacify an audience do not possess the same power to *engage* an audience. Synge and O'Casey explore the potential failings and weaknesses of a particular kind of Irishness that was becoming associated with national identity, and audiences did not want to see these failings. Synge believed in the necessity of the “brutal”: of that which is violent and disturbing enough to shake people out of complacency and into engagement.

Synge, however, was not capable of killing off the romantic image of rural Western Ireland; no one yet has been. A nation searching for identity in the early twentieth century used the ideals created by cultural nationalist art, so that de Valera could speak of the nation in 1943 as one of “frugal comfort,” “cosy homesteads,” “athletic youths,” and “comely maidens” (qtd. in Brown 113). In 1972, Conor Cruise O'Brien specified “By ‘the Irish race’ is meant, as far as Ireland is concerned: Primarily, people of native Irish stock, descended from Gaelic speakers, professing the Catholic religion, and holding some form of the general political opinions held by most people of this origin and religion” (qtd. in Watson 18). This construction of Irish identity was solidifying, and remains powerful to this day. As Robert Miles points out, paraphrasing Ernest Gellner, “The general aim of nationalist ideology is to create a myth of unitary national origin, whereby the present ‘congruent’ polity is understood to be a manifestation of an ancient culture. Nothing must contradict this narrative, including, or indeed, especially, evidence of past diversity, heterogeneity, and conflict” (53).

What's notable here is the persistence of this image of Ireland—this ideal of Irish identity—even late in the century when globalization has changed most of Ireland utterly.

That this ideal holds even now, at least in stereotype, is obvious to anyone who has seen TV commercials for Irish tourism featuring rolling rural hills, pristine churches, and simple rural folk ready to meet you for some craic and Guinness in the local pub. Writing in 1974, Terence Brown discusses “the development of a constituency of young people in which consumerism is encouraged in magazines, television advertisements, and the faddishness of the popular music industry” in Ireland (199). As young people move toward global popular culture, they may simultaneously move away from those characteristics associated with popular constructions of Irishness. Few people in Ireland today can speak any Gaelic beyond the “cúpla focal” they were forced to learn in school; the church’s power over the state has lessened; young people participate in a popular culture that bears more similarity to *The OC* than the Aran Islands. Even Toraigh island, the last respite of traditional Gaelic culture according to tourist publications like *Let’s Go* and the *Rough Guide*, now features a modern Western hotel serving watered-down American beers. While you will hear Irish on the island, most people speak English to you and to each other.

The ideal of Irish identity as located within a rural, Western, Catholic, Gaelic speaking paradigm has died hard, and is still powerful today. This idealized identity, however, bears increasingly little relation to the globalized and economically powerful Ireland of the 1990s and twenty-first century. As Terence Brown says, “the traditional essentialist definitions—language, tradition, culture, and distinctive ideology—are widely felt to fly in the face of social reality” (205-6). Furthermore, such a prescribed identity easily becomes repressive. This idea of a distinctive Irishness characterized by rural, simple people with a powerful Catholic faith has generated much of the conservative social legislation of the twentieth century in Ireland—laws prohibiting divorce and birth control and advocating

censorship—laws that have been difficult for the more liberal citizens of Ireland to swallow. The resistance to this paradigm of idealized Irish identity, which Patrick Hanafin calls the “Gaelic Romantic” stereotype, finds contemporary expression in writers like Martin McDonagh and Patrick McCabe, who, like J.M. Synge, suggest that this particular centre cannot hold.

It is unclear, however, what can replace it, or where a globalized Ireland might turn for a coherent definition of national character. Discussing Desmond Fennell’s book *The State of the Nation*, Brown suggests “the underlying Irish problem is a lack of a satisfactory, workable self-image after the economic and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s destroyed the once serviceable version of the national identity of Ireland as Gaelic, Catholic, and republican” (252). As Watson puts it, “always lurking somewhere near the surface is a painful sense of insecurity deriving ultimately from the sense of a lost identity, a broken tradition, and the knowledge that an alien identity has been, however reluctantly, more than half embraced” (20). While this “alien identity” might have been an Anglicized one in the early twentieth century, Ireland now has been increasingly infiltrated by global/ American popular culture. It’s unclear at this point what exactly being “Irish” does or should mean in the twenty-first century.

Many contemporary writers address this lack of coherent Irish identity in their literature. Their novels outline a period of transition—a movement away from a coherent but repressive traditional Irish identity toward a less coherent, less clearly Irish, but less repressive globalized one—and they offer a mix of morbid glee at the death of a tyrant and inconsolable nostalgia at the passing of a meaningful definition of Irishness. They generally do so in violent, horrific works that hearken back to Synge’s proclamation that art must be

‘brutal’ before it can be human again. Tom Herron agrees that writers like Patrick McCabe and Colm Tóibín produce “revisionist attempt[s] to debunk the nationalist meta-narrative” (171). Nicholas Grene invents the idea of the ‘black pastoral’ to describe those works that “invert [the norm of pastoral] by representing a brutally unidyllic Ireland of the past” (“Black Pastoral”). What I find interesting, however, is that these authors’ methods for depicting a brutal Ireland often both parallel the twentieth century horror film in plots and invoke specific horror films as precedents.

Horrific Innovations

In what way, then, did earlier twentieth-century authors such as Synge and O’Casey use horror? Though one could certainly argue that the horror genre existed in literature in their day, it was scarcely the force in mass popular culture that it is now. Irish authors, however, have never been a stranger to using horrific themes and images, as both Vivian Mercier and David Krause note in their analyses of Irish comedy. From Cú Chulainn’s battle rage, in which his skin turns inside out and one eye bulges out of his skull, to Christy Mahon’s bloody attack on his father, Irish literature abounds with the macabre. *Playboy*, after all, contains a murdered father, and revolves around the machinations and progress of the murderer. There are many gothic touches of what Waters would call the ‘dark and vital folk.’ Pegeen’s speech occasionally revels in the grotesque, especially in her references to the *Playboy*’s father rotting in the ground. She points out that the Widow Quin raised a young ram at her own breast. Furthermore, Pegeen burns the *Playboy*’s leg onstage as the townspeople prepare to kill him. While touched consistently by humorous and quick-witted dialogue, these ideas and scenes contain horrific and disturbing material, which is surely why

audiences felt maligned by Synge's portrayal of the peasant. O'Casey's plays similarly contain murder, death, and various forms of mayhem, covered by a light sheen of comedy, that, as Waters points out, fails to compensate for the disturbing nature of the plays: "[they] seldom provoke sustained laughter; one is always conscious of the defensive quality of the clowns, the bottled up ferocity that comes out of continual frustration" (155). While Synge and O'Casey would scarcely have described their works as "horror," it remains that many elements are similar: most strikingly brutality and murder.

Furthermore, this violence directs itself against the sacred institutions of traditional Irish identity—the family, the church, and the state. Christy claims to have murdered his father "with the help of God," revealing both his instinctive invocation of religious platitudes and his radical misunderstanding of them (17). Rural, Western Ireland is more a site of murderous heathens than the holy temple of the Irish nation. The patriots of O'Casey's play are delusional and misled. The emerging stereotype of Irish identity finds little support in these works; Synge and O'Casey instead attack it with horrific images.

Of course, the contemporary use of the horrific differs from that of Synge and O'Casey in significant ways. Nevertheless, horrific subjects and descriptions are used to point out the failings of Irish society in both periods. Ireland, or at least most of it, is now a nation free of British rule, free to govern itself. The Ireland that emerged after 1922 has, however, been a disappointment to many writers and more liberal thinkers. In their eyes, Ireland merely traded one tyranny for another—a monarchy for a theocracy. The years following independence saw rising power handed over to the Roman Catholic Church, with censorship laws passed and morality increasingly legislated. Echoes of civil war, the loss of

the North, and increasing conservatism tarnished the new Irish state. José Laners views the two sets of writers, Renaissance and contemporary, in this way:

The mood of the country had changed. Whereas the writers and artists of the Celtic Revival had played an active part not just in reflecting but in actually creating a vision of the future of Ireland, the Free State, with its narrowly defined moral and cultural code, fearful of independent and creative thought, forced its literary figures into an oppositional and increasingly marginalized role. (*Unauthorized Versions* 2)

One should note, however, that while such a framework might prove useful for comparing figures such as Lady Gregory and Patrick McCabe, it is less useful for comparing J.M. Synge and McCabe. Writers like Synge and O'Casey perceived themselves as outside the cultural nationalist project, thus taking up a more "oppositional and increasingly marginalized" role. We could posit, then, a tradition of oppositional and satiric writing operating at least from writers like Synge and O'Casey through contemporary authors like McCabe and Doyle. If contemporary authors are frustrated "first with the new country's lack of political imagination and daring, but increasingly with the more serious side effects of national insecurity, censorship, and repression" (Laners, *Unauthorized Versions* 2), their concerns are not unlike their Renaissance counterparts. As Kim McMullen puts it,

Perhaps it is only in this brave new world, self-confident and autonomous after centuries of colonial and postcolonial struggle, that Irish writers like Toibin, O'Faolain, Doyle and McCabe are at last free to critically interrogate the hidden wounds of the nation's past and to think about moving on. Yet there remains a persistent anxiety, stated and unstated, about 'What kind of people are we becoming?'

The contemporary period thus sees Irish writers interrogating both their past and their possible futures. They use disturbing images and ideas to reflect corruption and decay in the Irish state and in Irish society.

Indeed, this bottled up ferocity finds expression in the protagonists of many contemporary Irish writers like Doyle and McCabe. These writers sometimes draw

specifically on a “horror” tradition established through fiction and film. Furthermore, they do so as part of a tradition including Synge and O’Casey that utilizes disturbing or horrific subject matter to critique the state of Ireland. In an interview with Pat Collins, McCabe describes the Ireland of his youth: “I’m 39 now [1995] and until I was about ten, Ireland was a very grey place. . . . a certain section of the population . . . made the country a more illiberal place than when the British were here; that was the great tragedy of the free state” (“Patrick McCabe”). McCabe here expresses concisely his view of the failure of the Irish republic, that failure which Lanthers posits is such a force in contemporary Irish writing. He suggests that a “certain section” took control of the state and made it a “grey” place. Presumably this “certain section” could be associated with the “Gaelic Romantic” stereotype and the repressive social policies of mid-century Ireland. In an interview with Christopher FitzSimon, he puts it this way:

And I think you would be aware, even growing up, that you come from a brutalized culture, to some extent. Poverty was certainly everywhere when I was growing up—it’s not now thankfully, my children won’t have the same problems. But there’s no question that there was a deep hurt at all levels of society, certainly in the small town that I lived in. (“St Macartan” 180-181)

It is also not surprising that horror would become a useful tool to investigate that “brutalized culture” (note the term “brutal” appearing again) for Patrick McCabe, as he was raised on horror film, from *Psycho* to B-grade flicks: “I’ve seen all those films God knows how many times. They were always on the cinema when I was growing up. Anything that was good horror or schlock. I bring all that into my writing. It’s so much a part of me that I couldn’t keep it out even if I wanted to” (“Patrick McCabe”). Discussing with FitzSimon his life at St Macartan, he describes his money spending habits: “You could see seven or eight good movies in a week. So I got a job in Joe Comiskey’s, who had a grocery shop and he said

‘There’s thirty bob, what are you going to do with that?’ and I says ‘I’m off up now to see *Dr Terror’s House of Horrors* Joe’, I’d say” (“St Macartan” 179 -180). Following this point, FitzSimon asks McCabe about “mondo” movies, a term that becomes significant in his later book *Mondo Desperado*. He quotes from his then forthcoming book:

The average person who watches Mondo Movies wants to believe that they are seeing real, forbidden, shocking scenes of unusual customs, death and violence and are all too willing to accept even the most blatant fabrications, which gives the author all kinds of license. When watching these movies you might ask yourself questions like ‘Who made this movie?’, ‘Where?’, ‘When?’, and most of all ‘Why?’ ‘Did the filmmakers make this film for humanitarian or political reasons or just for money? Is it intended to enlighten, repulse or both?’ (“St Macartan” 180)

McCabe then finishes the quote by asking FitzSimon, “So I think that would be a nice thing to have said about your book, wouldn’t it?” (“St Macartan” 180). McCabe here outlines the possibilities for disturbing fiction as a tool to trouble and confuse, a tool that may be used for quite a variety of reasons. For McCabe, horror provides a vivid technique to depict the “brutalized culture” of post-independence Ireland.

Martin McDonagh has admitted to similar influences, though, as with McCabe, very little critical work has investigated how those influences play out in his work. Joseph Feeney’s analysis notes that McDonagh, when young, spent most of his free time “watching films and television, and reading and writing voraciously” (25); “He was also affected by such violent films as *Taxi Driver* and *Night of the Hunter*” (29); furthermore, McDonagh admits that “I’m coming to theatre with a disrespect for it. I’m coming from a film fan’s perspective on theatre” (qtd. in Feeney 28). Despite McDonagh’s insistence on a literary background that owes a great deal to contemporary popular culture, much discussion of McDonagh either focuses on his relationship with Synge or merely dubs him “the Quentin Tarantino of the Emerald Isle,” as did the *Financial Times* (qtd. in Feeney 24). If, as Vic

Merriman notes, McDonagh's works provide "a kind of voyeuristic aperture on the antics of white trash whose reference point is more closely aligned to the barbarous conjurings of Jerry Springer than to the continuities of an indigenous tradition of dramatic writing" (qtd. in Richards), then perhaps some analyses of McDonagh need to consider the "barbarous conjurings" of popular culture alongside J.M. Synge. These analyses gesture toward the importance of popular culture and specifically of disturbing film in comprehending McDonagh's work; in fact, a consideration of the filmic horror genre in the late twentieth century, especially the slasher film, has a great deal to contribute to the understanding of the characters and plot structures in all of his plays.

Contemporary authors, such as McCabe and McDonagh, use horror as a tool to critique the ideals and pretensions of the Irish nation, as did their Irish Renaissance counterparts. However, they have the powerful and popular twentieth-century tradition of horror in film and literature to draw upon. Both McCabe and McDonagh have admitted a taste for violent popular entertainment, though McCabe's interest might more appropriately be labeled a ravenous appetite. Both authors use horrific images, but they also make references to classic horror films, and use the plot structures associated with the horror genre. Horror is a, if not *the*, characterizing feature of the works of both these authors.

McCabe's novels revel in these disgusting and disturbing details—the corpse of a father, left to rot in the living room; a dismembered neighbor stowed in the brock heap; a suicidal teacher swinging from a noose; the rotting remains of a beloved cat. McDonagh's plays similarly invoke horrific images—the corpse of a mother with a poker-sized hole in her head; the bones of the town's dead scattered across the floor; piles of body parts being hacked into small pieces; a cat exploding in a ball of blood and bones onstage. There's

enough violent death, rampant decay, and spattered blood in these novels and plays to propel a few new installments of *Nightmare on Elm Street*. Such images would not necessarily have to be references to the horror genre. However, these works also incorporate allusions to specific horror films, and actually steal horror genre plots. We will discuss these varied uses of horror, as well as the authors' probably motivations, in more detail in the next chapter.

I should note here that sometimes, because of the extreme excesses of the blood and gore, McDonagh's and McCabe's works become comedic, tip over. Though this excess pushes these works toward camp, it is not apolitical camp, which "blocks out content," as Susan Sontag describes (sec. 15). Instead, this excess of horror serves to highlight and condemn a brutalized and brutalizing Ireland. These authors present worlds in which horror is an everyday fact of life. Francie's tortured existence becomes a catalogue of the potential evils of an Irish childhood: a suicidal, insane mother; an alcoholic, abusive father; a homosexual and pedophilic priest; a nosy yet indifferent community. As horrific image piles atop horrific event, all narrated with Francie's irreverent, increasingly insane pratter, the novel tips into a grotesque parody of Irish childhood novels, a Joycean attempt to end the genre through excess.

Leenane is a place where murder is so common that no one can summon up any moral outrage; only the suicidal local priest seems to notice or care. And on McDonagh's Inishmore, domestic chores are replaced with gory dismemberments, though the same language is retained: "Them corpses won't be chopping themselves up, or d'ye think they will"(57). A world in which chopping up corpses is something akin to washing the dishes is

one in which the horrific has been normalized, the “unhomely” rehomed.² Part of this translation of the horrific into an everyday domestic sphere is the audience’s prior saturation by horrific images; the contemporary author who wants to shock needs to do more than wave a loy around. These authors, however, do not just pile murder upon murder. Instead, they portray a world in which such events are to be expected. These authors use the excesses of horror to investigate and satirize a way of life that lacks any firm foundations—familial, regional, national, or religious. In these works, the family is the *only* place you would go for a mass murder. The use of horrific images and the a structure associated with the horror genre creates this sense of disestablishment, of homelessness, of the uncanny, and adds images of decay, rot, and death that characterize this new Ireland and further underscore the unpleasant, empty future ahead.

Patrick McCabe and Martin McDonagh are not the only writers using such images and structures. Many contemporary works utilize brutality and violence, question the nature of contemporary Irish identity, and present an unclear or bleak national future. Works by Doyle, McNamee, Patterson, and Banville all invite such readings. Furthermore, many contemporary works outside Ireland use similar structures. Ellis’s *American Psycho* uses a psychopathic central character in order to expose the soulless, craven capitalism of 1980’s consumer culture in America, where it is a small step from buying pop albums to “consuming” women’s bodies. Burgess uses extreme violence in *A Clockwork Orange* to investigate the nature of good and evil and the value of free will. Both these authors use brutality, and the reading audience’s presumed reaction of distress, in order to direct attention to cultural or moral problems. They have discovered that a disturbed audience is also, at

² Freud’s concept of the *unheimlich*, alternatively translated as the “uncanny” or the more literal “unhomely,” provides one basis for understanding what causes a person to experience the emotion of horror. I will discuss this briefly in the following chapter.

least, an interested and concerned audience. The use of horror as a tool for critique is certainly not uniquely Irish. It has, however, become one defining feature of contemporary Irish fiction, which continues to plumb the depths of gore and mayhem.

Indeed, the prevalence of such images and plotlines in contemporary works suggests that horror—so long undervalued critically—is making its way into more accepted cultural markets. Just as the slasher film found reputable expression in *The Silence of the Lambs*, and the rape-revenge film in *The Accused*, horror is making its way increasingly not just into genre video racks and paperback pulp, but into “literature.” This development is not surprising. As Carol Clover argues, the lower arts are often more free to innovate; the higher arts eventually discover and plunder these new developments. In addition, horror is markedly suited to the job of national critique.

In a time that many perceive as one of global brutality—threats of terrorism, civil wars, intimations and revelations of genocide, increasing chasms between conservatives and liberals worldwide—it should not be surprising that horror, the genre of fear and uncertainty, emerges as an important frame through which to understand the contemporary world. Certainly every generation has millennial expectations, but the last hundred years have been particularly horrific and gory, which finds expression in a variety of artistic works and especially these dark genres. Furthermore, this period has witnessed the emergence of many new nations from colonial rule; all of these new countries struggle with defining and buttressing a national character. At the same time, the forces of globalization undermine nations’ foundations, threatening the world with the destruction of local and regional identities in favor of an ever larger and less differentiated identity. The reactions to this development range from militant conservatism, which seeks to preserve local identities, often

with the threat of catastrophic violence, to a vacuous faith in universal values and oneness as if we all were all strapped into one Disneyland ride. As Benjamin Barber suggests in his aptly titled article “Jihad Vs. McWorld,” the world is currently both falling apart and coming together. It is scarcely surprising that these Irish authors have turned to the horror genre, with its emphasis on the unhomely and the homely, the coherent and the fractured, all through the lens of anxiety and violence, in order to chronicle the developmental periods of national identity.

CHAPTER II

ALIENS, MAD SCIENTISTS, AND PSYCHOS:

HORROR FILMS IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE

Once you start reading contemporary Irish literature, you quickly realize that you cannot avoid corpses—and not just corpses lying nicely composed in their coffins at a funeral home viewing, but corpses that refuse such easy visual or textual containment—corpses that stick around long enough to rot, corpses in the process of being dismembered, corpses that readers cannot initially recognize as dead. Indeed, corpses, how to interpret them and what to do with them, provide pivotal plot points in many of these works. A reader's sense of Francie Brady's madness crystallizes when she realizes that Francie has, for some time, been living with and talking to the rotting corpse of his father. In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, the viewer only realizes that he has entered the realm of horror when Mag's dead body tips forward in her rocking chair, revealing her dented skull. Much of the action in *A Skull in Connemara* revolves around bones, specifically the pulverizing of the bones of the community's deceased. *Lieutenant of Inishmore* features the onstage dismemberment of several corpses. Not even animals are safe—*The Dead School* includes the rotting corpse of a dog in the Grand Canal as well as Malachy slipping in the messy remains of Raphael's once beloved cat Setanta. Indeed, it is hard to find a work of contemporary Irish literature that is free of dead bodies—the presence of a corpse comes to seem almost de rigueur, a sort of odd

fetish.³ Certainly, most people find images of rotting or dismembered corpses disturbing, and one might then write these images off as mere attempts to shock readers and viewers. Or we could offer the generalization that Irish literature shows a tendency toward the macabre, perhaps suggesting that the universal presence of the corpse in these works might be a reference to cultural anxieties surrounding the casualties of the famine or of paramilitary campaigns in the North.⁴

However, such a response certainly falls short of articulating where those images might come from or why they are being used. I would argue that these, and other, similar, images derive from the stock of the filmic horror genre, and that such “abject” images (as I will discuss below) ground these writers within that specific tradition—a tradition that I believe is particularly enabling for critiques of nationalism. In this chapter, I am thus interested in clarifying what, exactly, the horror genre is, so that we can then move to consider where contemporary Irish authors use it and why something as seemingly lowbrow and exploitative as twentieth century horror film might appear within their works.

The horror genre is, first of all, a genre interested in the evocation of a sensation called horror in a film’s or book’s characters, and generally (though not always) the creation of that sensation in its audience.⁵ When one experiences horror, the sensation is not just one of fear—which one might feel when seeing a car moving toward you erratically—but also an

³ See also McNamee’s *Resurrection Man*, Patterson’s *Burning Your Own*, and Banville’s *Body of Evidence*.

⁴ See Mercier or Krause for more on the macabre tradition in Irish humor.

⁵ The caveat here is due to the fact that much B-grade horror actually plays as comedy to the audience, as the excesses of gore and screaming lead to a great deal of laughter in the theater. Such movies are still commonly referred to as horror, however, and stocked in a video store’s horror section. The key defining factor is thus the representation of characters experiencing horror, and whether the audience also experiences it is optional. Though one could argue that such movies are not “real” horror, to do so would force the exclusion of most contemporary films from the genre. As Carol Clover puts it, “The rapid alternation between registers—between something like ‘real’ horror on one hand and a camp, self-parodying horror on the other—is by now one of the most conspicuous characteristics of the tradition” (41).

arresting feeling of revulsion. Critics often associate horror with Freud's "uncanny," speculating that the feeling of disgust arises upon the "return of the repressed," or when one encounters a since discarded infantile belief. Monsters thus spring from the unconscious and reflect that which a society has denied; this interpretation of horror has been very popular for several decades now, and was instigated largely by Robin Wood's 1979 booklet of essays *The American Nightmare*. Zombies are thus uncanny as they capitalize on one's supposed infantile belief that life remains in the body after death. Aside from psychoanalysis, however, most critics agree that the experience of disgust which is such a part of horror arises from an encounter with something that is perceived as unnatural, which then largely results from an encounter with something perceived to be unclean. Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger*, argues that we label something as unclean if it resists easy categorization. Things that are between conceptual categories, that combine aspects of two apparently mutually exclusive categories, or that fall outside of such categories altogether are things that we perceive as unclean, and thus approach with disgust and horror. The monsters of the horror genre then generally rest on categorical violations. Of course, we are more invested in some categories than in others; the combination of a grapefruit and a jellyfish is not as disturbing as the combination of a man and a woman, or of the living and the dead.⁶ Frankenstein (we'll call the creature that, as we're primarily discussing popular film) is made out of bits of corpses, yet he is alive; he confounds our ability to draw a clean line between living and dead (as do the creature's more modern descendants, zombies). Dracula troubles the same boundary, with the additions that he can be a man *and* an animal (as in those depictions that

⁶ Horror comedies, however, have long capitalized on this preference for cross-categorical contamination. See the *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*—in which huge mutant tomatoes grow teeth and kill people—for one example.

feature the count turning into a bat or wolf, or the very ratlike count in the classic *Nosferatu*) or even a man *and* a woman (note the flowing locks and eyeliner of most contemporary portrayals). While Noel Carroll in *A Philosophy of Horror* argues that horror involves a violation of biological categories such as seen in the Swamp-Man, who is both man and fish, Carol Clover extends that definition to the violation of sexual categories in order to make room for modern slasher villains like the gender confused Leatherface or the child abuser Freddy Krueger. Though the finer points of these definitions may vary, critics generally agree that the feeling of horror rests upon a combination of fear and loathing, and that loathing arises from contact with something that is unclean, or that violates our conceptual categories—our sense of what is natural—in some way.

Certainly, one could be more specific than this in defining the genre: this manipulation of boundaries is highly likely to involve a parallel manipulation of flesh; body parts become manipulable and interchangeable: people wear other people's faces, eat sausage made from human flesh, and have sex with corpses. The genre is very interested in *bodies*. Because of this, horror is sometimes grouped with pornography and melodrama as a "body genre," in Linda Williams's terminology.⁷ To a large degree, however, this focus on the manipulation of the body seems to fall within the definition we have been delineating: to wear someone else's face or to eat from someone else's flesh is to violate conceptual—as well as moral—categories. One's face should be worn by oneself, and no human should eat human flesh. These interests in categorical violations, the depiction of characters experiencing horror, and the manipulation of bodies are common to horror's various subgenres, of which there are a wide variety: slasher flicks (*Halloween*, *Silence of the Lambs*), alien-invasion films (*Aliens*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*), monster baby movies

⁷ See her essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" for more on this.

(*Basketcase*, *It's Alive*), religious terror films (*The Exorcist*, *The Omen*), and rape-revenge flicks (*Ms. 45*, *I Spit on Your Grave*), to name only a few. As the purpose of this dissertation and this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive introduction to the nuances of the genre, but to provide a basic background, we will go into these subgenres only as they come up.

One particular way of conceptualizing the emotion of horror that has become particularly popular with contemporary genre critics rests on Julia Kristeva's description of the "abject." Though her conceptualization of the abject is not, strictly speaking, terribly different than the conceptions described above, it has been used in interesting ways by contemporary critics to make connections between horror and nationalism—connections that will be discussed more explicitly later and that will be quite useful to this project.

Kristeva uses the image of a corpse as the focal point for her definition of the abject. She suggests that the dead body, in a text or on a stage, is more than just a gruesome image—it is a particular kind of gruesome image.

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall) that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death... as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death.... If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (3)

Kristeva argues that the corpse does not operate, as dung might, as an object, against which you could define yourself and thereby bolster your identity. The corpse, instead, is abject—it undermines definition and identity by situating itself clearly between two categories (alive/dead). Borders become meaningless; they either collapse or "encroa[ch] upon everything." "[C]ompelling, raw, insolent," the corpse "is the utmost of abjection," "something rejected from which one does not part"; while you imagine the corpse to be something radically

separated from your own clean and proper body, you simultaneously know that your body will, at some point, become a corpse; the ability to distance yourself from the corpse is thus troubled (4). The abject gains its particular power as a disturbance of “identity, system, order” through its disrespect for “borders, positions, rules”; you then discover it in the “in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). The abject, then, is the source of horror—that emotion we feel when we sense that conceptual borders are not being properly respected, and when we perhaps are forced to feel that borders may be arbitrary. And without borders, identity can find no foundations or definitions—the understanding of what it means to be you, or even to be alive, falters in the corpse’s gaze. Horror emerges then as a challenge to pretensions to a coherent identity: boundaries and categories become fluid, perhaps dissolve.

This paradigm alters, to some degree, when the emotion of horror becomes encapsulated within the horror genre, which, like all genres, has its common plotlines and its traditional rules. If a horror genre film could actually undermine the secure foundations of one’s identity, either no one would see such films or we’d be a nation of ravening, bloodthirsty madmen. Certainly, as discussed above, the horror genre monster is crafted as a violation of categorization, whether biological, cultural, or sexual. And characters *within* a horror genre film often respond to the monster not just with terror, but also with some degree of lunacy. The genre often consciously plays with this conceptual link between the emotion of horror and the result of insanity. At the beginning of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre II*, viewers are informed that the sole surviving victim of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Sally, is now insane and living in an institution. Mental institutions are common settings for horror films; in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, Freddy Krueger’s mother worked in an insane asylum, and one of the sequels revolves around Freddy’s attempt to kill off a ward of young

people in that asylum. However, despite this flirtation with the trope of madness, viewers are not expected to go insane after watching a horror film, mainly because of the genre's mode, controlled by strict genre conventions, of presenting horrific experiences. While the protagonist will encounter an unclean monster, the plot works toward that monster's elimination in the service of the community. Whether one watches an alien invasion flick, an exorcism film, an evil baby movie, or a slasher pic, the monster will usually get what's coming to him by the end. Certainly the horrific nature of the monster provides the audience with some titillating moments of disgust, and part of the fun is, in Stephen King's terms, "an invitation to indulge in deviant, antisocial behavior by proxy" (31), but the thrust of the genre is, instead, the elimination of that unclean threat in the service of communal and individual purity. Even King agrees:

Monstrosity fascinates us because it appeals to the conservative Republican in a three-piece suit who resides within all of us. We love and need the concept of monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings . . . and let me further suggest that it is not the physical or mental aberration in itself which horrifies us, but rather the lack of order which these aberrations seem to imply. (39)

He goes on to say that "After all, when we discuss monstrosity, we are expressing out faith and belief in the norm and watching for the mutant. The writer of horror fiction is neither more nor less than an agency of the status quo" (39).⁸ The monster may run rampant for half an hour, but the point is that the monster will be defeated and expelled.

Our encounter with the abject through the film is thus filtered; from the beginning of the film, we expect the abject to strut out onstage and perform for us, but for it to then be

⁸ I find it interesting how successfully King's theories gel with more academic understandings of the genre. Though King often rails against academia in excesses that seem less than fully sane, he often agrees with them on horror genre criticism. This though he claims you need to be either "drunk" or a "graduate student"—"two states of roughly similar incompetence"—to worry yourself over the difference between fantasy and science fiction (16).

killed and civilization to be saved. This is not to suggest that some horror films are not subversive—the monster might be a little more disgusting than we can easily accept, or the monster might not be killed off at the end. King suggests that Tod Brownig's *Freaks* is genuinely disturbing, as "Browning made the mistake of using real freaks in his film. We may only feel really comfortable with horror as long as we can see the zipper running up the monster's back, when we understand that we are not playing for keepsies" (34). Horror films certainly can be disturbing, and the degree of disturbance will largely rest on the spectator's status as an educated or naive horror viewer. I do, however, want to suggest that most horror films are extremely conservative in their orientation, and that the film's payoff is probably less in the creature itself than in the monster's containment. Horror, in this sense, is very similar to traditional Shakespearean comedy; while subversion may run amuck for a while, the ending will contain it and wrap everything up in a big bow. However, while, on the one hand, this is a very conservative story, in which those things that threaten our civilization are easily identified as monsters and are then killed off, on the other hand, such stories can be very empowering. For who would suspect that the nerdy high schooler Laurie in *Halloween*, famously played by Jamie Lee Curtis, would defeat Michael Myers in a battle to the death? Much less in so many sequels? We would all like to believe that those battles in our lives that seem to be against such insurmountable odds could be so consistently won. King claims that horror is, ultimately, an "optimistic, upbeat experience; that it is often the tough mind's way of coping with terrible problems which may not be supernatural at all but perfectly real" (316).

And the genre, certainly, for whichever of these reasons, has been consistently, even wildly, popular for a long time. The persistent need to parody horror entertainment—whether

in *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, *The Munsters*, or the recent films *Scary Movie I*, *II*, and *III* – underscores the genre’s consistent popularity over the last century. Many genre aficionados, however, myself included, see the era from the late 1950s to the early 1980s as the apotheosis of horror film. B films like *Invasion of the Killer Shrews* graced drive-ins nationwide while oft-imitated (and remade) classics like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Exorcist*, *Halloween*, and *Evil Dead* emerged. Contemporary authors like Patrick McCabe and Martin McDonagh grew up during this golden age of horror cinema, and the genre makes itself felt in many obvious, and many less obvious, ways throughout their work.

Certainly their works trade in horrific images of the disgusting and the abject, and their works thereby require the reading or viewing audience to encounter horrifying images. McDonagh is known for staging spectacularly gory scenes which require extreme creativity from stage managers and prop creators: an exploding cat, corpses being chopped up, a young girl being crucified. These scenes of death and gore are perhaps *the* defining feature of his work. McCabe’s canon is similarly associated with violence and brutality, and, indeed, almost all his works feature a rotting corpse of some sort: Benny Brady in *The Butcher Boy*, Setanta the cat in *The Dead School*, the many exploded body parts of *Breakfast on Pluto*, Pat’s decaying mother in *Emerald Germs of Ireland*. In fact, if we used a simple definition of the horror genre as a form concerned with making its readers or viewers encounter the abject (whether they then react with horror or not), then these are certainly works that fall within the genre.⁹

⁹ In saying this, I do not wish to argue that these works obey all, or even most, of the conventions that would define them as horror fiction. Readers may be uncomfortable with such a suggestion, especially as the horror genre is generally considered as low-brow, exploitative, probably low-class, rural, uneducated entertainment. Part of my goal in this project is to undermine such simplistic and elitist sentiments. My point then is that under some, necessarily vague, definitions of horror entertainment, these authors would qualify, and that critics should not find such an assertion innately untenable.

One thing to note in many of these horrific images is their implications within an Irish nationalist framework. When these works introduce the abject, they often do so in a way that undermines or problematizes traditional ideals of Irish national identity. When Francie Brady travels to Dublin, he sees Daniel O’Connell’s statue, covered with bird droppings. Francie, however, is not even aware of who Daniel O’Connell is¹⁰; the monument is only a “big grey statue mouthing about something in the middle of the street and birds shiting all over his head,” a figure who “was something to do with the English and all that” (40). By covering Daniel O’Connell with dung, denying his power as a site of nationalist memory, and turning him into something abject, McCabe takes a national symbol and empties it of its traditionally ascribed meaning; the statue, instead, becomes a sign for the emptiness of the nation and the failures of the state. He performs a similar trick on Dublin’s Grand Canal in *The Dead School*. Malachy discovers the rotting corpse of a dog in Dublin’s Grand Canal—which is famous as the focus of Patrick Kavanagh’s “Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin.” Kavanagh’s poem celebrates the “stilly/ Greeny” water that “niagarously roars,” peopled by low-headed swans and a barge that “comes bringing from Athy/ And other far-flung towns mythologies.” The Grand Canal thus seems an idealized space, and a space filled with national mythology, as the “Parnassian islands” of the Grand Canal are filled with “mythologies” and with swans, themselves often associated with the myth of the children of Lir. The poet concludes that a “canal-bank seat” is preferable to a “hero-courageous/ Tomb,” presumably because the beauty and resonance of Irish history and myth are all available, in abundance, at the Grand Canal. That body of water appears quite differently to Malachy Dudgeon in McCabe’s *The Dead School*. Malachy sits beside the canal and thinks:

¹⁰ O’Connell is a famous Irish Catholic nationalist who campaigned for increased rights for Catholics in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

He [Patrick Kavanagh] wrote about its waters [the Grand Canal] tumbling like Niagara, and about the sun glinting off its surface on a summer's day. Admittedly it wasn't summer right now but it still required an extraordinary leap of the imagination to understand how poetry could be written about it. There was a foul green scum floating on the top of the water. Little islands of green scum. Blobs of slurpy scum. Awkwardly jammed in the lock gates was a rusted iron bedstead. There was also the corpse of a dog, half-rotted away. He wouldn't have thought it the place where one would be inspired to write poetry. He would not have thought so. But then of course, he was probably wrong about that too. (190)

"Parnassian islands" are replaced by "islands of green scum," and swans are replaced by the half-rotted corpse of a dog. These abject revisions to Kavanagh's scene thus interrogate traditional ideas of cultural nationalism and romantic art. Furthermore, Malachy seems troubled by the dissimilarity between art and the "real"; McCabe may here suggest that art *needs* rotting dogs, for rotting dogs are the materials of "real" life. I think that this image invokes the symbolism of a landmark like Dublin's Grand Canal, only to reject its traditional nationalist significance and reinscribe it as an abjected space. This abject space renders the Canal "in-between" and "ambiguous"—no longer clearly identifiable with Kavanagh's romantic vision.

Martin McDonagh performs a similar move with the Aran Islands. The Aran Islands, and the West of Ireland in general, were constructed by cultural nationalists as a wellspring of undiluted Irish identity. Yeats famously told J.M. Synge to "Give up Paris" and "Go to the Aran Islands" (qtd. in Grene, "Ireland" 299). Nicholas Grene points out that "urban writers rejecting metropolitan life" saw Aran as a place to "re[new] themselves 'Antaeus-like' by contact with the soil" and "by escape into the otherness of the West" (299). Given this sacred status of the West within cultural nationalism, the dead mothers, battered skeletons, and dismembered corpses that decorate the stages of McDonagh's plays deconstruct romantic nationalist visions of the "West" by associating it with abject images. In *Lieutenant of*

Inishmore's final acts, the stage is scattered with body parts either dismembered or in the act of being dismembered; if Aran is the source of a purely Irish identity, it thus does not seem like that identity is at all desirable—by that logic, the Irish are inherent psychopaths. This appropriation of sacred cows which are then moved into the realm of the abject is nothing new for Irish literature, however. Certainly J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey did the same thing in their plays. Synge's famous *Playboy of the Western World* also associates the West of Ireland—then being constructed as an ideal by Anglo-Irish nationalists like Yeats—with radical violence. The burning of Christy's leg onstage was a violent act directed at the simplistic and essentializing rhetoric of cultural nationalists attempting to construct a particular and narrow vision of Irish national identity.

One thing that differentiates these contemporary authors from their predecessors is the source from which they draw their horrific material: mid-twentieth century horror films. So where, one could ask, does the horror genre show up in these works, if it is more than a case of just using horrific images? The first answer to this question would be that the films show up in the texts—in allusions, in direct references, and in the characters who watch such films. The second answer would be that these authors are not above stealing horror film plots. And the third would be that the genre influences these authors in other, more powerful and more subtle ways, as these contemporary novels and plays turn on the same questions of identity, monstrosity, and community cohesion that motivate the horror genre. The rest of this chapter will expand on the first two answers and attempt to set the groundwork for the later chapters' in-depth consideration of the last.



If we buried the works of McCabe and McDonagh in a time capsule for one hundred years, our descendants would likely deduce that Alfred Hitchcock's seminal horror film *Psycho* was something every work of Irish literature needed to reference. Certainly its presentation of the Oedipal, sexually confused serial killer has been a massive influence on the development of the slasher subgenre. Furthermore, these authors, especially McCabe, seem unable to escape the film. In McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, following a scene in which Maureen threatens her mother, the lights come up on that mother slowly rocking in her chair; she then slumps forward, to reveal a large hole in her head. The revelation of a woman—whom the audience did not yet know to be a corpse—dead, in a rocking chair, recalls an audience's memories of *Psycho*.¹¹ McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* takes this scene further. Though Francie's father Benny dies after Francie returns home from the institution, readers are not aware of this for some time as Francie continues to talk to and care for the corpse. Attentive readers might notice that Francie is also buying a lot of fly paper and become suspicious. This devoted care for the decaying corpse of a parent is another clear allusion to *Psycho*, and one that McCabe apparently intended. In his interview with Pat Collins, he noted that *The Butcher Boy* has "a sense of Hitchcock's style," and McCabe produced a short television drama for RTE called *A Mother's Love's A Blessing*, which Collins calls "a hilarious parody of *Psycho*." In *Emerald*

¹¹ Of course, in *Psycho*, Norman Bates keeps his mother's corpse around long after her death and has extended conversations with her. She usually resides in a rocking chair. One of the key twists in Hitchcock's film is the revelation that the woman is a mummified corpse, as seen in the image above; viewers had assumed Norman was really speaking to his mother. Strangely, Nicholas Grene locates *Beauty Queen's* source for this image in Beckett's 1981 *Rockaby* ("Ireland" 301); as *Psycho* came much before that, is almost universally known, and as McDonagh claims little familiarity with Irish drama (though certainly that claim is suspect), it seems much more likely that *Psycho* is the source. And even if not, Beckett surely took it from *Psycho*.

Germes of Ireland, McCabe offers the same situation—Pat McNab kills his mother, but then cares for and talks to her rotting corpse for some time. Perhaps McCabe’s most obvious reference to *Psycho* is in *Breakfast on Pluto* in which an apparently authorial foreword suggests that McCabe’s “hero(ine)” Patrick Pussy Braden might become “a silly old Norman Bates of history” (xi).

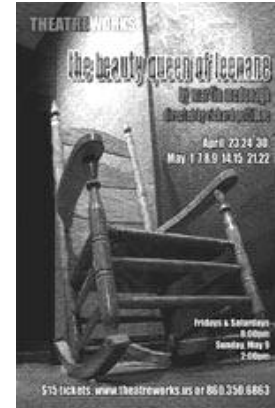
One service that all these references perform is to signal for readers the generic constructs within which the author is operating—in short, to encourage the reader to consider these texts as examples of a contemporary literature that may operate within the tradition of the horror genre. Indeed, the invocation of these films often serves to destabilize the audience, to force the reader or viewer to acknowledge that he or she is no longer in the realm of drama or simple comedy—that some other generic conventions are at work. Certainly McDonagh’s use of *Psycho* in *Beauty Queen of Leenane* serves this function. After all, *Psycho* offers one further parallel with *Beauty Queen*—half of Hitchcock’s film seems to be a drama/ adventure tale, as Marion steals her boss’s money and heads out on the run. The audience’s interest and expectations are settled on Marion as our central character; audience expectations meet a grisly end during the infamous shower scene, when *Psycho* reveals itself as something entirely different from the drama/ adventure audiences were led to expect. As Greenberg states in *Movies on Your Mind*, “With Leigh [Janet Leigh, who played Marion Crane] gone, the comfortable conventions of the Hollywood suspense vehicle have been totally violated” (qtd. in Clover 203). When Marion Crane’s blood begins swirling down the drain, we know we’re in another genre. And when Mag Folan tips forward, dead, from her

slowly rocking chair, this allusion to *Psycho* alerts McDonagh's audience that he has played a similar trick—the genre has changed.¹²

References to horror films abound in these works.

McCabe's works are especially prone to dropping the names of particular horror films, and to creating explicit parallels between his work and those films. *Call Me the Breeze* features Joey Tallon attempting to teach a class on David Cronenberg's *Shivers*—a film about “parasites who infect the victim with venereal disease and make them go rabid for sex”—because though “the movie you have just been watching seems, on the surface, to be a very simple story,” Joey would like to suggest (alongside “a lot of the critics”) that it “operates on a much deeper level than we think” (274). Though Joey never gets to articulate his interpretation of *Shivers* (his lecture is interrupted by a furious Mrs. Carmody), this moment shows both McCabe's interest in horror films and his interest in their status as something beyond titillating entertainment. Francie Brady watches an unnamed alien film in Dublin (one that seems quite similar to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) as well as the TV show *The Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, which features the attack of a monster octopus and its defeat. Malachy Dudgeon, in *The Dead School*, compares his mother's comatose status to a zombie, saying “Ladies and Gentlemen! *Night of the Living Dead*” (264).

McCabe's collection of short stories, *Mondo Desperado*, is itself a meditation of sorts on a subgenre of horror, the mondo film, which generally masquerades as a documentary showing “real” murders and sexual acts, and thus provides a marginally more accepted



¹² Note the TheatreWorks production poster for *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, which assumes that a rocking chair, with all its *Psycho* connotations, is sufficiently ominous to symbolize the play.

version of the “snuff film.” The collection thus showcases the creation and viewing of several films, one called *The Secrets of Louis Lestrangé: Can You Survive the 1,137 Whacks?* and others, various exploitative slashers watched by Eustace de Vere-Bingham which focus on “slavering, dungaree-clad defectives and social misfits who derived particular pleasure from the application of crude workshop tools and other implements to assorted parts of the female anatomy” (207-8). In *Carn*, McCabe has customers at the local bar watching a similarly exploitative slasher film: “On the video screen above them, the crazed adolescent in the asbestos suit dragged the body of a screaming young girl into a freezer as the soundtrack blared” (230). This same film appears on the bar’s screen *twice* during the novel. McCabe, then, has not yet written a novel that fails to reference or include a horror film.

It should be clear, then, that these works make countless allusions to horror films. Some of these allusions draw parallels between the contemporary work and horrific predecessors, as does McDonagh’s use of *Psycho* in *Beauty Queen* and McCabe’s in *Breakfast on Pluto*. Other allusions —like to Cronenberg’s *Shivers* in *Call Me the Breeze*— indicate that horror entertainment is something worth studying and analyzing, that something important might lie beneath their gory, exploitative surfaces. These numerous allusions and references suggest that these authors’ uses of these films are important to their overall projects—indeed that horror film could be understood as one key aspect of their work.

For these authors do not just use horrific images, or even incorporate references to historic horror films; they also steal horror film plots. Martin McDonagh is particularly prone to the theft of horror plots. *Beauty Queen of Leenane* could be read as a rewriting of *Psycho* from a female perspective, as both works present sexual repression as the motive for murder. McDonagh’s use of historic horror films goes far beyond this, however, as most of his plays

take a horror film, or a whole horror genre, as their foundation. One notable example is in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* in which Bobby claims to have seen a film that could only be Tod Browning's masterpiece *Freaks*: "I did see a film there one time with a fella who not only



had he no arms and no legs but he was a coloured fella too" (36),¹³ though Bobby is supposedly living on the very isolated Aran islands in 1934 and this film was widely banned on its release in America in 1932. Bobby could not have accessed this film. This odd reference really seems placed to alert viewers to extensive thematic parallels between *Freaks* and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*: in both films, the plot revolves around the quest of a physically impaired man—with whom the audience is encouraged to identify—for the love of a "normal" girl. Describing *Freaks*, Ian Butler writes: "It is the ordinary, the apparently normal, the beautiful which horrify—the monstrous and distorted which compel our respect, our sympathy, ultimately our affection. The visible beauty conceals the unseen evil, the visible horror is the real goodness" (qtd. in Hawkins 152). Certainly this is equally true of *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, in which our sympathies settle on Cripple Billy against the cruelty of murderous parents and heartless young girls. *The Lonesome West* has extensive parallels with *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, a classic horror film similarly concerned with sibling rivalry that also uses the murder of a cherished pet (a parakeet in the case of the film). Lastly, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* follows all the plot requirements of a slasher film,

¹³ His reference is to Prince Radian, aka "the Human Torso," who is featured in Browning's film. See illustration.

especially the pairing of the morally conservative serial killer Padraic with the boyish central female character Mairead. Mairead's eventual murder of Padraic using his own weapons is just what any fan of slasher fare expects. Most Martin McDonagh plays are thus based on a classic horror film, with only *A Skull in Connemara* and *The Pillowman* resisting such classification. And certainly both those plays still rely heavily on the genre, as *Skull* invokes the grave robbing scenes of many a mad-scientist movie and *The Pillowman*'s periodic scenes of torture bear marked similarities to the slasher film's episodic depiction of serial murder.¹⁴

Patrick McCabe also steals horror genre plots. If the basic horror plot involves the establishment of a community, the appearance of a categorically contaminated threat to that community, and the attempt to kill that deviant monster, *The Butcher Boy* certainly follows this plot—as do most McCabe novels. In his works, the central character idealizes some moment in the past, when his or her family was whole and functional and the world made sense. This idealized moment is somehow threatened, and the main character finds someone to blame for this loss. The plot then focuses on his or her quest to eliminate that threat. This creation of a monstrous scapegoat whom the central character then attempts to kill is one of McCabe's key borrowings from the horror genre. For example, in *The Butcher Boy*, the narrator Francie Brady starts out as poor, with a dysfunctional family, but he has a mother and father and a close friend, Joe. When the Nugent family comes to town, things start to fall apart for Francie. Mrs. Nugent calls the Brady family a bunch of pigs, and the emotionally

¹⁴ One source that *A Skull in Connemara* does seem to use is the life and crimes of Ed Gein, a notorious murderer and grave robber from Wisconsin and the source of the novel *Psycho*. Gein was primarily a grave robber; deprived of any natural relationships with women, he would dig them up and take them (or at least parts of them) home with him. The reference to Martin using corpses to “to have a good look” at female genitalia, as well as the graverobbing and references to cannibalism, point an alert reader toward Gein (116). The play also makes reference to the film *Se7en* in the mysterious death of “The fattest bastard you’ve ever seen in your life. Tits like this. Sitting, no clothes, in his armchair” (120). Furthermore, *The Pillowman*'s focus on a series of child murders recalls *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

troubled Mrs. Brady takes this to heart, eventually committing suicide. Francie becomes increasingly violent and hallucinatory. Eventually, Francie's behavior strains his friendship with Joe, and Joe finds a new best friend in Mrs. Nugent's son, Philip. As Francie progresses toward total isolation, without friends or family, he blames this state on Mrs. Nugent, as he complains to Joe's father: "It was fine until Mrs Nugent started interfering and causing trouble" (177). He murders her, and throws her parts into the brock heap at the butchery. Francie has thus made Mrs. Nugent into his scapegoat and his own personal monster.

McCabe does not apply this structure arbitrarily, however; Francie himself creates this structure. The influence of horror entertainment on Francie is generally overlooked by critics; however, Francie watches both an alien invasion film at the cinema and a horror-based TV show at the Nugents, each of which provides him with a way to understand his world. Namely, Francie learns what monsters are and how you deal with them. The alien film in Dublin teaches him that some people, though they appear human, are actually aliens, a lesson that he applies to Mrs Nugent. *The Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* reminds Francie that the proper way to deal with monsters is to "shut [them] up," or kill them (62). Francie internalizes these messages—that Nugent might be an alien, and that monsters should be killed—such that he kills Nugent, and when the police come to take him away, he whistles: "I don't know what I was whistling I think it was the tune from Voyage to the Bottom of The Sea" (214). Horror films provided Francie with a way to understand his situation. The revelation that Nugent might be an alien structures his response to her and his eventual murder of her in particular ways—ways laid out for him by horror films.

Francie thus turns *The Butcher Boy* into a horror film by labeling Mrs. Nugent as a monster that must be killed. Readers should also recognize, however, that McCabe has stolen

from that most hallowed of horror genre stories, *Frankenstein*. *The Butcher Boy* demonstrates extensive parallels with Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and with its many filmic adaptations. An intertextual reading of these two works allows readers to consider the nature of monstrosity, and to consider who (if anyone) is the real monster in McCabe's text. In Mary Shelley's novel, Dr. Frankenstein wishes to create life, so he pieces a man together from various body parts and succeeds in animating his patchwork corpse. Once he does so, however, the hideousness of the creature shocks him, and he abandons it, believing that he has created a monster. Of course, this abandonment makes an initially benevolent and hopeful being into a monster. The creature initially seeks an identity, friendship, and fellowship; only when these prove impossible, and when his creator Dr. Frankenstein continues to reject him, does he turn to violence. This monster is created by a hostile environment in which all people assume the creature to be an evil monster, and by the man who should have been his mother and his father, the good doctor Frankenstein, who cannot find it in himself to love his hideous progeny. We come from the novel with the idea that the creator of a monster bears at least as much blame as the monster itself.

The lessons of *The Butcher Boy* prove quite similar. The central character of both could be defined as a monster, at least by his acts. Both are murderers. Readers are given the opportunity to see the world from the point of view of these monsters, however; the creature narrates portions of *Frankenstein*, and all of *The Butcher Boy* comes through Francie's first person narration. The reader's position alongside these monsters encourages understanding and sympathy; as Dr. Frankenstein's creature is abandoned and reviled, Francie is similarly abandoned by all those forces that should support and shelter him. His family provides no haven; his mother is disturbed and suicidal, and his father is an alcoholic. Religion fails to

help him; instead, a priest molests him. State institutions admit and release Francie without providing any lasting benefit. The community in Francie's town offers no support; the women of the town enjoy gossiping much more than providing counseling. And, finally, Francie's one friend abandons him. By the end of the book, Francie is completely and totally alone. It thus becomes very difficult to blame him completely. If Victor Frankenstein creates his own monster, his doppelganger, it is the failures of Irish community and institutions that create the murderous Francie Brady. As Jennifer Jeffers puts it, if Francie's narrative is "senseless," it really "reveals the lack of sense of the societal and cultural institutions" (157). Indeed, James M. Smith suggests that the novel, through its depiction of the failure of Irish institutions like the industrial school, asylum, and prison, "exposes Irish society's deployment of an architecture of containment to police and maintain the nation's nativist imaginary" (123). Readers must ask themselves a question: to what degree is Francie a monster, and to what degree a neglected little boy who deserved better from society and its institutions? The key issues of *Frankenstein* and *The Butcher Boy* are thus the same: what is the nature of monstrosity; can monstrosity be created; and how responsible are those people abandoned by all the supports of society for their subsequent crimes?

Readers are encouraged to make the connection with *Frankenstein* through several subtle parallels. Francie's name, first of all, suggests Frankenstein; though Frankenstein is technically the name of the doctor, popular film has long attributed this name to the monster. Both texts focus on questions of monstrosity and criminal responsibility. Both texts also incorporate voyeurism and jealousy; both feature the monster observing a happy family, desperately desiring what they have, and imagining belonging to a family that is not actually his own. For Shelley, this is the De Lacys; for McCabe, it is the Nugents. In Shelley's text,

the creature wanders in the woods for some time before discovering the De Lacys; impressed by their love and friendship, the creature observes them, hoping to be accepted by their group. He says:

The more I saw of them, the greater became my desire to claim their protection and kindness; my heart yearned to be known and loved by these amiable creatures; to see their sweet looks directed toward me with affection was the utmost limit of my ambition. (127)

The creature expresses his longing to belong to this loving family, his own true family being limited to one proud and unkind doctor. Discussing Francie, Tim Gauthier notes that he “becomes the outsider who can only peer through the windows at a world that will never let him in” —Francie examines the Nugents just as Frankenstein’s creature did the De Lacys, noting all of their possessions and their happiness, desperately wishing to be integrated into their home. Francie’s hatred for the Nugents is underwritten by his desire to be one of them. As his own home life is so terrible, Francie longs for love and stability; this longing, however, makes him feel disloyal to his mother, and he thus turns his jealousy into hatred and rage. He observes the Nugents and their home:

It warm and glowing . . . It was as if just by being the Nugents it all came together as if by magic not a thing out of place. I shinned up the drainpipe . . . Philip was sleeping in his mother’s bed . . . She was sleeping soundly her chest rising and falling as if to say there’s no trouble at all in my dreams I have my son beside me and my dear husband will be home tomorrow. Philip’s mouth was a small whistling o. If there was a word bubble coming out of his mouth I knew what would be written in it. I love my mother more than anything in the world and I’d never do anything in the world to hurt her. I love my parents and I love my happy home. (47)

Francie thus longs for the happiness and success of the Nugent family. Jordan’s film also features numerous shots of Francie looking through the Nugents’ windows, into their living room, watching the Nugent parents and their son. Considering *The Butcher Boy* in light of

Frankenstein underscores McCabe's key themes.¹⁵ Both texts require sympathy and understanding for "monsters," revealing the role of abandonment, jealousy, and longing in creating people who act outside of accepted morality. They thus suggest that responsibility for such people and their crimes is not absolutely clear; monsters are created, not born, and a hostile environment bears much of the blame.

It may be becoming clearer why these authors choose to incorporate the horror genre. The monsters of classic and contemporary horror film provide one paradigm through which to consider the possibilities for society's outcasts—those groups who get inscribed as its monsters—whether the deformed Cripple Billy in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* or the sexually ambiguous Pussy Braden in *Breakfast on Pluto*. Characters in these works are constantly placed within a horror film context, as Maureen in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* becomes Norman Bates and Francie becomes Frankenstein's monster. Almost always, however, these contexts are invoked around characters for whom the reader or viewer already cares deeply. If people generally react to monstrosity with disgust and revulsion, these authors are interested in complicating that reaction by forcing the reading or viewing audience into sympathy with their "monsters." In some ways, this is a re-education process. And most of these "monsters" are people who do not fit within traditional definitions of a nationalist, Catholic, rural Irishness, or people who show the ultimate failure of that paradigm to produce well-adjusted, happy citizens. If the horrific images of these texts often destabilize romantic, nationalist images and histories, the monstrous characters act very similarly, as the authors require sympathy and understanding for characters who destabilize traditional ideals of Irish

¹⁵ Given this emphasis on Francie as Frankenstein, it is particularly interesting that Dracula also crops up in the text. David Skal argues that Dracula and Frankenstein have provided the two poles of horror in our century: "Taken together, the monsters constitute an overwhelming gestalt, representing the intuitive right brain and the logical left, shadow and substance, superstition and science—the oddest of odd couples" (81). Francie, thus, recognizes Dr. Roche as his enemy, saying "Who the fuck did he think he was—Count Dracula" (147)?.

national character. Horror—in some ways one of the most mythological and archetypal of genres—is used in the service of a demythologizing project.

The Gothic Nation

Horror, as a genre concerned with definitions of the nation and citizenship, has a long history. Robert Miles, in “Abjection, Nationalism, and the Gothic,” argues that the gothic emerges alongside nationalism as one way to express the nation’s boundaries—monsters are what the nation is *not*. He suggests then that the gothic monsters of Britain’s eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are often associated with the Catholic religion or French heritage. Luke Gibbons’s *Gaelic Gothic* argues that this hostility toward Catholicism often merged with specific hostility toward the Irish in the English Gothic, as the Irish become associated with monstrous degeneracy, contagion, and disease. The Gothic thus provides a way to organize national identity—that which must be expelled, which cannot be admitted, is made into a monster and killed off. As Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith put it in their introduction to *Modern Gothic*, authors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used the Gothic as a way to approach “the social, economic, and political instabilities of a new order, and the mayhem of a revolutionary period” (5). According to Judith Halberstam, the Gothic novel thus “produces an easy answer to the question of what threatens national security and prosperity”—namely, “the monster” (3). As King says, “when we discuss monstrosity, we are expressing our faith and belief in the norm and watching for the mutant” (39). Gothic monstrosity becomes a sort of national scapegoat. Thus, Halberstam argues that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* “condenses the xenophobia of Gothic fiction into a very specific horror—the vampire embodies and exhibits all the stereotyping of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism” (14). She goes on to suggest:

If the nation, therefore, is a textual production which creates national community in terms of an inside and an outside and then makes those categories indispensable, Gothic becomes one place to look for a fiction of the foreign, a narrative of who and what is not-English and not-native. The racism that becomes a mark of nineteenth-century Gothic arises out of the attempt within horror fiction to give form to what terrifies the national community. Gothic monsters are defined both as other than the imagined community and as the being that cannot be imagined as community. (15)

There are several things to notice here. First, we have discussed the abject—something that falls between or outside of conceptual categories, that which “cannot be imagined as community”—as the source of the emotion of horror. What should be apparent at this point is that various cultures’ perception of the abject, or the particular ways they will conceptualize the abject, will differ. As Halberstam puts it, “Monstrosity (and the fear it gives rise to) is historically conditioned rather than a psychological universal” (6). Rather, while fear and the emotion of horror are psychologically universal, the particular form of any given monster is not—it is, instead, dependent on political and cultural conditions. David Skal, in his book *The Monster Show*, takes this proposition as his starting point for an analysis of the twentieth century’s favorite monsters. If, as Halberstam suggests, Dracula is a personification of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism, then Skal shows that films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* conceptualize Communists as alien monsters: monsters that can then be killed off. The monster baby films of the 1970s provide a way to cope with the deformed children that resulted from women’s use of thalidomide to cure morning sickness. Freddy Krueger, the child killer, emerges in the 1980s alongside growing public awareness of child abuse, and a slew of scandals involving child care workers. All this is to say that the horror genre, as a rule, is deeply embroiled in a nation’s political, cultural, and economic concerns, and it provides one way in which people can imagine themselves to be a nation—by locating those things that are *not* British, American, or Irish in a monstrous form that the film or novel can

kill off. Halberstam goes so far as to suggest that “Gothic actually participates in the production of something like a psychology of self” (8). Despite the monster’s abject beginnings, the gothic and horror genre often function as a tool with which to prop up identity—precisely because the genre kills off whatever abject monster threatens a secure national character.

To call such a genre a “tool,” however, is to highlight that it could be used by different people toward different goals. As Luke Gibbons points out, discussing Irish Catholic constructions of a monstrous Protestant ascendancy, “the Gothic as a literary and cultural form could be turned, through acts of semiotic and narrative appropriation, against itself, thereby becoming a weapon of the weak” (15). Who or what is monstrous is indeed in the eye of the beholder. One nation’s monster may be another’s citizen. This possibility of horror offering a counter narrative—of turning horror against just those constructions of nationality that leave some people decidedly out—is one on which these contemporary authors certainly capitalize.

Previous critics have noted that “monsters” seem to play a role in these works. In “Who is Francie Pig? Self-Identity and Narrative Reliability in *The Butcher Boy*,” John Scaggs argues that McCabe’s work “reveals a basic similarity, in both structure and content, to the gothic novel” (52); however, his analysis primarily focuses on organizational similarities and he does not consider the possible relevance of monstrosity and horror film in this context. Tim Gauthier recognizes that Francie is “that by which they [the community] define themselves,” but again never considers the relevance of horror film or monstrosity in particular within the book. Nicholas Grene has called Mag in *Beauty Queen of Leenane* a “monster,” but he does not expand on what that might mean (“Black Pastoral”). There seems

to be a general acknowledgement that something about the gothic and about monstrosity is at work in these texts, but very little specific analysis of how, exactly, the gothic and the monstrous operate for these authors.

That analysis, then, is this project's goal. I feel that the extent of the references—the horrific images, allusions, and stolen plots—to horror films in these works begs critics to consider what, exactly, is at stake for these authors in their use of the genre. I will then read these works as gothic texts: as examples of literature overtly concerned with monstrosity and national identity. I will also try to answer the key questions raised by these authors' uses of the genre. First of all, any consideration of horror entertainment will need to notice at whom violence is directed, and why. Second, such an analysis should pay attention to the construction of monstrosity and of heroism—what kinds of identities are winners and losers in these narratives? Lastly, given the genre's emphasis on violence and monstrosity, it seems necessary to consider where the genre leads us—whether horror could offer a new way to think of individual and national identities. If, as Synge suggested, before art can be human it must be brutal, then horror might offer one way forward.

CHAPTER THREE

KILLING OFF THE NATION

“One place the [American] dream is permitted to perish, with noisy, convulsive death rattles, is in horror entertainment. The American nightmare, as refracted in film and fiction, is about disenfranchisement, exclusion, downward mobility, a struggle-to-the-death world of winners and losers. Familiar, civic-minded signposts are all reversed; the family is a sick joke, its house more likely to offer siege instead of shelter.”

*David Skal, The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*¹⁶

“The chronic unemployment, the Granard tragedy, the Kerry babies controversy, the demoralization in the aftermath of the abortion and divorce referenda, the growth of a new underclass, the reappearance of full-scale emigration, the new censorship mentality and, not least, the moving statues, constituted a return of the repressed for those intent on bringing Ireland into the modern world. If a Rip Van Winkle fell asleep in the 1950s and woke up in 1988, he could be forgiven for thinking that nothing had changed in between.” Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*¹⁷

In 1974, Tobe Hooper’s masterpiece *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was released. The film is unrelentingly brutal and violent, and it produced varied reactions. One critic labeled the film a “vile little piece of sick crap . . . unrelenting sadistic violence as extreme and hideous as a complete lack of imagination can possibly make it,” while another touted it as “the *Gone with the Wind* of meat movies” (qtd. in Clover 22).¹⁸ Scott Aaron Stine calls it “a damn near perfect film” (229). Certainly it produces a challenge for interpretation, as do most horror films; it may be hard to accept that something so brutal could have any

¹⁶ Page 354.

¹⁷ Page 83.

¹⁸ The first is from Stephen Koch’s 1976 *Harper’s* review, “Fashions in Pornography,” and the second from Lew Brighton’s 1975 essay “Saturn in Retrograde” from *The Film Journal*.

meaningful political or cultural commentary hiding behind all the blood and gore. Some viewers may approach it as a sadistic piece of filmmaking which lingers for eighty-three loving minutes on the torture and murder of four people—and if this is all the film is, it might well be a “vile little piece of sick crap.” Others may identify with Sally, thereby getting their masochistic kicks.¹⁹ But finally, the film asks to be interpreted as a piece of American cinema produced at a particular moment in history—as do most horror films, and most works within the horror genre.

The film opens with a claim to documentary status: “The film which you are about to see is an account of the tragedy which befell a group of five youths . . .,” insisting, first of all, on a *mondo*-esque representation of real events.²⁰ It moves on to introduce us to a group of five young people, including Sally and Franklin Hardesty, who travel to Texas to check on the Hardesty family plot, as someone has been vandalizing the graves in the local cemetery and stealing corpses. They discover that their grandfather’s grave is untouched and then decide to take a look at the old homestead, which is unfortunately located next door to the Sawyers’ house, and the Sawyers are as sick and twisted a family as horror film has produced to date. Though they used to work at the local slaughterhouse, their jobs have been eliminated by mechanization, so they learn to get by by doing the only thing they know: slaughtering. Of course, the object of slaughter has changed from cows to humans, and the Sawyers have become quite insane. They decorate their house with human bones and dismembered bodies, eat human flesh, and even sell that flesh to the public as strangely

¹⁹ See Clover’s chapter “Her Body, Himself” for her analysis of the male viewer’s primarily *masochistic* stake in the final girl sequence of the slasher genre. The female viewer’s stake in horror entertainment has not yet been explained adequately. For more on this, see Brigid Cherry, “Refusing to Refuse to Look: Female Viewers of the Horror Film.”

²⁰ This spawned a widely-believed urban legend that the film represented an actual series of murders—a belief that you will still occasionally run into. The film is fictitious, though loosely based on the exploits of serial killer and grave robber Ed Gein from Plainfield, Wisconsin. See Schechter’s *Deviant* for more on Gein.

delicious barbeque. The Sawyers kill four of the teenagers with little ado until they get to Sally, whose tortures merit over a third of the film, making her “final girl” sequence one of the most protracted in horror movies to date.

If you attempt to consider the film as a reflection of 1974 America, the film reveals a preoccupation with the human casualties of an increasingly mechanized agricultural sphere. Certainly the film is gory, and disturbing, but it also has something to say about the state of the nation in 1974, and it gets that message across partially through the brutal violence of the film. The Sawyers were, once, employed by the meatpacking industry, but those jobs are gone and their entire town seems to be a desolate, economically depressed wasteland. Meat processing is the only career they have been trained for; while the substitution of human flesh for beef is certainly disturbing, one could argue that the Sawyers only embark down the path of serial murder after the closure of other economic options. The subsequent murder of four young people—who seem well-heeled and who are ultimately only tourists in this rural area, from which their family escaped a generation ago—can thus be read as the revenge of America’s economically depressed rural heartland on the city folk and industrialists who ravished (or massacred, perhaps?) their way of life.²¹ The repressed of the American dream, those left behind, rise up, armed with chainsaws, ready for the slaughter; the end result is that everyone is meat and ripe for processing in a world in which productive efficiency overrides

²¹ In chapter 3, “Getting Even,” Clover elucidates this logic within the rape-revenge subgenre of horror, which she notes has affinities with rural slashers like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in their depiction of the rural murderer and the urban murderess. She argues that such films are actually thinly disguised westerns, in which we could read a the rural murderer as a stand in for the American Indian of the Western, and the urban murderess as the colonizing cowboy, but this parallel is obscured by the general practice of making the urban representative *female*. This feint—in which audiences sympathize with the female (exploitative) urbanite due to her apparent helplessness in the face of rural (exploited) insanity—allows audiences to applaud her victory over the savage wilderness instead of recognizing these films’ problematic cultural and economic bias in favor of the countryside’s exploitation. Such films then often contain an ethnic element, in which the rural becomes associated with degeneracy, inbreeding, and murderous lust, while the urban is progressive and politically savvy.

the ability of rural America to support itself. The Sawyers eat others because they have been eaten, socially and politically, by American policies that cannibalize rural industries in favor of economic goals. In Skal's terms, the narrative of the American dream in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* becomes a tale of "disenfranchisement, exclusion, downward mobility, a struggle-to-the-death world of winners and losers" (354). And it is not entirely clear who, exactly, the winners and losers are in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. While most slashers dispatch the villain by the end of the film, thereby endorsing the final girl and all she represents as the victors, Leatherface remains alive to saw again in various sequels, furiously waving his chainsaw overhead as Sally speeds away—and Sally, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* informs us, subsequently goes insane. Horror, then, in this case, offers a critique of the nation's idea of itself, undermining the myth that those who work hard will succeed and prosper through the presentation of a rural wasteland in which the only opportunity available is cannibalism—either economic cannibalism, in which the people and jobs of the rural heartland are fed to the interests of economic liberalism, or actual cannibalism, in which the disadvantaged rise up to eat their oppressors.

How does all this relate to contemporary Irish literature? In Luke Gibbons's series of essays *Transformations in Irish Culture*, he argues that the Ireland of the 1980s was a grave disappointment for progressives and liberals, as nothing seemed to have changed from 1950 to 1988: the country was still economically depressed and tied to socially conservative positions on women's rights, reproductive rights, and divorce legislation. Scandals like the Granard tragedy—in which a fifteen year old girl and her baby died when she attempted to give birth secretly—and the Kerry babies controversy—in which several babies abandoned by their mothers subsequently died, seemed to reveal a state whose rhetoric did not match

conditions on the ground. It didn't seem, in Granard and Kerry, that anything was changing—the Ireland of the 1950s was still at large, stalking the efforts of the 1980's state to “modernize.” Indeed, when Gibbons calls this temporal displacement of 1950's Ireland into the 1980's the “return of the repressed,” he represents the mid-century state—which was founded upon a particular vision of the Irish nation, as we'll discuss below—as a sort of monster, a ravening beast that refuses to die. Indeed, many critical discussions of horror describe the genre as the means by which a culture's repressed returns; our monsters are that which the society cannot acknowledge or accept, the identities that a particular construction of national identity has rendered abject. For later-twentieth century Ireland, the monster is the mid-century state, which, as Gibbons points out, changed little between independence and 1988, headed by Eamon de Valera, founded on the conservative social, cultural, and religious values articulated by the 1937 constitution. And for liberal and progressive thinkers in later-twentieth century Ireland, that monster needs to die. The concerns for these writers are thus quite similar to those demonstrated in Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*: the idealized self-presentation of the state (whether related to the “American dream” of economic success or conservative, Gaelic Romantic values) is undermined, or more specifically, killed off.

However, pinpointing the essential qualities of a nation, qualities spanning several decades, is a bit of a messy goal and could be a fool's errand. What, exactly, constitutes this “monstrous repressed” of a mid-century Irish state? In order to add some structure to these proceedings, I will use the political figure Eamon de Valera and the constitution that emerged under his direction in 1937 as two foundational supports for our understanding of how the state sponsored a particular articulation of the Irish nation and its people: namely, a Gaelic Romantic articulation. De Valera was either Taoiseach or President for the thirty-six years

between 1937 and 1973, and is generally credited as the mastermind behind the 1937 constitution, and, indeed, most of the state's developments in this period. Though a constitution is certainly an aspirational document, those aspirations have real consequences in the state's institutions and its legislation—it thus provides a framework within which a nation is encouraged to develop. Locating the state and its vision of the nation in this way has liabilities as well as assets. It reduces the complexity of the state and the nation in order to make it concrete and approachable. Certainly, Ireland depended very much on the Catholic church prior to 1937; censorship was already law when de Valera came to power in 1932. Also, in using de Valera and the constitution in order to locate a “monstrous repressed,” we will not only simplify an issue that is actually much more complex, but we will also necessarily elide ways in which de Valera and the mid-century state worked to create a functional and ideologically consistent basis for nationhood—efforts for which many still consider de Valera a saint. I think, however, that the specificity lost in using this approach is more than outweighed by its convenience in allowing us to approach an otherwise necessarily overwhelming topic.

In this chapter, I am interested in how contemporary Irish authors destabilize the pillars of national identity constructed in the 1937 constitution, and how they thereby deconstruct the mid-century ideal of Irish national identity. Authors like McDonagh and McCabe, whose works often operate as horrific texts, deconstruct this narrative of identity not only by attacking the state's idealizations of the Irish family, the church, and revolutionary nationalism, but also by personifying Gaelic Romantic values in particular characters—characters who are then killed off, in good horror film style. This chapter will, then, provide an overview of the constitution's articulation of an idealized Irish family,

Catholic Church, and revolutionary nationalism; consider how contemporary authors undermine that articulation; and then argue that these texts often locate Gaelic Romantic values in particular characters who are ripe for the killing. However, while these authors seem cognizant that the monster of mid-century Irishness needs to go, they also reveal a significant amount of nostalgia for the (perhaps necessary) passing of what they suggest was, however repressive or false, a coherent articulation of a national character.

I do not mean to fall into the justly criticized trap of reading all Irish texts as national allegories, à la Fredric Jameson's essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," which argues that all third world literatures are, necessarily, national allegories. Certainly, an Irish novel could include a housewife who is not a direct commentary on the state's configuration of Irish womanhood. Not every contemporary Irish text out there has a stake in killing off a ghostly mid century Irish state-sponsored nation. Many of them do, however; as Salman Rushdie says, "we are all irradiated by history, we are radioactive with history and politics; we see that it can be as false to create a politics-free fictional universe as to create one in which nobody needs to work or eat or hate or love or sleep"—though not all texts are national allegories, it is hard to imagine a text that could be truly apolitical, and it is thus appropriate to look in literature for traces of political commentary (100). If a state configures woman's place as only a domestic one, then it may well be appropriate to consider whether a novel's housewife character seems content with her life—or whether she goes suicidally insane. And reading these texts, especially through their roots in horror film, thus asks us to consider their possibilities as cultural and political critiques—as brutal reflections of a monstrous state.

The Pillars of Nation: Scandal and Subversion

Discussing the construction of a Gaelic Romantic national ideology, Luke Gibbons points out that “It is often forgotten that what are now taken as traditional values—myths of community, the sanctity of the family, devotion to faith and fatherland—are not a residue from an old Gaelic order but are of quite recent vintage, dating in fact from what Emmet Larkin has called ‘the devotional revolution’ in post-Famine Ireland” (*Transformations* 85). Larkin locates the shift from other possible conceptions of the nation to a predominantly Gaelic Romantic paradigm in the period between 1850 and 1875, in which he argues that a combination of personal and cultural insecurity resulting from the Famine and an increase in Church income was largely responsible for the Roman Catholic Church’s preeminent power in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century.²² Ireland has not, from time immemorial, been a wellspring of Catholic conservative values. As Hanafin says, using the phrase “Gaelic Romantic” borrowed from J. Prager’s *Building Democracy in Ireland*, “The Gaelic Romantic tradition in Irish political discourse was but one strand of the anti-colonial movement” (13). During the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pride in a heroic Gaelic past collapses with pride in a Catholic destiny into a paradigm Prager labels “Gaelic Romantic.” Prager describes that construction in this way:

Ireland was to be celebrated as a preindustrial nation; its identity was to be found in its rural character. The sanctity of the family was to be preserved, the [Roman Catholic] Church was to remain a central social institution second only to the family, and the farm was to serve as the backbone of a healthy, thriving society. (qtd. in Hanafin 11)

²² See Larkin’s essay “The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-1875” for more on this.

Thus, the period following the Famine saw the consolidation, to a large degree, of a Gaelic Romantic model for Irish identity, and this is the model that would be quantified some time later in Ireland's 1937 constitution.

Eamon de Valera, Taoiseach of Ireland for sixteen of the twenty-two years between 1937 and 1959 and President from 1959 to 1973, undertook to change Ireland's 1922 constitution to "express the fundamental values of a Catholic nation" (qtd. in O'Mahony 153).²³ The 1937 constitution then claims to represent a fundamental core of Irishness, one that de Valera associates especially with the Catholic religion and with a certain set of (presumably Catholic) values. Though the constitution stops short of making Catholicism the state religion (a move that some more radical members of the government were pushing for), Article 44 does reserve a "special" place for the church, as it "recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the Citizens." The 1937 constitution thus constructs a socially and religiously conservative basis for Irish national identity, codified in a Constitution that (still) begins and ends with religious language: "In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity" and "Dochum Glóire Dé agus Onóra na hÉireann" ("To the glory of God and the Honor of Ireland").²⁴ De Valera asserted that the "vast majority of the people of this island would claim that the nation and the State ought to be coterminous" (qtd. in Coogan, *Ireland* 222).

²³ In fact, de Valera's Catholic faith seems rather close to bigotry, as he supported the decision of Mayo County Council to fire a Protestant head librarian because "a county that is 98% Catholic is entitled to a Catholic head librarian." Certainly, this reactionary act is based upon a colonial history in which Protestants were preferred for most jobs, and the early Republic was interested in reversing this policy of discrimination. De Valera's decision here, however, seems to have nothing to do with the Protestant librarian's qualifications or tenure. See Coogan's biography *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* for a critical view of de Valera's life and politics.

²⁴ All this is nothing compared to the first draft of that section of the constitution, which specified that "the true religion is that established by our Divine Lord Jesus Christ himself, which he committed to his Church to protect and propagate as the guardian and interpreter of true morality. It acknowledges, moreover, that the Church of Christ is the Catholic Church"; it goes on to note that the church is a "perfect society, having within itself full competence and sovereign authority, in respect of the spiritual good of man" (qtd. in Coogan, *Ireland* 220).

Many traces of this kind remain, despite the fact that the Fifth Amendment, signed in 1973, eliminated the Church's "special position." And, aside from the constitution, much legislation prior to the 1937 constitution also fosters the creation of a socially conservative populace, such as the 1925 prohibition on divorce; the 1926 establishment of a Committee on Evil Literature; and the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act.²⁵ Indeed, in the early years of the Irish Republic, the church assumed many responsibilities traditionally reserved for the state, especially in the realms of education and healthcare, and thus possessed significant governmental influence in state policy formation.

It scarcely seems surprising, then, that writers from the 1980's through now feel the need to critique the church as it operates in Ireland, especially as it operated prior to the Fifth Amendment in 1973. In fact, for every writer who speaks kindly of the church, there seem to be five ready to denounce it. As McCabe said, "About the most unradical thing you could do in Ireland is critique the church. It's fallen like the Eastern bloc" (qtd. in Freedman). Much of this anger most likely results from the scandals that seemed to proliferate during the 1990's (when most of the works we're looking at were written), chiefly revolving around clerical sex abuse, which severely undermined popular faith in the priesthood and the church. Father Brendan Smyth was arrested for abusing hundreds of children in various parishes between 1945 and 1990, but much of the scandal surrounding him related to his superiors' attitudes toward his pedophilic impulses: when an accusation arose, they would merely transfer him to another area, and in some cases his superiors in the Norbertine order did not even inform his new bishop of his predilections. Similar scandals arose around the figures of the priests Sean Fortune and Jim Grennan, and these charges ultimately forced the resignation of Irish bishop

²⁵ Of course, such legislative acts raise the question—if Ireland is really a thoroughly moral and Catholic country, why is such legislation necessary? The legislation then reveals a certain anxiety regarding the existence of the supposed real Irish character; it instead seems to aim to produce, by legislative force, a conservative nation.

Brendan Comiskey. Some argue that the nearly ten percent drop in Mass attendance in this period (roughly 1992 forward) is a direct result of people's loss of faith in their church ("Roman Catholic Church sex abuse scandal").

Many contemporary authors have commented on this growing fissure between the Catholic church and the people, generally by clearly indicting the church as a site of brutality and abuse. Perhaps the most famous example is John McGahern's *The Dark*, which depicts one priest making homosexual advances toward the protagonist. The book was banned in Ireland in 1965, and McGahern lost his job as a schoolteacher; this is surely a cautionary tale for any later writer interested in portraying the church in a less than positive light. In Patrick McCabe's works, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland is much more likely to molest you than to offer any guidance or comfort. *Carn* presents priests and nuns as abusive, as in the nuns at Josie's orphanage and at Pat Lacey's school. Pat even traces his masochistic desires back to an extensive battering received by a priest when he was a schoolboy. Francie, in *The Butcher Boy*, is sexually molested by a priest, Father Sullivan. Patrick Pussy Braden, the hero/ heroine of *Breakfast on Pluto*, is actually the product of an abusive priest, as his young and attractive mother was raped by the local priest when she filled in for his usual housekeeper.²⁶ Nine months later, she gives birth to, and abandons, her son Patrick. Martin McDonagh's attitudes toward the church are quite similar. In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Ray Dooley feels that it is worth mentioning that "Father Welsh seldom uses violence, same as most young priests. It's usually the older priests go punching you in the head" (13). When Mag later points out that "a priest in the news Wednesday had a babby with a Yank," Ray

²⁶ *The United Methodist Interpreter* cites Pamela Cooper-White, former director of the Center for Women and Religion at Berkeley, who argues that women make up over 95 percent of all clerical abuse cases, though much more attention is given to pedophilia in the clergy (Poling). McCabe, then, displays both of these types of abuse.

responds nonchalantly, saying “That’s no news at all. That’s everyday” (13). McDonagh presents the Catholic church as rife with physical abuse and with lack of chastity, but, interestingly, the only priest he presents onstage is of a different sort. Father Welsh, a central character in *The Lonesome West*, is presented as a kind and loving member of the Catholic church, but he scarcely offers a rosy future for the church in Ireland. When his attempts to provide guidance for his flock fail miserably, Father Welsh commits suicide. The church in these works, then, is at worst, abusive, and at best, powerless.

The 1937 constitution endows power similar to that accorded the Roman Catholic Church to the Irish family, and specifically a traditional nuclear family with the woman located within the home.²⁷ The family, indeed, provides the foundation for the state by producing moral children: “The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.” Part of the way that the family achieves its status as the state’s “moral institution” is through the regulation of the body of the woman: “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.” In this language, the fate of the Irish state rests upon the shoulders of the woman, and a woman specifically located within the home, *not* engaged in wage labor in the public sphere. The constitution thus attempts to legislate Irish women into being “angels in the house,” and it certainly suggests that a woman operating *outside* the home is somehow unnatural, or even traitorous as she deprives the State of the key support for the common good.

²⁷ See Chapter 3, “Of Manifestos and Mamafestas: Gender in(g) the New Ireland,” in Hanafin’s *Constituting Identity* for a much more in-depth analysis of the relationship between Irish legislation and women’s position vis-à-vis the state.

In his biography of de Valera, Coogan suggests that this attitude toward women resulted from de Valera's childhood: "although he invariably showed a studied courtesy to women, [he] never showed any disposition to improve their lot in society ... Perhaps the absence of a mother in his own formative years had something to do with his attitude" (qtd. in Hanafin 30). Certainly, this conservative articulation of Irish womanhood was not a given in 1937, for many women were active in both the revolutionary struggle and the civil war, including women like Constance Markievicz who took up a role as a soldier and, along with Michael Malin, secured St. Stephen's Green during Easter 1916. De Valera himself was the only IRB leader to refuse "point blank" to allow any of the women of Cumann na mBan to join his troops (Coogan, *Ireland* 55). And many women's groups later protested the language of the 1937 constitution, such as the National Council of Women of Ireland, the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers, and the Women's Graduates Association (Hanafin 31-2). Dorothy Macardle, from the vantage of her own history as a feminist and republican, wrote to de Valera in 1937:

The language of certain clauses suggests that the state may interfere to a great extent in determining what opportunities shall be open or closed to women . . . I do not see how anyone holding advanced views on the rights of women can support it [the constitution], and that is a tragic dilemma for those who have been loyal and ardent workers in the national cause. (qtd. in Hanafin 32)

De Valera's vision of the Irish woman was thus not predetermined to be codified in an Irish constitution; alternative points of view existed and were, in fact, common, as the constitution passed with 44% of voters voting against it (Hanafin 31). Women had been active in the nationalist movement for some time, and de Valera's constitution actively wrote over their voices, producing a symbolic construction of Irish womanhood that remains powerful today. This is not to say that the history of Ireland is one unrelenting saga of female oppression;

certainly, the constitution affords women the right to vote, and Mary Robinson was the first female head of state in the world. It is to say that within the symbolic and legal realm of the state, woman's position is extremely circumscribed. As Hanafin argues, "The country of de Valera's imaginary is no place for real women" (36).

This legislation of the female body proceeds further from the requirement of domesticity to the regulation of female reproduction, specifically, by criminalizing any female attempt to control her own reproductive capacities. The use of birth control was illegal until the Family Planning Act of 1979, and divorce (in limited circumstances) only became legal in 1995. Abortion is still largely illegal in Ireland, with an exception only for cases in which the mother's life is in danger, though it is no longer illegal to provide information about abortion services located abroad. The Irish woman (especially the Irish woman prior to 1980) is thus the site of a great deal of legal discussion and legislation, as she should be located within the home, is virtually unable to divorce, and is also unable to take any control of her reproductive capacities. Luke Gibbons, discussing Anne Devlin, articulates some of the qualities that become associated with this construction of the Irish woman—"virtues of loyalty, fortitude and forbearance, combined with an unlimited capacity to endure suffering," qualities that he notes "helped to disenfranchise women from participating in public affairs" (*Transformations* 107-8). And certainly, to endure the kind of life offered in the constitution would require forbearance and the endurance of suffering. The qualities, then, that become associated with Irish womanhood provide one implicit critique of the state's legislation of her body.

This imago of Irish womanhood—chaste, fervently Catholic, and happily presiding over a coherent and comforting domestic sphere— met some specific challenges in the 1980's

and 1990's. In 1984, Ann Lovett, a fifteen year old girl from Granard in County Longford, died while attempting to secretly give birth to her son. The child also died. Presumably, Ann did not see herself as having many options with both birth control and abortion illegal, and with the degree of social stigma attached to teenage pregnancy. This tragic case, along with that of a fourteen year old Dublin girl only known as X, helped push the state toward more liberal reproductive legislation. "X" was raped and attempted to travel abroad for an abortion; she was prevented from doing so by the state due to the constitutional ban on that practice. In 1992, the Supreme Court addressed the case and concluded that the "right to life" articulated in the constitution extended to the life of the pregnant woman, and if her life was threatened by the continuation of the pregnancy (including by suicide) then abortion should be allowed. However, no abortions have yet been provided in Ireland, despite this verdict, which speaks to the degree of stigma still attached to them. But these cases certainly reveal an increasing awareness that women's position vis-à-vis the Irish state is highly problematic and a desire to revisit and rearticulate women's status.

Contemporary authors engage with the status of the Irish family, and the Irish woman within it, in a variety of ways. For one, Nuala O'Faolain's *Are You Somebody?* presents a vivid, autobiographical account of the contradictions and tensions inherent in being a single Irish woman in the late twentieth century. In McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto*, Patrick is abandoned by his mother. Young, unmarried, and raped by the local priest, she has very few options; she cannot abort the child, marry the father, or even carry the child to term without shaming her family. She is forced to birth the child in secret, deliver it into the hands of a local foster parent, and leave her town. As a result, Patrick never knows his mother. And for those women in McCabe's fiction who do marry, the future seems bleak. Without the ability

to divorce abusive husbands or escape from a loveless marriage, women are shown trapped in terrible circumstances. In *The Butcher Boy*, Annie Brady endures emotional and physical abuse from her drunkard husband Benny, and eventually goes mad and commits suicide—the only avenue of escape available to her. Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* describes very similar marital problems when Mr. Clarke starts hitting Mrs. Clarke during arguments. This leads eventually to their separation, though this separation carries no hope of divorce. A later novel, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, focuses specifically on an abused woman in an unhappy marriage. Kim McMullen argues, then, that Doyle's work as a whole suggests that "Ireland's revolution remains unfinished" due to "continued class and gender inequities that can be traced directly back to the nation's founding moments." The children in these cases cannot hope that their mother might remarry; they will be permanently fatherless, a state that these novels variously suggest may lead to sadism, homosexuality, and/or madness. *The Dead School* depicts Cissie Dudgeon, who, no longer in love with her husband, takes up with another local man, leading to her husband's suicide and significant later emotional problems for her son Malachy. *Call Me the Breeze* presents another unhappy marriage with a faithless husband, which eventually results in the suicide of the father's mistress. *Emerald* *Gems of Ireland* features a father so sadistic and abusive that the only way out seems to be his murder. In fact, McCabe never writes about a happy, well-adjusted family (with the exception of the parodic happiness attributed to Raphael Bell's parents before the father is murdered); families, instead, are poisoned by adultery and alcoholism, and women are unable to escape from these abusive and destructive situations. Mothers are, indeed, more likely than not to go mad or commit suicide. McCabe's implicit refusal to depict happy domesticity

suggests the impossibility of healthy familial relations within a state that circumscribes women's options so strictly.

On the other hand, Martin McDonagh rarely presents a set of two parents in his work. In *Beauty Queen of Leenane*, the father is not present and is never mentioned (he presumably died some time ago); in *A Skull in Connemara*, Mick's wife is seven years dead; in *The Lonesome West*, the mother is not present and not mentioned. The mother is similarly mysteriously missing in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* reveals that Cripple Billy's parents died together in a boat while attempting to drown their crippled son; apparently, they didn't wish to support someone who was physically handicapped. *The Pillowman*, alone in McDonagh's work, presents the dynamic of two parents alongside their children; it is hardly a happy picture, though, as the parents torture one child for years before being killed by the other one. Indeed, aside from the absence of one or both parents, families fare universally badly in McDonagh's work, as matricide and patricide seem fairly common, and fratricide also seems probable in *The Lonesome West*. In all these works, the family is more likely to provide abuse and even murder than a comforting, loving space, and a great deal of this unhealthy situation is attributed to women's role in the home—unable to control her reproductive options or to escape from horrific situations.

Another keystone of the national identity articulated by de Valera and the 1937 Constitution is a continued reverence for revolutionary nationalism. The Constitution claims to derive its authority from the joint power of Jesus and of the revolution's martyrs:

We, the people of Éire, Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial, Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain

the rightful independence of our Nation . . . Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution.

The nation is founded upon the heroism and struggle of those who endured trial in the name of Ireland's independence. The constitution's articulation here is only one example of the cult of martyrdom within Irish nationalism. The 1916 Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic similarly rests upon the twin pillars of God and of "the dead generations from which she [Ireland] receives her old tradition of nationhood." The most famous articulation of this belief in the power of the memory of the revolutionary dead comes from Padraic Pearse's 1915 speech at O'Donovan Rossa's funeral: "the fools, the fools, the fools, the fools! . . . they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace" (qtd. in Coogan, *Ireland* 41). Pearse argued that "from the graves of patriotic men and women spring living nations" (qtd. in Coogan, *Ireland* 41). Regardless of the fact that this image invokes the nation as a *zombie* crawling out of the graves of the dead, it is a powerful expression of a belief still powerful in 1937: that revolutionary violence is justified and is sufficiently honorable to serve as, alongside God, one of the two pillars of the state. Those who died working toward Ireland's freedom are thus inscribed as martyrs.

The problem with nationalist sentiments in Ireland is that the continuing conflict in the North deploys the rhetoric of revolutionary nationalism on both sides, and with results that most citizens of the Republic of Ireland find offensive. The operations of the Irish Republican Army and its own children (the Real IRA, the Provisional IRA, the INLA, and so forth), the descendants of the revolutionary groups that won Ireland its independence in the 1920s, reveal that the glory of revolutionary nationalism is in the eye of the beholder. The

continuation of this violence, in the name of nationalism, is not supported by most people in the Republic of Ireland, and this desire to distance the Republic from the violence in the North has found expression in constitutional revision. Though the 1937 constitution claimed power over the entire island (“the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and territorial seas,” and it looks forward to the “re-integration of the national territory”), subsequent legal cases attempted to interpret this language in two ways. The first, articulated in the case of *Re Article 26 and the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Bill 1975*, argued that this constitutional language referred to a political, not legal, claim, and thus revealed a national aspiration rather than a legal right. The other option, given in *McGimpsey v Ireland* in 1990, argued that the constitution reflected a claim to a legal right to govern Northern Ireland. The disagreement was largely solved by the Nineteenth Amendment in 1998 which deleted the language regarding the “re-integration of the national territory” as well as the “whole” before the “island of Ireland,” thus offering language more acceptable to the British as the two nations attempted to nail down the Belfast Agreement. The referendum regarding these revisions passed with 94.39% of the vote (Hanafin 92). What these revisions, and the support for them, suggest is that the bulk of the Irish voting public no longer supported any legal claim to Northern Ireland.²⁸

The cult of revolutionary nationalism, then, no longer provides an unambiguous, solid foundation for the state, as citizens are increasingly uncomfortable with the valorization of nationalist violence due to the continuing use of such rhetoric in the North. McCabe’s presentation of nationalism often turns on just this conflict—current uses of sectarian violence problematize the state’s (and the nation’s) investment in a cult of martyrdom. Both

²⁸ See Hanafin’s chapter six, “Terri(s)tory: Nation and Territory in Constitutional Discourse,” for more on legal conflicts about the status of the North.

Carn and *The Dead School* offer in-depth critiques of nationalist violence, and, in fact, *most* of McCabe's novels focus on sectarian violence in the borderlands, those ambiguous, liminal spaces between the Republic and the North (possibly because McCabe grew up in a border town himself).²⁹ The town of Carn locates its originary nationalist myth within the character of Matt Dolan, who was shot dead in a raid on a railway in 1922 and comes to be known as "Carn's true hero" (13). With the force of national myth, which requires those who fought for the independence of Ireland to be lauded as heroes, behind this canonization, it is easy to idealize Matt Dolan, especially as images of this violence are lost to history; Matt's memory is free for co-option as a founder of the nation, a brave fighter who offered the ultimate sacrifice for his people's freedom. Just this sort of rhetoric is trotted out by schoolmasters for dead nationalist youths—"the two gallant young men who had been done to death"—and by impressionable boys, easily entranced by the seduction of violence: "They swore that they would invade Northern Ireland and kill all the protestants" (15, 14). It is much easier, however, to glorify violent acts in the past than to glorify them in the present—gore and the death of innocents tend to get in the way of idealizing current acts of revolutionary violence. As Maisie cries, "But there was none of that in the old days! They were decent men then. No killing children or old people then," we see the desperate exclamations of a woman discovering the realities of revolution and thereby losing her national faith (111). Indeed, once the town is bombed, the traditional Easter celebrations are suspended, and their monument to Matt Dolan is left unlauded as the people quietly voice their feeling that such celebrations are "indiscreet" in times of violence (154). They are brought face to face with the results of guerilla warfare, and thus find themselves unable to celebrate with any sincerity

²⁹ *Breakfast on Pluto*, set in a border town, has the hero/ine Patrick Pussy accused of planting a bomb in London, and *Call Me the Breeze* focuses on a series of sectarian outrages and their resonances in the present.

the Easter rising, itself the opening of years of war and civil war. Partially this seems hypocritical and cruel, as earlier heroes like the Dolans are discarded, but the sectarian violence within the novel always seems utterly senseless.

We never discover why Hugo needed to blow up the customs hut, or what if any good came of it; the bombing of the Vintage Bar serves no clear purpose, other than making the locals afraid; Benny's raid on the Hamiltons' house results not in the capture of an arms hideout but in the senseless death of a local civilian, Pat Lacey. Members of these paramilitary organizations seem likely to be either sadists or young men driven only by rage, as with the group responsible for searching the Hamiltons' home. Benny hears only the voices of these men from his post outside, but their language is violent, ominous, and disrespectful, "the Belfast voice spat, *If you don't tell me I'll do it right here and now you bitch*" (214). All that his relationship with these men gets Benny is a murder conviction and a life in jail. Benny gets roped into a patrilineal descent in which Irish masculinity is yoked to sectarian violence—an open, ambiguous world in which many people are potential targets—a fitting foil for the domestic conscription of Irish womanhood. Maisie offers a pat interpretation: "'Let's face it,' she said. 'His father was a murderer'" (223). A national myth based on the legitimization of revolutionary violence is revealed as untenable. McCabe's presentation of revolutionary violence lacks empathy for the ideological stakes on both sides; his works generally present paramilitaries as probably sadistic—like the Belfast men in *Carn*—or at best misguided—like Benny. If, perhaps, this is a fault in McCabe's critique of revolutionary nationalism, it still reflects recent popular feelings about practices labeled as "terrorism," in which violence against civilians never emerges as a legitimate method through which to advance political goals.

For Raphael Bell in *The Dead School*, the destabilization of the myth of revolutionary nationalism occurs for similar reasons. Raphael's father died during the revolutionary period, and Raphael remembers him as a nationalist and a martyr. In fact, much of his pride in his life and youth runs back to his father and his father's sacrifice. However, this seminal moment in Irish political history, of 1916 and the wars surrounding Irish independence, is revealed as potentially nothing more than vicious and callous bloodshed. In the newspaper, Raphael sees a story about recent IRA violence: "There was a photograph of them both [a boy and a shopkeeper] with sheets over them. You could see the young fellow's shoes and socks. Underneath the photo it said the IRA had done it. Raphael went crazy. He said they couldn't have done it" (119). When his friend Father Des points out that the story is true, and that he saw it on the news, "Raphael just stood there because he couldn't think of anything to say. He just stood there scraping the top of his index finger with his thumbnail" (119). The possibility that the IRA, and implicitly the whole Irish Republican movement through the last century, could callously murder a young child undermines Raphael's total and foundational faith in the heroism of his father. In his dreams, he invents revisionist histories that implicate his father in bloodthirsty and unjustified violence:

Another night he dreamed of the Black and Tan and his father in the field. The Black and Tan had a gun in his father's mouth, 'You murderer! You fucking murderer!' he was snarling. 'You and your murdering Shinner mates crippled my best friend! You blew his legs off! You can't walk, you bastard! He can't even shit by himself! And *you* did it!' Raphael waited for his daddy to say 'No!' To cry out 'It's a lie!' But he never did. All he did was smile at the Black and Tan. All he did was smile and the smile didn't mean 'No, I didn't. You've got it all wrong!' It meant 'So what if I did?' (123)

The Black and Tans were sent in by the British during the War of Independence; many of them were battle-hardened veterans recently returned from World War I, and they are still remembered for their brutality. They have emerged as a prominent symbol of brutal imperial

oppression. Raphael's dream turns the Black and Tan into a victim, and his father into the brutalizer—a historically significant reversal. Given Raphael's deep investment in all the tenets of Irish republicanism, it is a reversal with severe implications for Raphael's sense of identity. Without this faith in his father, Raphael eventually loses the will to fight for his school and loses his mind.

Martin McDonagh does not depict characters revisiting their memories of the legitimated violence surrounding the Irish revolutionary war and civil war, but he does introduce characters who attempt to use the rhetoric of violent nationalism for inappropriate ends. In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Ray Dooley breaks a toe during an encounter with the local police. Ray claims that the police broke his toe purposefully, while the police claim that Ray broke it himself kicking a metal door in his bare feet. When Mag Folan repeats this second version, Ray responds: "And I suppose you believe a policeman's word over mine. Oh aye. Isn't that how the Birmingham Six went down?" (75). Ray thus attempts to equate the policeman's supposed lie over his pathetic broken toe with the police's framing of six innocent men for a bombing that claimed twenty-one lives, reinscribing his wound within the valorized context of revolutionary nationalism. Of course, this jump from a broken toe to the justifying rhetoric of violent nationalism is played for laughs—it is entirely inappropriate and out of place (and rather ridiculous). *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* provides the most extended critique of revolutionary nationalism within McDonagh's canon through its presentation of Padraic, a member of the INLA. Padraic has dedicated his life to "ridding Erin of them jackboot hirelings of England's foul monarchy" (33), but the targets of the INLA's violence are scarcely such jackboot hirelings of the monarchy—mainly, apparently, cats and college marijuana peddlers, though men named Airey Neave also get their share ("You can't blow up

a fella just because he has a funny name. It wasn't his fault") (29). The objects of violence thus no longer seem appropriate to the supposed cause. Padraic tells his father: "I put bombs in a couple of chip shops, but they didn't go off. (*Pause.*) Because chip shops aren't as well guarded as army barracks" (13). The pause is presumably when his father asks him what possible motivation Padraic could have for blowing up chip shops, and Padraic's response misses the point—the destruction of random chip shops hardly strikes at the heart of the imperial presence in Northern Ireland. In *Lieutenant*, violence is its own reward, and the cult of revolutionary nationalism provides a convenient cover story. Those men who still pursue violent revolution in the North are suggested to merely be sadists, as none of the members of the INLA in this play seem to pursue violence at all related to forcing the British government to remove itself from the North. McDonagh then consistently uses the rhetoric of revolutionary nationalism, but only to show a lack of correspondence between the rhetoric and its actual uses. Beneath the rhetoric lie unjustifiable acts of violence.

While McDonagh's invocation of the Birmingham Six avoids suggesting that their conviction was a good idea, it does elide the event's political context. Certainly for members of the INLA to claim that Airey Neave was killed because he had a funny name is a direct attack on the intelligence and political savvy of Ireland's revolutionaries; these men are so out of touch with the political goals of their organization that they have not been informed (or have not cared to find out) that Neave was a British Conservative MP and a close friend of Margaret Thatcher. McDonagh thus separates these members of the INLA from any political motives; paramilitary groups splinter with the least possible cause, and giving bad cat advice makes a man the "valdest of targets" (*Lieutenant* 59). McDonagh is interested in how people use revolutionary rhetoric in appropriate contexts, but he never shows something that might

count for an appropriate context. Partially, this is just part of McDonagh's general destructive bent; as he said in an interview with *Elle*, "My idea of theatre is some kind of punk destruction of what's gone on before" (qtd. in Wolf).³⁰ It's hard to imagine McDonagh approaching anything piously. Thus, it seems likely that McDonagh sees such rhetoric—as, perhaps, does McCabe—as universally bankrupt, without any possibility of an appropriate referent. As such, many could take issues with either of these authors' presentations of revolutionary nationalism as failing to recognize the potential reasons such rhetoric might be necessary. On the other hand, certainly many other people would agree that any rhetoric used to justify violence against civilians must be emptied of its power.

Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* goes back to Easter week 1916 and the subsequent revolutionary struggle. The protagonist, Henry Smart, becomes a soldier and assassin for the nationalist movement, but the book ultimately portrays this violence as misdirected. Henry is asked to kill people who he later finds out did nothing in particular wrong—the IRA takes out some people (like Henry's Jewish friend David Climanis) for no better reason than rampant racism. Indeed, much of the project of the book seems to be the subversion of national myths surrounding the "heroes" of Ireland's revolutionary struggle. Henry's assertion regarding de Valera, for instance, specifies that at one point, "he was wearing red socks and he smelt of shite," and is representative of the book's trajectory as a whole (156). Kim McMullen argues that "Doyle's historic revisionism restores key factions—socialists and women in particular—which have been airbrushed from the official portrait of Ireland's founding fathers." All these works then seem part and parcel of a contemporary revisionist interest in questioning the mythology that surrounds revolutionary

³⁰ He was, however, drunk at that interview. McDonagh's Brendan Behan-esque performances for the media are an interesting phenomenon that would benefit from further research.

nationalism—a willingness to problematize violence in all its forms, including historically lauded nationalist ones, thereby enabling a critique of current acts of terrorism.³¹

Contemporary literature thus participates in contemporary debates surrounding some of the traditional pillars of the Irish nation presented in the 1937 constitution: the church, the family, and the nation's history of revolutionary martyrdom. If the constitution presented an aspirational blueprint for an Irish nation, these authors suggest that the state's attempt to legislate those aspirations produced repressive, untenable conditions for the state's citizens. Indeed, James Smith argues that the nation's legislation and "official and public discourses" produced an "architecture of containment" with the function of "confin[ing] and render[ing] invisible segments of the population whose very existence threatened Ireland's national imaginary, the vision of Ireland enshrined in President Eamon de Valera's 1937 constitution" (112). In writing against this architecture of containment, these authors attempt to open space for other kinds of aspirations and another kind of nation. Smith suggests that the proliferation of scandals in the 1990s enabled Irish writers to begin speaking out, "focusing attention on the suffering of children and other marginalized citizens" (114). These authors take up the goal of a "open, tolerant, inclusive" Ireland in which "diverse stories" are told, in the words of Mary Robinson's inaugural address (qtd. in Smith 114).

I do not wish to suggest that these three supports of the state provide all we might wish to know about the Irish state's construction of a national character and ideal citizen—that changeless "repressed" of mid-century Ireland that Gibbons argues haunted Ireland's attempts to modernize. I would suggest, however, that many of the other characteristics of the imaginary Irish citizen we might discuss largely derive from these three bases. The role of the "west" of Ireland as the wellspring of untainted Gaelic identity in the national

³¹ Certainly this strain exists in historical work as well as literature. Coogan's overall quite unkind 1995 biography of de Valera, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow*, is part of this movement.

imaginary is firmly tied in with ideals of the church and the family, as the west is supposedly the last bastion of a traditional, rural Gaelic culture in which religion and the nuclear family develop to their proper dimensions. Implicitly, the imaginary Irish citizen is always a rural one, though, as Gibbons points out, “idealizations of rural existence, the longing for community and primitive simplicity, are the product of an urban sensibility” (85). Certainly the educational system and state institutions (orphanages, hospitals, and the like) help to construct any national subject; however, in Ireland’s case, education and state institutions were primarily controlled by the church until quite recently. In 1971, J.H. Whyte noted that the church had “carved out for itself a more extensive control over education than in any other country in the world” (qtd. in Coogan, *Ireland* 168). Much education in Ireland is still run by religious institutions. We might discuss the role of Gaelic sport or of a certain kind of tight-knit rural community, but these similarly derive from the importance placed, respectively, on nationalist history and on the nuclear Catholic family. Perhaps de Valera sums up this powerful combination of church, family, and national pride, mixing to form idealized Irish citizens, in this comment from 1943:

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, or a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that man should live. (qtd in Coogan, *Ireland* 274)

De Valera captures a beautiful image. But on the back of this photograph is written the names of various scandals and tragedies that ask us to admit the monstrosity of the image, based as it is upon repressive state policies. The image asks for the admission of people like Ann Lovett and a young girl known only as X into the cultural imaginary as full citizens of the state. The authors we have discussed above have taken on a de-mythologizing project, in

which they display (and help to create) fissures in the state's self presentation, making room for other and new definitions of Irishness. For the values insisted on by the 1937 constitution were not foregone conclusions. The codification of those values was contested by people like Constance Markievicz and Dorothy Macardle, and all along the way, including by shows like *The Riordans*, which first aired in 1979 thereby "bringing to the surface with almost relentless zeal every possible transgression of the traditional Irish family enshrined in the 1937 Constitution" (Gibbons, *Transformations* 61).³² Many Irish authors are continuing this project, doing literary battle with the monstrous repressed of de Valera's Ireland.

The Irish Literary Massacre

In 1902, the Irish Literary Theatre first performed Yeats's famous *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, which represents Ireland first as a stately older woman and then a beautiful young girl "with the walk of a queen." She has come in search of a man to assist her by expelling the "strangers in the house," and she succeeds in entrancing Michael Gillane who abandons his forthcoming marriage in order to follow Cathleen into an uncertain future in which "many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name."³³ The play offers a powerful propagandistic articulation of two key images of Irish national identity—the abused but noble woman (represented as both the aged, betrayed old woman and the proud, gorgeous young one) and the brave nationalist man (willing to die in order to secure himself a place as a revolutionary martyr). It is the male willingness to surrender his life that produces Cathleen's transformation from hag to beauty queen—a metaphor that bears

³² See Gibbons' chapter four in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, "From Kitchen Sink to Soap," for more on how television programs challenged the values codified in the 1937 constitution.

³³ This image—of a separation between fathers and sons due to revolutionary nationalism—is paralleled in Benny's relationship with his father in *Carn*. Fathers get linked to revolutionary violence.

uncomfortable similarity to vampirism, as it is the blood of young men that keeps Cathleen alive and young.³⁴

For contemporary Irish authors, embodiments of the nation are rarely this simple—lovely, proud women and brave men. The myth of revolutionary sacrifice, as articulated above, must be rewritten, as must narratives that legitimate the powerful role of the Catholic church or present an uncomplicated vision of the nuclear Irish family. In many current narratives, authors introduce characters associated with Gaelic Romantic values only to kill them off, figuratively sending a chainsaw wielding madman onto the stage to dispatch Cathleen ni Houlihan and her amorous beau. These horrific works demonstrate a horror film sensibility—murder, death, and dismemberment are the tools with which they reveal the collapse of the vision of Irishness articulated in the 1937 constitution. Just as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* demonstrates the failure of the American dream in America's rural heart, so do these works display the fissures and inconsistencies in the Gaelic Romantic vision—by killing it off.

Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is the murder of Mrs. Nugent by Francie Brady in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. Francie is depicted throughout as jealous of the happiness and perfection of the Nugent household:

It warm and glowing. There was a table with books and a pair of spectacles on it. The table was set for breakfast in the morning. They had a butter dish with a special knife, a bluestriped jug with matching cups, all these things they had. It was as if just by being the Nugents it all came together as if by magic not a thing out of place. I shinned up the drainpipe. There was a nightlight on in there the room was full of shadows. I think Mr Nugent must have been away. Sometimes he went away on business. Philip was sleeping in his mother's bed. His head was tilted back on the pillow with his mouth open. She was sleeping soundly her chest rising and falling as if to say there's no trouble at all in my dreams I have my son beside me and my dear

³⁴ I think it is worth noting here that several popular constructions of the state actually configure it as a monster. Pearse's assertion that the nation rises out of the graves of dead nationalists produces a zombie nation, and Yeats's articulation here that the nation feeds on the blood of young nationalists similarly produces a vampiric nation. We will go more in depth on this issue in the concluding chapter.

husband will be home tomorrow. Philip's mouth was a small whistling o. If there was a word bubble coming out of his mouth I knew what would be written in it. I love my mother more than anything in the world and I'd never do anything in the world to hurt her. I love my parents and I love my happy home. (47)

We considered this passage earlier as evidence for Francie's similarity to the creature in *Frankenstein*, but we should also consider the economic implications of this section. The Nugents thus have economic security, seen in the father "away on business," the table and book, denoting pleasure reading and leisure time, and their ownership of the accoutrements proper to domestic bliss: the butter knife and the matching cups. More than this, however, they have familial harmony in which the father works, the wife stays home, and love circulates throughout the domestic space. This bears a marked similarity to de Valera's "cosy" homesteads, and McCabe makes the equation between the Nugents and the Irish good life clear with their ownership of the music book "Emerald Gems of Ireland"—a tome of traditional tunes featuring "an ass and cart going off into green mountains on the cover" (48). It is thus the Nugents, with their economic power and domestic happiness, who own the idealized symbols of Ireland.³⁵ As Smith puts it, Nugent becomes "the righteous and symbolically powerful Irish mother" (128).

Furthermore, it is suggested that this kind of lifestyle is impossible for those who are actually Irish. The Nugents are not fully Irish in the way the Brady's are, as Mrs. Nugent left the town when she was young for England, and she returned with a "half English" voice

³⁵ Notably, these idealized symbols actually represent a subsistence, rural, poor lifestyle. That it is the Nugents—living in the town, middle upper class, owning no livestock—who possess this book further underscores historians' claims that the association of national identity with the rural working class is actually a construction produced by the city. Hanafin discusses the postcolonial elite's construction of a "pure precolonial Gaelic self" as the basis for national identity (18). In a larger context, Bruce King argues that "Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies itself with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the 'folk' the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties" (qtd in Brennan 53). Notably, when Francie attempts to purchase a similar book showing "an old woman in a shawl standing at a half-door staring at the sun going down behind the mountains," it has to be *given* to him—he doesn't have the economic power to purchase it—and it ultimately fails to produce the desired result of winning Joe back (196). Implicitly, Francie cannot own these images in the same way that the Nugents can.

(28). Philip was raised primarily in a London private school. Mr. Nugent may be entirely British; Francie isn't sure: "I don't know if he was English but he spoke like it. He said good afternoon when everybody else said *hardy weather* or *she looks like rain*" (55). It is suggested that the Nugents' economic success rests, actually, on a partial Englishness. Ireland certainly does nothing to increase their economic status, as they either purchase all their consumer goods immediately upon moving to the town or they already owned the goods and brought them with them; in either case, it is money made in England that purchases those goods. Anyone in the novel who experiences any degree of financial success is associated with England, from Francie's Uncle Alo to the son of a woman he meets on his travels: "She told me she had six daughters and a son called Packy in England. He did well says I, he has a big job, hasn't he?" (184). In fact, this correlation between England and economic success is a realistic representation, as a great many people emigrated to England during this period in order to support themselves as well as those left behind in Ireland.

The Butcher Boy suggests, however, that the promise of a Gaelic Romantic vision of Ireland may not have been accessible to the Irish in the 1960's, that the economic situation of Ireland was such that only English money could create those "cosy" homesteads. Francie's mother Annie hopes that the Bradys might be able to break through into a better life:

She said we'd never be run down in this town again we'd show them we were as good as any of them. She looked into my eyes and said: We don't want to be like the Nugents. We don't want to be like any of them! We'll show them—won't we Francie? They'll envy us yet! We're the Bradys, Francie! The Bradys! (19)

Though she promises a new start and better times, there seems to be no grounding for her optimism. With an alcoholic husband, no hope for divorce, and a tenuous grasp on reality herself, her subsequent madness and suicide seem a more likely conclusion to her story than rapid economic success. Francie comes to understand that being a Brady, as far as economic

stability and the achievement of the Irish good life are concerned, is not as good as being a Nugent, and he dreams of Philip saying: “You know what he’s doing here don’t you mother? He wants to be one of us. He wants his name to be Francis Nugent. That’s what he’s wanted all along! We know that—don’t we mother?” as Mrs. Nugent takes out her breast (64).

Mrs. Nugent thus represents a life Francie believes he can never have—all the beautiful things in the world, locked up in the Nugents’ house, taunt him. Through their English success, they achieve a degree of economic prosperity that allows for the production of domestic bliss. Mr. Nugent earns enough money that Mrs. Nugent can stay home and that they can purchase working TVs, butter knives, and matching mugs. The Bradys—with an alcoholic father and an abused and insane mother—have no hope of matching them or finding their way toward such a “cosy” homestead. Basically, Francie wants more money—not really for itself, but for the stability that might come with it. It is Father Sullivan’s question, “I’ll bet you live in a nice house do you? Do you live in a nice house?,” that leads Francie to beat him up, because he desperately wants a nice house and is aware that he doesn’t have one (96).

Francie’s murder of Mrs. Nugent can thus be understood as revenge upon an ideal that he cannot access—the destruction of a set of particularly Irish symbols, partially denied him due to his Irishness. As in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the have-nots rise up to eliminate the haves. And the murder is done in a particularly gory, horror film style, as Francie slices her open, writes on the walls in her blood, and eventually dismembers her body to hide it in the brock heap. Again, as in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the body of Mrs. Nugent, representative of the haves, becomes food for consumption by the have-nots. But while the Sawyers eat their victims, pigs will dine on Mrs. Nugent (204). Though when

he murders Mrs. Nugent, he writes “PIGS” in blood all over the Nugent home and thereby casts the Nugents as the pigs of the tale, he does this based on his own past identification as a pig, as when he imagines Mrs. Nugent saying “Francis Pig you little piggy baby pig” (204). It is thus, implicitly, Francie who eats Mrs. Nugent.

Another interesting facet of Mrs. Nugent that begs consideration is her association with a certain method of reading. For her, books are economic commodities that must be preserved and respected. One of the first things we find out about Philip and his mother is that they treat books nicely; Philip’s comics have “not a crease or a dog-ear in sight,” and when Joe and Francie borrow those comics, “Mrs Nugent says: Make sure not to damage any of those now they cost money” (3). Comics, instead of pulp productions designed for children with dirty fingers to consume in tree-houses while eating Flash Bars, become articles to be treasured and preserved. While this is certainly respectful, it does not seem to acknowledge that the comics should be fun and are made for young boys who perhaps have enough work to do in not messing up their parents’ homes. The Nugents treat their music books similarly: “These were just like his comics not a speck on any of them. You’d think those books were brand new out of the shop” (48). It is then notable that part of Francie’s murderous rage is to *write* “Pigs” all over the Nugent home in *blood*, thereby violating the sanctity and cleanliness of that text. Implicitly, I think that McCabe argues that there is something perverse in respecting texts too much—keeping them spotless, as if they weren’t designed to be used. Certainly, Francie’s particular rebellion shouldn’t be repeated on a mass scale, but it does suggest that texts are not, and should not be, sacred—which has implications for how we approach McCabe’s works. After all, his novels often duplicate Francie’s rebellion on a larger scale, bloodily slaughtering the sacred cows of Gaelic

Romantic nationhood, writing over that text in a particularly disrespectful (often gory) way. Implicitly, texts themselves should not be respected and should be open to revision—as the 1937 constitution’s vision of Irish nationality must be revisited and rearticulated.

Martin McDonagh’s play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* similarly kills off a representative of a stereotyped Ireland, though it is a little more difficult to identify Mag Folan cleanly with “Ireland.” Maureen Folan murders her mother Mag to force change in her situation and to enable her escape to America. Pato has offered to take Maureen out of Leenane to live with him in Boston—offering a new country and a new life to the sheltered, despairing Maureen. As in *The Butcher Boy*, Ireland is presented as economically stagnant; Pato considers, “I do ask meself, if there was good work in Leenane, would I stay in Leenane? I mean, there never will be good work, but hypothetically, I’m saying. Or even bad work. Any work” (31). Leenane, then, offers *no* possibility of gainful employment, and people move to England or America to get jobs. Mag, with her insistence on being taken care of and her refusal to enter a home, is what stands between Maureen and the American dream. Mag must die for Maureen to enter the promised land of American opportunity; the tie to Mag is thus a tie to a stagnant, repressive, and futureless Ireland.

But this tie between the mother and the nation seems based on more than just this plot device. Mag is also the key representative of the small-minded, conservative, self-centered community of Leenane, in which Mag’s desire to avoid a nursing home justifies the burning of Maureen’s letters (and implicitly all her hopes for a different future). The two—the mother and the nation—thus appear as coterminous within the play; the murder of the mother is how one escapes the nation. As Nicholas Grene says, the mother and the nation get tied together: “in watching the murder of the mother [we] can exorcise any sense that we need to

venerate where we come from” (“Black Pastoral”). And certainly you could see Mag as representing a certain stereotype of Irish womanhood. She is a thoroughly domestic woman; nothing in the play indicates that Mag ever worked for a living. Mag is entirely, then, located within the home place, as advocated by the 1937 constitution. Furthermore, she espouses a very conservative sexual morality, in which kissing two men makes Maureen a “whore”; as she puts it, “Two men is two men too much!” (23). Readers may presume that this conservative point of view on sexuality results from the teachings of the church; given the crucifix on the wall, viewers of the play can presume the Folan are Catholic, even if they miss the finer points of tolerance and brotherly love. Mag is thus a clear presentation of the darker side of the constitution’s construction of womanhood; she is entirely defined by her identity as a mother, living within a domestic space, espousing a conservative sexual ideology presumably based on Catholic religious teachings.³⁶ Mag does not present a positive picture of this kind of stereotype; she is small-minded, cruel, and manipulative. When both cultural norms and her own disability deprive her of any chance to exercise power in a world larger than her cottage, she attempts, instead, to control every aspect of her daughter’s life.

We cannot, however, equate Mag too cleanly with the stereotypes of national identity. First, her Catholicism seems to be all display with very little substance. She never demonstrates any of the values ideally associated with religion (self-sacrifice, tolerance, kindness, love). She also seems quite unaware of her nation’s history, and she demonstrates no nationalist sentiments. When a man sings in Irish Gaelic on the radio, Mag calls him “An oul fella singing nonsense” and asks Maureen “Why can’t they just speak English like

³⁶ It seems notable that Mag is *not* similarly defined as a wife; though Mr. Folan must have existed at some point, he is never even referred to. Partially this is in keeping with McDonagh’s tendency to never show cohesive family units, but it also suggests, perhaps, the desexualization of the Irish housewife—mother, but never lover.

everybody else?” (6). When Maureen responds that “It’s Irish you should be speaking in Ireland,” Mag seems unconvinced (8). Mag is out of touch with what being “Irish” might mean, with her presumed Irish roots, and demonstrates absolutely no knowledge of the Irish language; she doesn’t even recognize the words as Irish. It is Maureen, the next generation, who spouts some nationalist rhetoric about the lost Irish tongue and the “English stealing our language” (8). If Mag represents, in some way, Ireland, then she shows an Ireland that has lost touch with itself, and is becoming a shell, meaningless—emptied out, even, perhaps, for the Irish themselves.

It is Maureen who articulates some version of an Irish identity: “If it wasn’t for the English stealing our language, and our land, and our God-knows-what, wouldn’t it be we wouldn’t need to go over there begging for jobs and for handouts?” (8). In her analysis, the Irish language and Irish land (and implicitly everything Irish: “our God-knows-what”) were stolen by the English, leaving behind a lack: emptiness where an original culture might have been. Maureen complains about this perceived Irish cultural bankruptcy, noting that people are “Bringing up kids to think all they’ll ever be good for is beggin handouts from the English and the Yanks” (9). The Ireland she describes here is passive and helpless, emptied of culture by the British and unable to accomplish anything itself—all it can do is beg for help from others.³⁷ This is quite similar to the play’s presentation of Mag: similarly emptied of Irish culture and similarly helpless, begging for handouts. She is largely confined to her rocking chair, constantly begging for others to fix her Complan, make some porridge, or boil some water for her tea. Like Mag in this play, Ireland is fundamentally *unproductive*; no one

³⁷ And therein lays one of the main critiques leveled at McDonagh: his apparent duplication of negative colonial stereotypes of Irishness. However, while it seems undebatable that McDonagh invokes some negative stereotypes of Irishness, it is certainly debatable whether McDonagh reifies those stereotypes or destabilizes them through the excesses of his parody.

in the play *works* (unless they go to America or England) or does *anything* except talk. Mag in her rocking chair is an image of Ireland as increasingly divorced from its own ideals, static, helpless, futureless, and stagnant. Certainly this is a nation that needs killing off. Nicholas Grene argues that the play “encourages a kind of comic collusion in the need to destroy the mother as it figures the recoil against the motherland with all its mythology of the rural west as primal place of origin. With a mother like Mag, with a home like Leenane, matricide is all but justified” (“Ireland” 301-2). Mag is no Cathleen ni Houlihan, with flowing locks and a proud mien. Instead, Mag is an entirely domestic woman, tied to the church’s conservative vision of sexuality, who has become a controlling manipulative bitch to her daughter as a result of her inability to control anything else. She is also a woman for whom traditional symbols of Irishness, like the Irish language, have no meaning; she does not even have a pride in Irish culture to sustain her. The murder of Mag, then, is the murder of a nation that needs to die. McDonagh, however, does not suggest that her murder will accomplish anything; Maureen merely becomes Mag after her death, unable to escape into the better life she imagined. Unable to escape to another, different life, Maureen’s identity collapses into Mag’s—she becomes another woman deprived of opportunity, confined within her home. While in Yeats’s play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, the transition from aged hag to younger woman is a sign of national vitality, here it shows national stagnation, in which children—deprived of opportunities—duplicate their parents’ failures. Maureen, sitting in her mother’s rocking chair, is an Ireland that is dead and has given up.

And, in *The Butcher Boy*, the murder scene is a particularly horrific one, in that it invokes the horror film as precedent and referent. Audiences may recognize a strong allusion in this scene. The mother in a rocking chair; the strange movement of that rocking chair

(“MAG, sitting in her rocking chair, which rocks back and forth of its own volition, her body unmoving”) (70); the horrifying moment of revelation that the woman is *dead*—all these elements appear in Hitchcock’s masterpiece *Psycho*. Certainly, this image of a dead mother in a strangely mobile rocking chair is not the only parallel—both Norman Bates and Maureen Folan murder out of sexual repression. For both murderers, the mothers are the source of that repression, as neither Mrs. Bates nor Mag are able to allow their children to develop and act on normal sexual urges; both mothers are murdered because of this failure³⁸. Both children subsequently *become* the mother that they murdered. Norman internalizes his mother so that when he murders, he is Mrs. Bates; the close of *Psycho* shows a Norman who apparently no longer exists, having been entirely taken over by his mother. As *Beauty Queen of Leenane* wraps up, Maureen begins to demonstrate the same verbal and mental ticks that had characterized Mag, such that Ray remarks “The exact fucking image of your mother you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting me name!” (83). *Beauty Queen* can thus be seen as a rewriting of *Psycho* with a female perspective, in which the mother becomes a castrating bitch, standing in the way of sexual fulfillment, instead of the desirable sexual object that no subsequent woman can approach, as she is for Norman. Certainly, extensive plot parallels exist between *Beauty Queen* and *Psycho*. More than this, however, the very allusion to *Psycho* present within the scene of Mag tipping forward from her rocking chair provides the audience with a clue that we are moving away from comedy and into something much closer to horror, as we discussed in the introduction.

³⁸ *Psycho IV: The Beginning* explains Norman’s murder of his mother; her simultaneous forbidden sexual availability (she asks the teenage Norman to sleep with her in his underwear when she is frightened of a storm and similarly gets him to massage her before rolling around on the floor with him) and sexual frigidity (when the above actions result in an erection, she calls Norman filthy and reviles him) leads to Norman’s twisted desire for her, and her subsequent murder.

McDonagh's *The Lonesome West* approaches this scenario—the killing off of some stereotype of “Irishness”—quite differently. Father Welsh is a priest, and thus could be tied to the religious center of Gaelic Romantic Irish identity. He is also, however, presented very positively, as, in fact, the moral center of the play. While Father Welsh is not murdered like Mag or Mrs. Nugent, his death does reflect his, and implicitly the church's, failure to relate to his community. His eventual death seems really to show that the values Father Welsh represents have been left behind by an increasingly brutal and irreligious culture, not that Father Welsh is an unattractive or brutal anachronism, as might be the case for Mag Folan.

Welsh often attempts to counter the brutality of the relationship between Valene and Coleman with points that reflect a traditional, moral point of view, as when he criticizes Coleman's foul mouth on the day of his father's funeral: “Don't be swearing today of all days anyway, Coleman . . . After us only burying your dad, I'm saying” (170). He assumes that Coleman loved his father, asking him “This house, isn't it going to be awful lonesome now with yer dad gone?” (171). When Coleman insults Tom Hanlon, Welsh responds: “The poor man's not even cold yet, Coleman Connor. Do you have to be talking that way about him,” and describes Tom in glowing terms: “a fella never had a bad word to say about anybody and did his best to be serving the community every day of his life” (193, 196). During one of Coleman and Valene's many fights, Welsh tries to calm them down by asking: “If it's your own brother you can't get on with, how can we ever hope for peace in the world . . .?” (200). What seems most interesting about Welsh's role as arbiter and moral center is that *none* of McDonagh's other plays contain this sort of character—someone that audiences can identify with as a spokesperson for the traditional sort of morality that is generally radically lacking in McDonagh's work. Welsh, in fact, can be relied upon to offer the

expected moral platitude whenever the situation between Coleman and Valene gets too dangerous. As such, he functions as a sort of mirror for a presumably shocked and disturbed audience, inserting morally appropriate comments at all turns.

Part of this difference from the other works of McDonagh's canon lies in Welsh's function within the play, which is as a Christ figure, filtered through another famous Yeats play *The Countess Cathleen*, in which a young Countess gives away her soul in order to save a group of poor people from starvation.³⁹ Welsh, in fact, barter his soul in the hope of changing the relationship between Coleman and Valene from one of mutual hatred to one of brotherly love. Welsh commits suicide, dooming him to hell from the Catholic church's point of view, but he suggests in his suicide note that Coleman and Valene might be able to save him from that fate by performing a "miracle" and learning to love each other:

They're [the odds] probably 64,000 to one be this time, but I'd go betting on ye's still, for despite everything, despite yere murder and yere mayhem and yere miserliness that'd tear the teeth out of broken goats, I have faith in ye. You wouldn't be letting me down now, would ye? Yours sincerely, and yours with the love of Christ now, Roderick Welsh. (223-4)

The reference to the "love of Christ" at the end of this note underscores, to the slow members of the audience, that Roderick Welsh is a Christ figure, sacrificing himself for the good of others. Welsh thus performs several functions—though he uses the violent, colorful Western language we might expect from a literary descendent of Synge, he also serves as a stand in for the audience's hopeful expectations regarding the power or triumph of traditional morals and represents the best of religion: self sacrificing love. As such, he provides a powerful

³⁹ McDonagh also invokes *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in *The Lonesome West* through mentioning the gorgeous redhead Alison O'Hoolihan. The allusion is irreverent however, as Alison gets stabbed in the throat by a pencil and subsequently marries her doctor, much to Coleman's dismay. The suggestion seems to be that Coleman will not be able to run off with Alison/ Cathleen/ Ireland because she has, instead, hooked up with a doctor—someone with more economic power than Coleman. Ireland becomes a tart looking for money.

endorsement of the Catholic church not seen in McDonagh's other works, or in most contemporary Irish literature.

However, such an interpretation, in some ways, doesn't seem to hold up. If McDonagh wishes to validate Welsh's moral positions, to allow the audience's identification with him to "win" in some way, why aren't there more Welsh-ian characters in his other works? Why don't his later plays allow the audience a similar "out" from their unrelenting brutality? Welsh himself, in an almost metafictional moment, acknowledges that he is an aberration: "Maybe I am high-horse so. Maybe that's why I don't fit into this town. Although I'd have to have killed half me fecking relatives to fit into this town" (212). He does not fit into McDonagh's work or "this town." And while his moral proclamations land him on the side of traditional values, many of them also seem somehow naive or out of place. When he says, "Ah Valene, now. If it's your own brother you can't get on with, how can we ever hope for peace in the world," he displays a remarkable inability to get the point (200). It's always, exactly, your own brother you can't get on with; as he himself puts it later, the two have "lived in each other's pockets the entire of yere lives" (222). In all of McDonagh's work, it is familiarity (especially within the family) that breeds animosity and contempt; it is much easier to get along with someone that isn't your brother, and preferably someone who lives outside Leenane. In McDonagh's world, it is always your family that you can't get on with—and, as such, he offers a powerful commentary on contemporary politics, especially in the North. Welsh describes "the daily grudges and faults and moans and baby-crimes against each other ye can never seem to step back from and see the love there underneath and forgive each other for," and suggests that having "lived in each other's pockets" is one of the main problems. The role of "baby crimes"—injustices perpetrated in the distant past—and constant

proximity in the continuation of the conflict in the North certainly shouldn't be underestimated. It is hard to forgive those historical faults when the two sides live "in each others' pockets." The hope, however, that the two sides could "step back" and see the love underneath the conflict may seem ill founded. Many of Welsh's comments, then, can be read simultaneously as representatives of a moral viewpoint and as extremely naïve.

I would argue that McDonagh inserts Father Welsh, as stand-in for the presumed audience's expectations regarding the functionality of a moral universe, exactly in order to kill him off—to show his failures and his inability to operate within the brutal world of McDonagh's plays. As Welsh says, "Nobody ever listens to me at all" (213). Though Welsh is sympathetically presented, his character type appears doomed within McDonagh's world; he is both too moral and too naïve to survive. He is powerless to enforce any change, and even his final dramatic act of suicide brings about only a partial and very tenuous hope. When the play closes, it is true that Coleman and Valene have stopped just short of killing each other; it is hard to believe, however, that the fighting won't recommence and probably escalate to threats of murder again. Certainly the two have not found the "love for each other as brothers" that Welsh urged them to shoot for (222). Welsh's is exactly the point of view that can't survive in McDonagh's world; he's driven to alcoholism and finally suicide by a world in which his values come to seem ridiculous. The final suicide of Welsh is thus, implicitly, an attack on any audience member who attempts to hold onto a traditional kind of morality while viewing McDonagh's work. *The Lonesome West* creates Welsh only to kill him off, as Catholicism (even good Catholicism) is no longer a relevant response in contemporary Ireland.

Raphael Bell, from Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School*, provides another textbook example of this phenomenon of killing off a Gaelic Romantic Ireland. Raphael Bell, born in 1913, the child of a doting mother and a nationalist father, enjoys a charmed childhood. The narrator plays on all the classic stereotypes of Irish life and national character when he proclaims that:

The time is long ago in Ireland and we are in a quiet village where nothing much has happened for around a hundred years, and probably never will. Not that anybody minds. They are more than happy with the way things are, working hard in the fields, saying their prayers at night and being good for the Lord who looks down over all. (33)

This Ireland is static, Catholic, and hard-working; furthermore, it is nationalist, caught in a struggle against England, and Raphael's father loses his life to several Black and Tans.

Raphael's uncle Joe is quick to point out that "Your father was a hero, son. You didn't know that. No one knew it. But he was. He died for Ireland. He's at one now with all the loyal patriots asleep in the ground" (45); Raphael soon learns to take pride in his father's death, so that when he sings 'God Save Ireland' or beats the school bully to a bloody pulp, he feels the spirit of his father with him (52). Young Raphael carries his nationalist ideals into his career as he prepares to become a teacher; he contemplates the significance of his duty, educating "the first free generation of a country for centuries in chains"—"a proud and noble people" (79). With his friend Paschal O'Dowd, they see "themselves with chalk in hand, pacing polished classrooms, league-stepping into infinity" (79). It is little wonder then that when Raphael becomes the Master of St. Anthony's boys school, he takes "pride in all things Gaelic and Irish," taking his students to Kilmainham Gaol and enforcing a rigid dress code and religious observances (90). He decorates his office in a manner befitting his upbringing:

Behind the door hung a map of Ireland and upon the wall stood the Pope blessing the multitude in St Peter's Square. Over the window rested a St Brigid's

Cross fashioned from rushes and beside it the charcoal heads of the seven men who had taken on the might of the British Empire and struck for Ireland's freedom. And looking down over all, little St Anthony standing on his plinth with two chipped fingers upraised and sadness in his eyes. (110)⁴⁰

In the evenings, he listens to the Walton Programme, providing “weekly reminders of the grace and beauty that lie in our heritage of Irish song—the songs our fathers loved”—songs that make Raphael think of his father, “A proud and noble soldier who died a noble death in an Irish field beneath an Irish sky” (117-118). He experiences immediate and stupendous success, so that St. Anthony's appears to be a “phantasmagorical galleon soaring toward the future at full sail across the skies” (93).

Such fantasy ships, however, may not last long. Raphael is associated, throughout *The Dead School*, with the most idealized notions of Irish identity. His town has been “nestled since time began at the foot of a mountain that rose majestically into the clear blue sky” (32). The excesses of the description in these sections on Raphael's early life always seem ready to tip into parody; Raphael becomes the national myth, the ideal of Irish identity articulated in the constitution, the stereotype propagated by nationalists and government pundits. His rural upbringing, Catholic roots, Republican sympathies, and national pride, along with his rapid and unbelievable success, make him the poster child for a particular stereotype of Irish identity.

It is scarcely surprising that Raphael will experience attempts at increasing liberalization in the 60s and 70s as jolts, and unwelcome ones. The world changes rapidly around him in this period, despite his attempts to keep St. Anthony's as:

a school which was, and acknowledged as such, a light on the hill, a fortress buffeted by the winds of change and caprice and modish fancy, against which it had,

⁴⁰ The name of the school, St. Anthony's, seems perfectly appropriate for Raphael's vision of his own vocation. St. Anthony is generally credited with the creation of a Christian monastic and ascetic tradition; Raphael, similarly, wants to make his school into an isolated and preserved bastion of Irishness and Catholicism.

no more than if it had been fortified by walls of concrete three feet thick, always remained firm and resolute. (126-127)

These winds, however, become increasingly powerful, and all of Raphael's ideals are undermined. The forces of liberalization begin to chip away at Raphael's achievements. Specifically, the feminist Ms. Evans, chair of the parents' committee, attempts to make various "improvements" to the school by introducing noncompetitive sport, supporting a trip to Waterworld instead of Kilmainham Gaol, and eliminating rosary beads, school uniforms, evening sodality, and "military style formation[s]" (144). Striking, as these do, at the heart of Raphael's Irish ideals of nationalism, religion, excellence, and order, her endless requests begin to undermine Raphael's faith in the trajectory of his entire life; she gives him violent headaches. Raphael is also buffeted by cultural changes outside the school, as sexual and secular entertainment becomes popular; the radio host Terry Krash insults the Walton Programme: "Who wants to hear a bunch of old songs about bogmen sitting by turf fires?" and discusses openly topics that Raphael considers indecent, such as bras, abortions, and fornication (125). When these cultural changes combine with Raphael's loss of faith in his father's nationalistic heroism (as discussed above), Raphael has little left to live for. Confused by the direction his life has taken, he blames all his losses on the progressive Ms. Evans, blaming her for all of his and, implicitly, the nation's problems: "Forward with Evans! Rob the poor! Fiddle the taxes! Divorce your wives! Blow up your neighbors! Melt babies' eyes! Torture animals! Laugh at your teachers! Go on—do it Evans!" (248). She becomes his scapegoat, the monster that has ruined him, his school, and his nation. Thus all of the traditional bases of Irish national identity—nationalism, religion, family life—are revealed as essentially corrupt or about to be discarded. And without these bases, poor Raphael cannot imagine something worth living for; he realizes that his father "had perished

in a lonely field and had gone to his grave to life cold and alone not for Jesus not for Mary not for Evelyn not for Ireland . . . but for . . . a great big royal duckegg, a bloated circle gawping blindly from behind a blackboard, a shameful zero. Nothing. Absolutely nothing at all” (146). As Ms. Evans undermines Raphael’s beliefs in the family and the church, and current IRA activities destroy his faith in nationalism, Raphael Bell reveals an Ireland that can no longer depend on conservative, Gaelic Romantic values.

And he is taken out.⁴¹ Malachy Dudgeon finds a scapegoat for his own failed life in Raphael, and while pretending to be Jack Nicholson with a group of girls, “He lets them know just what it is he is gonna do to a certain person. To a motherfucker who has had it coming for a long time” (265). Malachy points out, “And while I might not have been a psycho then, I certainly am one now. That is why I am going to make you pay” (266). Malachy thus intends to go psycho on Raphael Bell—at least to kill him, possibly also to torture him. However, in the midst of his own delusions, Raphael commits suicide, suggesting that Malachy is not needed to do the job. The center of Irishness seen in Raphael Bell can no longer hold; Raphael appears as old-fashioned and irrelevant as his Walton Programme. Traditional Ireland seems to implode under its own weight.

We have thus emerged with quite a list of characters identified with the sort of Irishness codified in de Valera’s 1937 constitution, characters that these playwrights and novelists see fit to kill off. The monster that Luke Gibbons suggests is mid-century Ireland, still firmly based on a Gaelic Romantic identity, still operating in the late eighties, needs to go. Characters associated with traditional religious faith, conservative domestic values, or

⁴¹ That Ms. Evans is *not* taken out seems to rest on two reasons: first of all, she provides a reflection of an increasingly liberal Ireland. While Ireland is moving past Raphael, it is moving toward her. Second, Raphael does not have the murderous tendencies that Malachy has; while Raphael condemns Evans, it never occurs to him to murder her.

nationalist pride will be taught a lesson, or, rather, be killed, in more or less gory ways. What we haven't mentioned yet is that these deaths are not always presented as cause for celebration. In fact, some of these works evidence considerable nostalgia for the loss of this particular construction of Ireland. The famous director Neil Jordan once said, "My parents had a certain idealism, that of the de Valera generation—rather admirable ideals, but their values are not viable any more, they don't apply. We have lost a sense of coherent idealism" (qtd. in Ardagh 16). Jordan articulates a simultaneous acknowledgement of the irrelevance of de Valerian values with a longing for the idealism that those values articulated. The loss of de Valera's vision is, in some ways, just that—loss. Even as authors like McCabe and McDonagh kill off the nation, they look nostalgically back toward a time when Ireland might have been a nation—a group of people held together by more than geographical boundaries and borders, a people held together by common beliefs and values. For while characters like Raphael Bell and Father Welsh meet unattractive ends, there is no suggestion that anything coherent or worthwhile might emerge to replace them.

In interviews, McCabe has emphasized his resolute support of a new, Technicolor, liberalized Ireland: "Anything that brings in colour, reveals the true nature of the people, which certainly isn't joylessness is fine with me" ("Patrick McCabe"). He locates this new vibrancy in the new media available in the later twentieth century: "For example I just love cable TV, I'm zapping all the time" ("Patrick McCabe"). One might expect, then, for McCabe's novels to champion popular culture and to offer the world of tinseltown as a desirable alternative to an illiberal and repressive nation. His works, however, suggest exactly the opposite. For characters like Francie Brady and Malachy Dudgeon, who embrace the comics, films, and music that a new, globalized Ireland has to offer, such entertainment

eventually seems bankrupt, and may even provide blueprints for violence and murder. Francie founds his decision to kill Mrs Nugent on an alien-invasion film, and Malachy impersonates J.J. Gittes from *Chinatown* as he prepares to murder Raphael Bell. Though “cable TV” and popular culture are valid respites for Patrick McCabe, they don’t seem to be clearly acceptable for his characters. And, in fact, his fiction always seems deeply suspicious of the Ireland emerging in the 1960s through the present (as *Call Me the Breeze* moves up to 2004).

Despite Patrick McCabe’s claims, then, his fiction demonstrates some ambivalence toward the ending of a Gaelic Romantic Ireland and the beginning of something new. For example, this elimination of the ideals of traditional Ireland seen in Raphael Bell creates no celebrations. As he views Raphael swinging from a noose, all Malachy can do is vomit and say “oh no oh Jesus Christ” (276). He is scarcely prepared to step into Raphael’s league boots. And the Ireland that follows him after his death in 1979 seems to be heading to hell in a handbasket, as the town gains foxy boxing, exotic dancing, a big disco, and a videoshop. The narrator points out: “Maybe it’s just as well poor old Raphael kicked the bucket when he did, for I doubt if his heart would have been able to stand up to all the carry-on. It’s got so bad now that if you didn’t know better, you’d think half the country was on drugs” (284). For McCabe, the choice seems to be between Raphael Bell’s Gaelic Romantic values and Malachy Dudgeon’s more globalized and messy “carry-on.” If both are monstrous, this raises questions about what possible coherent basis for nationhood could be formed in the early twenty-first century in Ireland—questions that the next chapters will engage.

CHAPTER IV
MAKING MONSTERS:
TECHNOLOGIES OF ABJECTION

“But listen here, while you’re sitting there. We’ve nearly got rid of the English. And we want no more strangers in our house. Those guys [the Jews], the pedlars and the moneylenders, your poor little friends with no country of their own, they’re roaming the country getting the small farmers into hock. Ready to take the land off them when the time comes. They’re all set. Just when we’re rid of the English we’ll have new masters.”—Jack Dalton to Henry Smart in Roddy Doyle’s A Star Called Henry⁴²

“It is my contention that the construction by the postcolonial elite of a subject of national self-identification entailed the rejection or expulsion of certain groups from the national family. This notion of abjection was reflected at the level of the national narrative”—Patrick Hanafin, Constituting Identity: Political Identity Formation and the Constitution in Post-Independence Ireland⁴³

“It was fine until Mrs Nugent started interfering and causing trouble”—Francie Brady in Patrick McCabe’s The Butcher Boy⁴⁴

In Roddy Doyle’s 1999 novel *A Star Called Henry*, set during the Easter Rising and the subsequent revolutionary struggle, Henry Smart argues with Jack Dalton about the murder of Henry’s Jewish friend David Climanis. Though Dalton claims that Climanis’ murder had nothing to do with his Jewish heritage, Dalton also speaks out for an Ireland emptied of any Jewish population: “Did it never occur to you to ask yourself why they’ve been run out of every country they’ve ever landed in? Or is every other country in Europe wrong?” (364). As he goes on to state, “If you’re not with us you’re against us” (365).

⁴² Page 363.

⁴³ In this quote, the “postcolonial elite” refers to the framers of the 1937 constitution, and the “national narrative” refers to the constructed ideal of a Gaelic Romantic Irish identity. Page 22.

⁴⁴ Page 177.

Dalton's vision of an independent Ireland is one that is racially unmixed, purified of religious or cultural contaminations: a new, pure nation for the Irish people, with no more "strangers" in the house. Though, in the previous chapter, we discussed authors killing off representatives of de Valera's Ireland, Doyle here presents a narrative that moves in the other direction by showing a revolutionary, nationalist state killing off those that don't fit within its definitions of "Irishness." Who, or what, is the monster seems to depend very much on your position.

Some historians argue that racist or exclusionary sentiments are part and parcel of forming a new nation, especially for those states within, or emerging from, a colonial context in which two separate cultures coexisted for some time. For, as Timothy Brennan argues, the postcolonial "*a priori* state" must "chas[e] a national identity after the fact"(58): "The idea of nationhood is not only a political plea, but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political structures, grows also a repeated dialectic of uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people" (62). Out of multiplicity and heterogeneity, a justification for the nation-state must be formed: a justification that often produces an articulation of "uniformity" and "national culture," producing a coherent myth out of chaos. New states have the burden of identifying a particular national character or essence, generally what Hanafin calls a "pre-colonial mythical self," to underwrite unity (10). Though people's sense of themselves as a nation may well predate the existence of a state, the state's articulation of the terms of that nationhood in legal documents, such as a constitution, delimits the nation's possibilities. One of the ways that the state justifies itself is by describing, and thereby, in many ways,

producing a particular version of the nation.⁴⁵ It becomes necessary to express not only what the nation is, but what it is not. Perhaps the most famous articulation of this idea is from Homi Bhabha's essay "Signs Taken for Wonders": "if the unitary (and essentialist) reference to race, nation, or cultural tradition is essential to preserve the presence of authority as an immediate mimetic effect, such essentialism must be exceeded in the articulation of 'differentiatory,' discriminatory identities" (173). The construction of a unitary and original nation self also requires the production of alternative selves against which to define that nation: devalued, 'differentiatory' groups.

In post 1921 Ireland, as we have already discussed, this articulation of an originary and continuous Irish identity is yoked to the Roman Catholic Church, to family values, and to nationalist sentiment. The de Valerian vision of Ireland created in the 1937 constitution is just this sort of state-sponsored myth of nationhood: a discursive production that writes over voices of dissent and opposing views in the production of an apparent national unity and Irish character. While the constitution is certainly only one voice among many in the formation of a nation, it possesses particular power due to its legal status; the state can, effectively, attempt to legislate cultural and morality, as discussed previously. O'Mahony and Delanty describe the period of the revolutionary struggle in this way: "The emotions unleashed by the new nationalism were sectarian and even racist. An organic unity of Catholicism, nationality, culture and race was forged in promoting extreme Anglophobia" (79). In *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, Brian Moore describes the reading habits of the main character Gavin's father in this way:

⁴⁵ And in producing this state-sponsored version of nationhood, the state attempts to cut off competing visions of the nation. John Regan's *The Irish Counter Revolution, 1921-1926* describes the early state's encounters with fascist and socialist conceptions of the state.

A Jewish name discovered in an account of a financial transaction, a Franco victory over the godless Reds, a hint of British perfidy in international affairs, an Irish triumph in the sports field, an evidence of Protestant bigotry, a discovery of Ulster governmental corruption: these were his reading goals. (24)

The emerging nationalism thus created both a ideal of Irishness and a series of dark doubles—that which is *not* Irish—headed up by the primary enemy: colonial England.⁴⁶ The articulation of what the nation is *not* provides exterior cultures to define the new state and its construction of national identity against: in Bhabha's terms, "discriminatory identities." In Jack Dalton's case, one of these cultures is the Jewish people; he describes them as opportunistic and greedy, and notes that, like the English, they supposedly aspire to become the masters of Ireland. Though there are a few Jewish people in the Organization (Briscoe and Noyk), Dalton sees their culture as mysterious and sinister, something he cannot understand or access: "They know what side their bread is buttered on. If they're allowed to eat butter. Or bread. For fuck sake, man" (364). Dalton is thus unsure about many aspects of Jewish life and culture, but he does know that the Jews certainly are strangers in his house: they aren't Irish. The production of national identity can thus be seen as happening alongside the twin production of that-which-is-not-the-nation: those dark doppelgangers of identity. Basically, nation formation often requires divisive discourse: a uniform us versus them. The Irish versus the British; the Irish versus the Jews; perhaps, the Irish versus everyone else. The Catholics versus the Protestants. In order to become a nation, Ireland must be different from the cultures that surround it, or that would threaten it from within, and what Hanafin calls the "postcolonial elite" of Ireland produced a "Gaelic Romantic" identity for the nation, founded on the church, the family, and nationalism.

⁴⁶ Certainly England's exclusion from Irish identity as the former colonial ruler did not rule out many Irish men and women traveling to England to seek work, as the pre-Celtic Tiger Irish economy did not allow many people sufficient income to support their families.

Hanafin describes: “The Irish self that was posited by the postcolonial elite was pure and clean, expelling what it considered to be ‘impure’ elements. In this sense, it conforms to Kristeva’s notion of abjection” (20). On one side we have a “pure,” “clean” Irishness, and on the other all that is impure, disgusting, and monstrous—that which is *abjected* in the process of constructing an unpolluted, originary national character. Impure, unclean identities are produced and expelled, thereby preserving the purity of the originary pre-colonial self. Scapegoats are produced. This distinction between pure and impure and the expulsion of that which is polluted in these discussions of state formation bears significant similarity to the critical discourse surrounding the construction of monstrosity. Monsters represent that which a culture deems impure, unclean—that which needs expulsion. In fact, critical discussion of monstrosity often uses just these terms, hearkening to Mary Douglas’s book *Purity and Danger* and Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*. And much critical discussion of monstrosity in the last twenty years has relied upon this discursive similarity between the construction of monstrosity and the production of ‘discriminatory’ identities during the formation of the state. A state’s ‘discriminatory’ identities—that which it expels as unclean—are its monsters. Thus a state’s gothic texts (and its horror films) cast those expelled selves and dark doppelgangers as the tale’s villains. And a society’s monsters, whether in horror film or gothic literature, change through time to reflect that society’s new anxieties or preoccupations; the monstrous baby subgenre of horror became prolific in the 1970’s after the rise of women’s rights movements and controversies over reproductive rights. Similarly, Eamon de Valera himself, alongside the Gaelic Romantic identity associated with him, becomes a monstrous aberration in these contemporary texts, though he was once, by many,

lauded as a hero. Who or what is impure and monstrous depends on numerous variables, mainly the particular society and era.

One term, “abjection,” can then cover both kinds of production: discriminatory identities and monsters. We have previously discussed the abject as a set of things—most specifically as corpses. In this chapter, I would like to move to considering abjection as a process—the process by which monsters are constructed, in which “impure” elements are expelled from the community. This dialectic of pure and impure renders monstrous that which does not fall within the boundaries of national identity.

Criticism on the Gothic often argues that the concept of the abject allows for a critical integration of the construction of monsters and the preservation of a national community. Robert Miles writes that “the nationalist effort to construct a usable past is haunted, in the Gothic, by what has been abjected in the process” (35), suggesting that Gothic monsters display lost, discarded, and/or abjected identities, selves expelled by the construction of a unitary, originary national self. The abject monster represents all that the state is not; as such, it records alternatives (perhaps revolutionary ones) to the dominant articulation of national essence and always erupts as a challenge to traditional definitions of nationhood. You could, as many have, call this monster the “return of the [national] repressed.”

These issues, then, of the relationship between abjection and national identity, are appropriately dramatized in the horror genre’s emphasis on constructions of monstrosity. The genre can provide a record of alternative selves rendered monstrous by the prevailing construction of nationality that is de Valera’s Ireland. Horror narratives, with their self-conscious attention to the construction of monstrosity, may be where the most explicit commentary on the mechanics of national identity consolidation emerges. We should also

acknowledge that horror—as the genre where ‘discriminatory identities’ take the stage and run amok—provides one space in which a critique (perhaps a revolutionary one) of the dominant, unified, originary myth of national character could be advanced.⁴⁷

I have been arguing that the business of national critique finds an appropriate paradigm in the horror genre, and that the horror genre then both explicitly and implicitly informs the way that these authors approach their critiques. In the last chapter, we discussed how de Valera’s construction of Irishness is “killed off” by contemporary authors, who present fissures within the traditional pillars of Irish society, among them the church, the family, and nationalism. The previous chapter focused primarily on associations between De Valera’s Ireland and characters who are then killed off, primarily because such a conservative vision of the national self needs to die in order to move into new potentials for national identities. “Killing Off the Nation” thus showed de Valera’s Ireland as the monstrous villain from one point of view. However, in these texts, monsters actually proliferate wildly, and particular constructions of monstrosity are entirely dependent on individual subject positions. The reader’s monsters may not be the same as the characters’. For just as readers may label characters like Mag or Raphael as monstrous, repressive anachronisms, the characters within these works create their own abjected monsters. In this chapter, I am thus interested in moving down from the high vantage point of the previous chapter—in which we, as readers, made connections between particular ideologies and characters (connections those characters would not be aware of)—into the motivations and

⁴⁷ Though I would scarcely argue that Freddy Krueger as child abuser is a discarded identity that America needs to recover, the racist narratives of many Gothic texts ask contemporary readers to consider a world in which being Jewish or Catholic would not be monstrous—in which those identities could be allowed full participation in the state. Similarly, I think, the use of religion, sexuality, and politics as markers of monstrosity in the narratives we will discuss below ask readers to consider a world in which such categories no longer render some citizens more valued than others.

beliefs of those characters, as I believe that they demonstrate, again and again, the attraction of abjection as a method through which to preserve identity, as well as the process's ultimate failure. *Who* kills characters off and *why* are some questions we will consider in this chapter, as we move more into the mechanics of monster construction, looking at abjection as a *process* related to identity formation, and specifically to Irish national identity. I argue that these works show abjection in action, but that the primary goal of these texts is actually to show that abjection always ultimately fails as a method of preserving societal boundaries. These authors then advocate for a nation based on a more secure footing than the demonization of undesired groups.

Monsters and Their Victims

The most interesting and nuanced investigation of the process of abjection is McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. Though we discussed this novel briefly in the introduction, and returned to it in the previous chapter, we have yet to consider the novel's engagement with constructions of monstrosity. For while Mrs. Nugent is a monster, as we suggested previously, she is a particular kind of monster—namely an alien; Francie is also a monster; and a variety of other monsters stalk their way through this text. *The Butcher Boy* is overtly concerned with the nature of monstrosity and the mechanics of its construction.

The first monster that readers may notice—the most obvious monster—is Francie himself; he is a mentally deranged murderer. And, indeed, Francie hints at a slasher film serial killer in the tradition of Norman Bates. In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, Carol Clover argues that this is the dominant paradigm in slasher film villains today—a sexually

ambiguous, probably Oedipal, male driven to murderous rage.⁴⁸ The reason for the killer's desire to inflict pain is both the loss of and desire for the mother, and Francie's motives for murder prove similar. When his own mother commits suicide, he begins to fantasize about Mrs. Nugent as a replacement mother, and he even has a dream in which she offers him her breast: "she slowly unbuttoned her blouse and took out her breast. Then she said: This is for you Francis" (64). This tension between his real, dead mother and the idealized replacement mother leads him to murder; Francie clearly fits within Clover's description of slasher villains as "propelled by psychosexual fury" (27). Francie thus functions, for the reader, as a "monstrous" though human villain, and by hinting at Francie's similarities with slasher film villains like Norman Bates, McCabe encourages readers to consider other possible monsters in the novel. This allusion, however, operates as an allusion directed toward the reader, and is certainly not anything that Francie is aware of.

Francie is rendered monstrous by more than this. If the Bradys represent a kind of Irishness (poor, alcoholic, insane) that the town as a whole (invested as it is in de Valera's vision of a domestic, Catholic Ireland) cannot accept, then Francie operates specifically as the town's abject. Other critics have noticed this relationship between Francie and his community, though they do not use the term "abject" or discuss Francie as the town's "monster." For example, Herron suggests that the Bradys reveal "the underside" of de Valera's idealized Ireland and that Francie becomes "that which is expelled from the main current of the community" (176, 178). Tim Gauthier similarly suggests that "Francie Brady adopts or internalizes the dominant culture's hatred." He explains Francie's relationship to the community as the other's relationship to the self:

⁴⁸ Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992). Clover argues that this kind of sexually ambiguous serial killer is now the norm in horror, as she notes "the progeny of Norman Bates stalk the genre up to the present day" (27).

For the community, that Other is the Bradys, who must be ostracized for the new conception of the community to be established; their presence simply serves to recall an Irishness that the new Ireland would rather not acknowledge. If Francie's parents are Irish stereotypes (the drunken father, the long-suffering mother) it is because they embody truths about the community that it must face, rather than live above, as the Nugents do.

Both of these critical works explicate Francie's relationship with the community as one not only of opposition, but also of definition, as Francie embodies that which the community cannot accept—an implicitly “real” Ireland operating beneath the Gaelic Romantic ideal. Francie is the community's monster because he is what its vision of itself, paralleling de Valera's idealized vision of Ireland, cannot and will not accept. The town's rejection of Francie is reflected by the discomfort that the women of the town feel around him. Well before the death of Francie's father, they become hesitant and awkward around Francie, unsure of how to interact with a young delinquent:

They couldn't make up their minds who was going to speak. Little coughs and all this and one looking at the other—you say hello to him. No—*you do!* It went on like that for a minute or two. I think they thought I was going to pull a machine gun out from under my coat drrr die you dogs. . . . The smiles I had to laugh at them too—they weren't like smiles at all more like elastic bands pulled tight. Twang! and back they'd go. (108-110)

Though Francie, as he always does, makes this into a humorous scene, he is aware that he makes the women of the town very uncomfortable and that they see him as a potentially violent, unpredictable force. Francie doesn't fit with the women's vision of their town. He is the town's abjected monster, a beast that ultimately arises out of its subordinated position in order to demonstrate the failures of the dominant paradigm. Notably, Mrs. Nugent labels Francie as a “pig”: a beast that is something less than human, a *monstrous* boy/ hog hybrid.

However, the presentation of abjection in *The Butcher Boy* does not stop there. For Francie, if he is the town's monster, goes on subsequently—and, indeed, *because of* his

abandonment by his family and the town—to create his own monster: Mrs. Nugent. On one level, she could certainly be said to operate as Francie’s abject, as his desire to become a Nugent conflicts with his identification with and love for his own parents; she complicates Francie’s preferred self-definition, and must therefore be killed in order to prove Francie’s loyalty to his real mother. She is his abject, that which must be expelled in order to maintain a coherent identity. The way in which Francie comes to understand Mrs. Nugent’s relevance thus seems perfectly appropriate. She is his monster, and he then articulates her as just that: specifically, an alien.

McCabe does not apply this label arbitrarily, however; Francie himself consciously creates it as a way to understand the relationship between himself and Mrs Nugent. And Francie learns to articulate Mrs. Nugent’s monstrosity by watching horror entertainment and by considering its presentation of monstrosity. Through viewing a horror film and a horror TV show, namely a film about aliens that he sees in Dublin and *The Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, Francie learns what monsters are and how you deal with them. When Francie runs away to Dublin briefly, he is excited by a cinema marquee:

The Corinthian Cinema written in unlit lights. What’s going on here I said. The creatures were coming to take over the planet earth because their own was finished there was nothing left on it. The shaky writing said they came from beyond the stars bringing death and destruction. I’d have to go and see them aliens when it opened up. (40)

He takes great pleasure in watching the film when he returns to the cinema:

[The alien] had a human body that he stole off some bogman of a farmer that just gave him a lift but you knew by the twisted sneer that inside he was a fat green blob with tentacles like an octopus and his face all scales. Make no mistake he says we will control the world and neither you nor anyone else in this town will stop us. It was him saying *in this town* made me think of the women and Mrs Nugent they were always saying that. (42)

Francie takes several things from this viewing. He associates the aliens specifically with the town's women and Mrs. Nugent due to their proprietary way of saying "in this town," which reveals their snobby, exclusive, moral sense of middle-class community ownership. This vision of the community excludes Francie as a "pig" and makes Francie into an abjected monster. The film also foregrounds the idea that there are humans and there are monsters, and they exist in opposition. Furthermore, some monsters actually look human—they may have human faces, but they are "fat green blob[s] with tentacles" beneath. Francie's subsequent awareness of a possible opposition between a surface humanity and a monstrous, entirely different essence resonates throughout *The Butcher Boy*. It is hardly surprising that Francie associates these aliens with Mrs. Nugent; much earlier in the text, he contemplated the difference between an apparently kind and socially graceful Mrs. Nugent and the cruel, vicious reality: "Mrs Nugent all smiles when she met us and how are you getting on Mrs and young Francis are you both well? It was hard to believe that all the time what she was really saying was: *Ah hello Mrs Pig how are you and look Philip do you see what's coming now—the Pig Family!*" (5). After viewing the alien invasion film, Francie gains an awareness of a new category, the alien, which explains Nugent as a woman whose appearance diverges sharply from her real self. Francie makes her into his own personal monster, the scapegoat for all his sins, failures, and losses.

Francie, in fact, uses this new category to explain a variety of duplicitous characters. Aliens figure in Francie's dreams about Bubble: in one, he sports "a huge alien's head like a wasp" (153), and this association between Bubble and aliens seems to result from Bubble's inability to stand up for Francie and clearly condemn Father Sullivan's behavior. Though, as a priest, Bubble should protect Francie, he is much more concerned "That everybody would

hear” about Father Sullivan’s indiscretions, and thus he shows the same contrast between surface and depth that Mrs. Nugent displays (101). Francie’s anxiety about this potential difference between presentation and reality also comes out during his final confrontation with his friend Joe, when Joe finally and totally rejects Francie:

that wasn’t Joe I said I didn’t know who that was but it wasn’t Joe, Joe is gone they took him away from me and all I could see was a pair of thin lips saying that’s right we did and there’s nothing you can do that will ever bring him back again isn’t that true Francis Pig you little piggy baby pig and I says yes Mrs Nugent it is. (204)

Notably, Francie does not try to explain Joe’s strange behavior by suggesting that Joe might be in a bad mood or have a nasty headache. The paradigm that the alien film has made available to him suggests that the figure which appears to be Joe might actually be someone else—a fake, an alien. This interpretation of the “new” Joe as an alien, and the real Joe as “gone,” allows Francie to preserve some hope that his friendship with the real Joe could be recaptured. Joe here slides into Mrs. Nugent, as both are apparently aliens beneath their human exteriors. The alien film thus provides Francie with a new awareness of a possible divergence between appearance and reality and a new paradigm for understanding his world; monstrosity is something that must be interpreted and discovered when any human could, somewhere deep inside, be hiding some insidious evil. With the encouragement of this film, Francie creates his alien, Mrs. Nugent.

Francie also views the television show *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* on one of the occasions when he breaks into the Nugents’ home. He similarly loses himself in this narrative, noting the strength and wiliness of the giant octopus: “He was a cute bastard sending out these big curling tentacles with suckers on them knocking the sub against rocks upside down and everything” (62). He roots for Admiral Nelson as he battles the creature: “*Kill the bastard!* I shouted, I was getting excited too, *harpoon him that’ll shut him up!*”

When depth charges succeed in ending the octopus's shenanigans, Francie reacts with pleasure:

Fair play to you admiral, I said, that shut him up. And it sure did the octopus was lying at the back of the cave like a busted cushion and it would be a long time before he was suckering or tentacling again. I made myself a big mug of tea and another doorstep of bread and jam to celebrate. (62)

As he watches this film, Francie seems aware of the proper treatment of monsters—the “bastards” must be killed and shut up, and such deaths are proper sources for celebration. The death of the monster is necessary to put that monster in its proper place; namely, monsters must be killed off.

Thus, these two creature flicks have foregrounded several important lessons for Francie. Some people are actually aliens, though they appear human, and the best way to deal with monsters is to kill them. Horror film has provided Francie with a paradigm through which to process Mrs. Nugent's abjection—it allows Francie to make her into a monster rather than a human woman, and he has learned how to deal with monsters. It is no wonder, then, that the eventual murder of Mrs. Nugent relies on the contrast between surface and depth found in the alien flick—she must be opened up, and her true self revealed. As he looks at her, Francie observes: “She had a white mask of a face on her,” so he cuts her open to reveal what is beneath that mask (209). When the police come to take Francie away, Francie whistles: “I don't know what I was whistling I think it was the tune from *Voyage to the Bottom of The Sea*” (214). Certainly, Francie's decision to murder Mrs. Nugent rests on more than her possible status as an alien—as Nicholas Grene points out, “she stands for the whole system of things that has humiliated him and his family” (par. 8). As we discussed previously, she possesses a kind of Irish good life that Francie desperately desires and cannot have. Francie cannot accept his own longing for Mrs. Nugent's maternal caresses and turns to

murder as one way to avoid accepting those feelings, which imply a betrayal of his own mother. However, it remains that Francie's experiences with the horror genre provide him with a way to process his feelings about Mrs. Nugent and a *justification* for her murder—which thereby account for his subsequent lack of guilt. He learns about monstrosity as a category reserved for the inhuman, and about how monsters should be treated, from the horror genre. You could say that it is horror entertainment that teaches Francie all he needs to know about abjection.

Neil Jordan's film version of *The Butcher Boy*, which Patrick McCabe co-wrote, expands the equation of Mrs. Nugent with an alien.⁴⁹ In Jordan's film, while watching the movie in Dublin, Francie muses: "There was one of them aliens, he had a human body he stole off a snotty nose doctor but you knew by the cut of him that inside was Mrs. Nugent" (Jordan). The clips shown of the film feature such B-horror conventions as a large floating brain with eyes, a screaming young woman, and various scattered test tubes. This moment in the film illustrates Francie's familiarity with and affinity for such films (the scene shows Francie yelling "Come on yuz alien bastards" at the screen) as well as the possibility that Mrs. Nugent is the alien monster of the story. Fiona Shaw, as Mrs. Nugent, wears a particularly vile shade of green throughout the film, rendering her not only very unattractive but also a representative of the "little green men" popular in representations of aliens. After her murder, Francie notes, "There's only one place for aliens and that's under the rotten cabbages in the brock heap." In both the novel and the movie, Francie gains a new awareness of monsters and how to deal with them from monster flicks; he comes to believe these

⁴⁹ Some scholars have disputed that McCabe co-wrote the screenplay, though his name is in the credits. Jordan has claimed that he put the script together himself, but McCabe explains in his interview with FitzSimon that Jordan put the script together out of the two different drafts that McCabe wrote. Though McCabe acknowledges "a lot of stuff [was] written by [Jordan]," he believes that the majority of the material was his. Patrick McCabe, interview with Christopher FitzSimon, p. 177.

lessons are pertinent to him. When his world falls apart, he seeks someone to blame, and Mrs. Nugent is fittingly “shut up.”

Francie’s anxieties about surface and depth, as well as his anxieties about his family’s failure to access the Irish good life that Nugent possesses, lead him to create a monster, Mrs. Nugent, that he comes to see as a certain kind of monster: an alien. This particular kind of monster actually resonates throughout *The Butcher Boy*. The monsters that a society creates reflect the preoccupations of that particular society and time. David Skal’s *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* argues that 1960s films about aliens taking over human bodies were attempts to deal with the threat of Communism in the McCarthy age, the fear that the normal-appearing person next to you could actually be corrupted inside by an insidious and evil doctrine. Films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* feature men and women who seem to be themselves, but reveal their essential alien nature through group-oriented behavior and subtle personality differences, differences that must be detected by the few remaining humans (Skal 247-250). Jack Lynch, the fourth Taoiseach of Ireland, used the euphemism of “alien ideologies” to discuss Communists (qtd. in Coogan, *Ireland* 517). As discussed previously, McCabe’s novel features a preoccupation with aliens and an interest specifically in alien films that display a difference between bodily appearance and essential nature. The novel also incorporates many references to cultural anxieties about Communism, and specifically the Cuban missile crisis. The society as a whole is mad with fear, and the Communists are the monsters of the moment: Communists provide one ‘discriminatory identity’ against which to define Western nations. On his travels, Francie meets an old woman who wants him to pray with her—her particular prayer is “please dear Jesus save us from all harm don’t let the world come to an end” (183). She wants to hear “news”; when

Francie inquires what sort of news she wants, she replies “Ach! she says and scratches her backside, the communists ah say I what would I know about communists h’ho you won’t be saying that when Mr Baldy Kruschev presses the button. And he’s going to press it. Make no mistake!” (183). This societal fear of nuclear annihilation results in the creation of monsters—namely Communists and their horror film counterpart, aliens.

The novel, however, demonstrates extreme skepticism about the creation of monsters of any sort. Monsters appear to be molded out of a society’s anxieties and abjected identities; there may, actually, be nothing particularly threatening or violent about them. Though evil may exist, *monsters* are always societal constructions. As a woman selling chips to Francie puts it, “she said she hoped the communists won she said they’re no worse than the rest of them” (40). Society goes on creating its scapegoats, molded from fear and anxiety, creations that satisfy the urge to find someone responsible, to blame someone, to project our fears and desires onto some exterior mark—to abject someone. And perhaps this need for blame, for a scapegoat, finds particular expression in societies without currently viable national institutions; when a culture lacks its own firm foundations, it may be much more tempting to create monsters. Again and again in McCabe’s fictions, characters create their own scapegoats and plot their revenge. Francie learns this strategy from the horror genre—the source of most narratives of abjection, monstrosity, and murder—and he identifies and eliminates his monster. His society has apparently learned the same lesson, as it fears and blames the Communists for a possible end of the world. McCabe’s novel thus displays a chain of monsters. Readers may label Francie a monster, Francie labels Nugent a monster, and society labels the communists monsters. However, McCabe undercuts each of these levels, always revealing the constructed nature of monstrosity.

While *The Butcher Boy* provides a key example of this phenomenon, especially as it ties abjection so clearly to horror entertainment, McCabe's novels almost always offer a very similar plot: someone casts someone else as their scapegoat and their personal monster, and the plot revolves around the attempt to eliminate their inhuman enemy. These texts often tend to present what I would call a chain of abjection, in that those who are abjected generally proceed to abject others: scapegoats beget more scapegoats. Furthermore, abjection often *begins* with the community rejecting someone who does not fit their paradigm of Irishness (generally tied to conservative Gaelic Romantic values). The person so rejected may go on to create his or her own monsters, but it generally begins in the community. McCabe's second novel, *Carn*, demonstrates a very similar plot, and its articulation is, again, tied to horror film.

The town of Carn is a small border community previously supported by revenue from a railway. When the rail closes, the town becomes destitute, but James Cooney steps in decades later to build a meat processing plant in Carn, which provides new economic prosperity—for a while. Eventually, Cooney also closes the processing plant, and the town again becomes economically depressed. Within this fragmented, dissolving community, locals Jack Murphy and the barman decide to teach the town prostitute Josie Keenan a lesson. Once they enter her home, they begin comparing her, unfavorably, with the Sacred Heart and the "Little Flower" (a reference to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, a virgin saint), comparisons that highlight her supposed failure as a representative of Irish Catholic womanhood. She is certainly no de Valerian domestic servant; though she works from her home, she does so by selling her body to married men. Her uncontrolled sexuality resists society's attempts to legislate women into domestic roles; she is something that a conservative articulation of Irish

values cannot accept—its abject. Her sexuality exceeds the town's attempts to contain it; to them, she becomes something foreign, a monstrous witch of a woman. The barman unfolds example after example of her promiscuity before raping her and saying "Stay out of the Railway Hotel! And don't think of telling anybody about this if you're wise—not that they'd believe the likes of you anyway" (167). Josie, as a solitary woman, provides a convenient scapegoat for the men's (and implicitly the town's) anxieties over their loss of culture—an anxiety that finds its keenest expression after that culture has already begun dissolving, as James Cooney prepares to disband the meat processing plant. Abjection rarely stops there, however.

After this experience, Josie calls Pat Lacey to visit her; he provides a convenient scapegoat. Though Pat Murphy and the barman's actions were probably based on revelations from Pat Lacey, he certainly did not rape her himself or tell the two men that they should. Regardless of this, Josie knows that Pat Lacey will come if she calls, and that he is a man—a class of human that has fallen significantly in her estimation after being sexually abused by her father and finally raped by the town's barman. She calls him a "big man" and attempts to elide the possible differences between him and other men: "I thought all you men could hold your drink.... Jack's a man like yourself. He'd understand. Men understand one another" (204-5). She drugs Pat and ties him up; it is not clear what she ultimately means to do to him, as he escapes, but her behavior demonstrates McCabe's interest in the chain reaction produced by abjection—as Josie is abjected, she, in turn, abjects Pat. Denying him his individuality, she processes him only as a representative of a group; he thereby becomes something less than human, something rather monstrous, to her. These actions are again duplicated in the sectarian violence rampant in the town and area. A figure defined only as

the “northman” (which makes him more a boogeyman of sectarian irrationality than a character) informs Benny Dolan that the local shopkeeper Alec Hamilton has been hiding a unionist weapons stockpile—an assertion that runs counter to all of Benny’s knowledge and intuition. Though Benny knows him as “Solid, dependable Alec Hamilton,” the northman asserts that “He’s been checked and double-checked” (182). The eventual raid on Hamilton’s house turns up no evidence of sectarian activities of any kind, much less a weapons cache. The Hamiltons seem to have been fingered merely out of the need to finger someone—out of the sectarian need to have a target, which itself seems only to reflect a permeating need for scapegoats.

As in *The Butcher Boy*, we are encouraged to understand this process partially through the horror genre. On one level, the town is rife with real horrific images. Perhaps the most glaring examples of violence are the paramilitary campaigns in the text, one of which throws Blast Morgan “twenty feet across the street with half his stomach hanging out” (115). The human body seems to be a mutable and fragile creation, with flesh prone to decay and destruction. Josie views images of a bombing on the television and listens to a young woman repeating “*Bodies everywhere*,” a phrase that sticks with her (141). She later remembers her father’s words as he raped her: “*There’s no skin on God’s sweet earth like the skin of a woman. Jesus like the skin of a woman*,” a thought that quickly morphs with her memories of the bombing on television, “His cries came to her and the words again *bodies bodies*” (146). The parallel between these memories seems to be an equation of people with flesh, a lack of respect for people as other individuals. To her father, Josie merely offers a woman’s skin, and he forgets that she is also his daughter. To paramilitaries, civilian bodies are chits in a poker match. This devolution of people into parts, and into parts that it might be proper and

desirable to manipulate, is expressed both by the paramilitaries and by men who merely take their pleasure from women's flesh. Josie imagines the bar peopled by various men who used or abused her: "With the whole room to themselves, not a woman in sight, no women to come between them and their clandestine talk of bodies, more bodies, dead or alive it was all the same to them" (170). Rape, incest, and murder all become part of a masculine economy that values people as body parts. And this provides one common thread through many of the examples of abjection we will examine in this chapter: the denial of an individual's humanity (usually accomplished by associating them with an already abjected group identity) enables that individual to become merely flesh, merely parts. Once Nugent becomes an alien, she needs to be killed. If Josie is labeled as a promiscuous whore, then she can be raped. If Pat is a man, he could be tortured. And if you're on the other side of the sectarian divide, if you're a "Unionist" or a "Nationalist" (depending on which side you start on), then you deserve death.

It is thus scarcely surprising that the town, and the book, is named Carn, and that the central place of employment is a meat processing plant, all of which emphasize flesh and processing and packaging of flesh. This normalization of violence is seen in the local bar, which several times features the same exploitation slasher film:

The video screen went blank and when the picture returned a crazed youth in an asbestos suit was setting a series of young women alight. He met them in singles bars, lured them to his home and burnt them alive. They turned from the woman on the stage and gave their attention to this for a while. They stared open-mouthed as he applied his flame thrower to the feet of a trussed-up girl. (193)

First of all, this image shows the brutal violence already rampant within the town, providing a reflection of the carnage produced by sectarian violence. On another level, however, this film displays the method by which such violence is perpetuated; the crazed youth makes the

young woman into something less than human—he abjects her—and thereby treats her only as flesh, as something subhuman. The film thereby invites consideration alongside the town’s abjection of Josie, Josie’s abjection of Pat, and each paramilitary side’s abjection of the other. The community as a whole is implicated in this process. Notably, the men merely gape at the image, making no attempt to change the channel, mute the volume, or even to avoid watching—they are captivated by the images of sadism on the screen. The horror film displays the constant in Carn’s narrative: a dependence upon abjection as a method by which to preserve self or group definition.

This plot device appears again and again in McCabe’s fiction. First, the main character is abjected by the community based on his or her failure to reflect the idealized Irishness of a Gaelic Romantic nation-state. Francie and Josie are rejected by their communities for these reasons. Similarly, Pussy Braden in *Breakfast on Pluto* is eventually rejected by his community due to his status as a cross-dressing homosexual—something the 1937 constitution certainly makes no room for. And when Malachy Dudgeon enters the de Valerian world of Raphael Bell’s school, St. Anthony’s, he finds that he constantly comes up short and cannot measure up to Bell’s expectations; Bell, the representative of de Valerian values, rejects Malachy. Even Pat in *Emerald Germs of Ireland* is labeled as something less than a real man (who would be strong, nationalist, violent, rather like Pat’s father) by his community, based on his strange attachment to his mother and to “dolls” like his tin soldier. But once the main character has been so rejected by the community, it never stops there. Second, that character goes on to abject someone else, and all these abjections are generally portrayed as part of a nation-wide tendency to manufacture monstrous scapegoats. Thus, Pussy blames his father, the rapist priest, and fantasizes about burning down his church; all

this takes place within a brutal world of sectarian killings and bombing campaigns. Malachy Dudgeon labels Raphael as his scapegoat, and concocts a plan to murder him, while the nation around them gets more permissive and violent. Pat becomes a serial killer, taking out perhaps more than fifty people. Abjection doesn't stop—it keeps going in a chain of blame and murderous violence that shows no inclination of even slowing down. And we are encouraged, especially in *The Butcher Boy* and *Carn*, to associate this process with the horror genre, with its presentations of brutality, murder, and monstrosity—the presentation of characters as either victims to be killed by monsters or monsters to be eliminated. Either way, any character just becomes flesh.

Though this plot is perhaps most consistently articulated in McCabe's novels, which seem to return to this process obsessively, it occurs frequently in other contemporary writers as well. In *A Skull in Connemara*, McDonagh presents abjection similarly, as a process associated with denying a person his or her human individuality and turning that person into flesh, into parts. Mick is looking for someone to blame for the removal of his wife's bones from the cemetery; he and Mairtin have been hammering skull and bones "to skitter" with some mallets as they discuss this grave robbing incident. When Mairtin accidentally reveals that he knows more than he should about Oona's disappearance, Mick picks up a mallet, ready to smash Mairtin's skull. In the moment that Mick decides on Mairtin's guilt, Mairtin then becomes equivalent to the skulls and bones scattered over his living room, and the fact that Mick batters Mairtin's skull with a mallet reveals this parallel. Mairtin is now merely flesh, merely bones, just like the skeletons strewn over the cottage: bones ready to be battered.

However, in many ways, the world of McDonagh's work is a more extreme example of this process of turning people into manipulable parts than McCabe's: abjection is the norm. Martin McDonagh's work demonstrates a world in which blaming someone else and taking them out seems to be a universally acknowledged path toward self-fulfillment. And this process seems at least partially based on an unrelenting brutal environment; the world of Leenane and Aran in McDonagh's plays is one where you are likely to be tortured and dismembered if you murder a cat, or to be beaten to death with a poker for stealing a letter. Punishments are out of all proportion with crimes, and McDonagh offers little to no escape from this brutal, blood-thirsty world.⁵⁰ As Pato Dooley puts it in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, "You can't kick a cow in Leenane without some bastard holding a grudge twenty year" (31). Indeed, Ray clings to his grudge against Maureen for stealing his swing ball, and Maureen proves totally unable to forgive her mother for her (admittedly much more serious) trespasses. Mag ends up dead; Maureen takes out her scapegoat.

There are certainly differences in McCabe's and McDonagh's approaches to the phenomenon we have called abjection, however. While McCabe generally depicts a character who has been abjected by his community for failing to live up to Gaelic Romantic standards, this doesn't happen in McDonagh's work. Mainly this is because representatives of such values in McDonagh are few and far between: Father Welsh provides the only real moral center in all of the plays. Figures like Mag or Mary Johnny are partially associated with that sort of moral, conservative community, but even these characters are generally shown to participate in the universal culture of brutality in Leenane, whether by burning letters or cursing five year olds to hell.

⁵⁰ The exception being Father Welsh, but, as I argued in the last chapter, I believe he is introduced for the explicit purpose of killing him off.

What these plays, however, *do* require is an audience with moral values similar to Father Welsh's. These plays need an audience who can be shocked and titillated—whose moral code is therefore *different* from that represented in the play—in order for them to work. For an audience as amoral as McDonagh's characters, these plays would produce nothing—they would be terribly boring. All these plays assume an audience whose values can be violated, and therein lies the pleasure—the scandal and titillation of laughing at the brutal machinations of the very strange people and very strange community of McDonagh's work. For *shocking* an audience to be worth attempting, you must assume that some moral foundations are there, that there's something to shake. McDonagh's plays, which always depend on shock value, make this assumption. While characters like Father Welsh who personify these sort of presumed traditional values *within* the world of the play are quite rare in McDonagh's canon, we should not forget that the play's *audience* is always there as a moral center to be played off of and violated. As José Lanfers has stated, “the plays are effective only because they rely on the audience to be able to perceive and feel what the characters do not”—namely, the audience must possess that “moral center” which the characters do not have (“Playwrights” 219). This is quite similar to Christopher Murray's interpretation of Synge's work, in which:

the audience's orthodox moral position, which would normally incline towards Shawn's, is undercut and the audience is left little choice but to rejoice with the others on stage at Christy's disclosure. A moral issue is brazenly made fun of and the audience is implicated in the conspiracy. (qtd in Lanfers, “Playwrights” 219)

Implicitly, then, all the plays' digs at the church and the family are directed at the audience, at the titillating violation of their sacred cows. For both Synge and McDonagh, the spectators are, implicitly, who's attacked in the play. As I suggested in the previous chapter's discussion of Father Welsh, it is the audience who ultimately becomes the stand in for

traditional, conservative values—for some (however tentative or self-consciously held) faith in the church and the family— and it is therefore the audience who is violated and implicitly “killed off.” If this was all there was in a McDonagh play, however, one could be excused for wondering why anyone goes. And certainly people wonder the same thing about horror films—why would anyone pay to be implicitly violated and murdered for two hours? Or why pay one-hundred dollars a ticket to see McDonagh’s new play *The Pillowman*—which features the onstage torture and murder of children? Horror films even usually kill off the monster, reestablishing some sort of moral order by the end—something that McDonagh’s works don’t usually do. José Laners suggests that these works “act as agent provocateurs in the national debate,” using their “contrariness to accepted pieties” to “raise questions about the representation of identity, including Irish national identity” (222). While I certainly agree with this, it does not quite address why audiences pay to see their “accepted pieties” mocked.

So why does anyone enjoy them? I would argue that part of the reason is the audience’s ability to *abject* the world of the play: to interpret the world of the play as radically other, as something strange, foreign, and disgusting—something definitely “not like us.” An audience can enjoy the violation of its sacred cows, bask in the titillating depictions of violence, and then leave, thinking: “Wasn’t that fun? Good thing we’re not like that.” Audiences are able to enjoy the violence of the work because they assume themselves to be removed from it. The world of the play becomes an exaggeration, a farce; the people of the play are monstrous, weird, and crazy. But this puts the audience in a sort of double bind: longing for the titillation that they’ve come to expect from McDonagh’s work while *simultaneously* distancing themselves from it, falling back on their traditional morals once they leave the theatre. This is problematic. The audience begins the play with a presumed set

of moral beliefs; the play violates and tinkers with those beliefs; the audience enjoys that tinkering and is titillated by the violence; the audience leaves and writes off the play as exaggeration and farce, thereby keeping its presumed values intact. The problem is that such an audience enjoys, even longs for, perhaps expects, the violence and titillation of having their morals hit by a poker, slammed over the head with a mallet, or burned in an oven.⁵¹ The audience tries to have its cake and eat it too. In essence, it is the audience that starts the chain of abjection in McDonagh's work by simultaneously loving the violence and rejecting it as something monstrous, something foreign. And it is the audience that is finally monstrous: a bloodthirsty bunch of voyeurs. I think that McDonagh's work recognizes this dynamic, and sometimes attempts to directly comment upon it, especially in *A Skull in Connemara*.

In *A Skull in Connemara*, the community is presented as universally brutal. The play centers on the manipulation of dead bodies, which are subjected to disrespectful and perhaps blasphemous uses. And it becomes apparent that, in Leenane, torturing animals as a pastime does not occasion any condemnatory, or even surprised, response, and the only thing worth discussing is various methods of death. Mairtin cooks a hamster alive, and only laments that he did not have a clear view of its death throes: "If the oven had had a see-through door it would've been more fun, but it didn't, it had an ordinary door. My mistake was not planning ahead" (140). Thomas, Mick, and Mairtin have various conversations on possible methods of death, and are especially interested in how likely or unlikely some accidents are. They compare being hit by a tractor to drowning in slurry or meeting your end in a combine harvester, and later discuss the relative merits of drowning on wee or on sick: "Drowned on

⁵¹ I think that this dynamic must be the same for any viewer of McDonagh, whether in Chapel Hill, Ireland, or Tokyo. Without this tension, there would be no motivation to see the plays.

wee I'm talking about. Drowned on wee you have to go out of your way. Drowned on sick you don't" (141).

Such attitudes seem to reflect a general sadistic morbidity operating within the town (and implicitly within the audience, who paid to see this fare). Mairtin justifies cutting up two girls' faces with bottles when they refused him as a dancing partner: "Stiches aren't good enough for them sorts of bitches, and well they know. As ugly as them two started out, sure stiches'd be nothing but an improvement, oh aye" (97). It thus takes very little instigation for Mairtin to justify responding with vicious violence. Even Mary, who one might expect to be outside this cruelty as the only woman in the play (and an ostensibly religious one), demonstrates similar viciousness when she condemns a couple of five year olds who urinated in the churchyard and called her a "fat oul biddy" twenty-seven years ago: "When I see them burned in hell I'll let bygones be bygones, and not before" (90). Part of this seems born of excessive boredom—a way to cope with a town in which nothing ever seems to happen. Violence emerges as a possible method of breaking the routine, and thus as a desired kind of entertainment. And again, this implicitly comments on the play's audience, who has chosen to pay for entrance into the world of a brutal, violent play. Thomas Hanlon longs for a more brutal world: "I would *like* there to be bodies flying about everywhere, but there never is" (120); Mairtin hopes that the bloody gossip about Mick is true: "There you got me hoping I was working with a fella up and slaughtered his wife with an axe or something, when all it was was an oul cheap-ass drink-driving. Aren't they ten-a-penny?" (129). A bit of blood sexes up the story, in Hollywood, Leenane, or the local theatre.

Part of this brutality seems to be learned. Mairtin, for instance, has an unhappy family life, and it does not then seem terribly surprising that he has learned to be cruel toward

others. The abused become abusers. When Mary criticizes Mairtin for saying unkind things about his dad, Mairtin responds: “And if he took his belt off to you for no reason at all eight times a week, it wouldn’t be so quick you’d be saying ‘Your own father now’” (96). Brutal adults produce brutal children and a brutal culture; there does not seem to be a clear avenue of escape for the characters in *A Skull in Connemara*. Violence is everpresent, and, more than that, the characters long for ever more brutality to disrupt what they see as the boring routine of rural Irish life. To find someone to abject—someone to blame, someone to fight with, perhaps someone to murder—is the only entertainment available to these characters.

The central problem of *A Skull in Connemara* is thus how one could possibly detect a real act of violence within this culture. Mick Dowd has been accused of murdering his wife Oona. Though the inquests proved nothing, and Mick himself denies the murder, claiming it was a drunk-driving car accident, no one in the town can let it rest. Everyone seems to *want* Mick to be a murderer—because, as Mairtin suggests, it is more interesting. And everyone lies constantly, from Mairtin’s obvious lie stating that he didn’t bottle the two young girls at the disco to Mick’s lie that he doesn’t batter the skulls and bones into dust and drop them in the slurry. When pressed by Mary, Mick says, “I hit [the bones] with a hammer until they were dust and I pegged them be the bucketload into the slurry,” but he shortly changes his tune: “I neither hammer the bones nor throw them in the slurry, Mary. Sure what do you take me for?” (99-100). Of course, when scene three arrives, the audience watches Mick hammer away at the bones of the community’s dead. Though Mick later claims that this was the *first time* he had done so, and thus that he didn’t lie to Mary, the claim seems suspect. Mick is not trustworthy, so his constant denials of murdering Oona are similarly unreliable. The audience

is thus asked to figure out a very difficult problem, without reliable testimony; is Mick guilty or innocent?

Given the centrality of this question, the presence of a detective in the play certainly seems significant. Thomas may be rather incompetent, as he cannot tell the difference between circumstantial evidence and hearsay (“Feck I’m always getting them two beggars mixed up”), but he tries to use the tools of his trade (155). Specifically, he articulates the necessity of paying attention to details. When Mick makes the mistake of asserting that cooking cats or cooking hamsters is “the same difference, sure,” Thomas corrects him:

A fact is a fact, like. It’s the same in detective work. No matter how small a detail may appear to be, you can’t go lumping it with a bunch of other details like it’s all the same thing. So you can’t go lumping cats and hamsters together either. Things like that are the difference between solving and not solving an entire case. (122)

Thomas thus advocates a close attention to detail and a precise method of description. He reacts similarly when Mick draws no distinction between insults and “vague insinuations”: “It’s not the self-same thing at all, and if you knew anything about the law then you’d know it’s not the self-same thing” (127). If audience members, like Thomas, can be assumed to be on Mick’s trail, attempting to figure out his status as guilty or innocent, then these instructions apply to the audience as well—viewers must pay careful attention to detail as they attempt to convict or exonerate Mick Dowd. The play, however, does not ultimately present a clear case, either way. Certainly, there is evidence against Mick. As Thomas says, “your wife’s head injuries all those years ago weren’t especially conducive to only having been in a car crash at all” (128). Furthermore, Mary claims to have seen something on the night of Oona’s death, something that leads her to believe in Mick’s guilt:

Oh no? I must’ve been mistaken what I saw that night so, as along the two of ye drove . . . All I’m saying is you’ll be meeting up with Oona again someday, Mick Dowd, and not just the bare skull but the spirit of her, and when you meet may down

to the stinking fires of hell she drag the rotten murdering bones of you, and may downhill from there for you it go. (164-5)

Mary certainly seems, in this passage, to believe in Mick's guilt; she also appears to be a witness. While this may seem damning, Mary herself is inconsistent. Not much earlier than this in the play, she seems genuinely surprised that Mick could be guilty of killing Oona. When he supposedly fills out a confession, she murmurs: "It's true? (*Pause.*) I had always prayed only fool gossiping is all it ever was"—a comment that seems totally indefensible if Mary, indeed, saw Mick commit the murder (153). Mary's evidence is thus compromised. Thomas's claim that Oona's head injuries necessitated something more than a car accident also appears unreliable, as Mick notes those accusations came out at the inquest and were defeated.

On the other hand, the evidence for Mick's innocence may be more compelling, though it rests on nothing but his own word. Mick consistently denies any role in Oona's death beyond irresponsibly driving a car while drunk. After Mick believes that he has killed Mairtin, he says to Mary: ". . . do you want to hear something funny? I *didn't* butcher my wife. Just like for seven long years I've been saying I didn't butcher my wife. I never butchered anybody 'til tonight" (156). The final words of the play are his repeated oaths that he "didn't touch her": "I swear it . . . I swear it" (166). While this is certainly not hard evidence, it may be more compelling than Mary's inconsistent testimony and Thomas's vague aspersions.

The joke of the play ultimately seems to be that the reader cannot piece together a solution from the fragments offered. Like Thomas, the audience becomes a failed detective. Despite the lack of evidence, many audience members emerge feeling that Mick did it—this feeling, however, seems to rest only on wish fulfillment. Viewers become like the town

members, echoing Mairtin's sentiments that a murderer is more interesting than a drunk driver—the audience lusts after gore too. We are implicated and indicted as part of a brutal culture, in which blood sells. Mick confesses to Mairtin's murder out of a sense that the town, long ago, cast him in the role of murderer—regardless of evidence or the lack thereof: “A pure drink-driving was all my Oona was, as all along I've said, but if it's a murderer ye've always wanted living in yer midst, ye can fecking have one” (156). But this is exactly what *A Skull in Connemara* does not, ultimately, give us—perhaps to our disappointment. The play thus highlights the audience's double bind: the frustration of our desire for blood and gore (McDonagh's refusal to give us the payoff of a murder), followed by our feelings of disappointment, conflicts with the audience's ability to distance itself from the world of the play. We are clearly implicated.⁵² Just like Mairtin, we look for some blood and guts to spice up our apparently boring lives. The play becomes the abject—something to define yourself and your community against. But McDonagh's work, especially *A Skull in Connemara*, tries to resist this by implicating the audience in the play's action and revealing its implicit bloodlust.⁵³

McDonagh's work also perhaps suggests that in a universally brutal world, abjecting others—making them into scapegoats that you can fight and kill—may be the only kind of identity possible. Without the church, the family, national pride, a functioning community, or *any* of those potential supports, the townspeople of Leenane turn to murderous violence: to defining themselves negatively, by who they are *not* rather than who they might be. The most

⁵² In doing so, it reveals some troubling contradictions: if the audience's desire for bloodshed is somehow inappropriate, why does McDonagh keep delivering gorier and gorier works? And as he has continued to produce horrific plays, what attitude does that reveal toward his own art and the people who attend his plays? His works seem at least condescending, if not hostile, to his own audience.

⁵³ Another source, beyond Synge, for this is certainly Beckett and *Waiting for Godot*. The play's title, *A Skull in Connemara*, comes from Lucky's speech, and the casual violence in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky seems influential in McDonagh's work.

vivid display of this logic within McDonagh's work is in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*.

Certainly, Padraic gives plenty of lip service to his distrust and hatred of England's "jackboot hirelings" in the North of Ireland; as a member of the INLA, such attitudes are required of him. Irish nationalists are *not* Unionists, and this provides one clear basis for identity. This becomes rather ridiculous in the play, however, as Padraic seems unable to find any actual Unionists to fight, and thereby tortures and kills people who have nothing to do with colonial oppression, including people supposedly on his own side, other members of the INLA.

Padraic's need to fight, to have enemies, thus finds more and more ridiculous outlets: a college marijuana dealer, cat killers. Finally he proposes to Mairead that they "leave the INLA altogether" and start their "own splinter group, just me and you" (59). The first act of this splinter group will be to pursue someone Padraic thinks is the "validest of targets": a man who "spun me a yarn about ringworm proved completely untrue too. 'Wrapping pellets up in cheese.' I bet he doesn't even have a cat" (59). Bad cat advice becomes justification for murder, as Padraic's need for an enemy, for someone to abject, spirals totally out of control. *Lieutenant of Inishmore* thus offers a sort of parodic excess of abjection, in which Padraic's desperate need for enemies leads him to more and more ridiculous targets; as such, it offers (however comedically) a critique of abjection as a basis for identity consolidation. Though McDonagh never offers any possibilities for defining an Irish nation outside of stereotyped identities or abjecting others, he at least does demonstrate that those two options are highly problematic. At the close of the play, Mairead seems ready to take up largely where Padraic left off: her decision to launch an "investigation" into the death of her own cat carries the threat of new violence (67). Once she leaves, Davey cries out: "Oh, will it never end? Will it never fecking end?," to which Donny replies, "It fecking won't, do'you know!," which

certainly would be the response that McDonagh's work as a whole suggests (67). Abjection produces its own momentum, especially in a world emptied of those supports that might have allowed for the creation of more humane and well adjusted identities (a compassionate religion; loving, attentive family; supportive community).⁵⁴ All that is left is identity by negation, crafted by labeling others as enemies.

Other contemporary writers engage with similar themes. Abjection—the process of seeking someone to define oneself against, of creating a personal or societal monster—runs rampant in contemporary works. In William Trevor's *Fools of Fortune*, the sectarian violence (the burning of the Kilneagh house) that opens the novel produces nothing but grief and more violence, as Willie Quinton seeks out and murders the perpetrator of the deed. Both of these acts are depicted totally separated from any political consequences—neither is seen to impact partition either way; thus each act seems part of a historical chain of abjection, dependent on a history of violence from each side, rather than hope for any change. The violence is part of a self-perpetuating history of blame and punishment, a history which persists in Imelda's terrible nightmares of fire and death. Violence produces more violence. Similarly, Doyle's novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* depicts Paddy's growth from a young, imaginative, energetic boy to a young man whose primary ambition is to "be hard" so that he will be able to cope with life's betrayals—whether from his father or his friends (250). Implicitly, he is *not* his father, but his attempt to define himself against his father only leads him toward cruelty and violence. And in *A Star Called Henry*, the revelation that David Climanis was murdered by the Organization leads Henry to murder Mister O'Gandúin in retaliation, yelling "David Climanis says Hello" as he beats him to death (377).

⁵⁴ While many contemporary works attempt to kill off a de Valerian Ireland, they do not present a new, post de Valerian, nation basking in the sun of tolerance and liberal policies. And in these works, there seems to be little available to found a new nation upon.

The point in these works seems to be that cruelty and violence result in cruelty and violence. This is why abjection ultimately fails as a method for sustaining self or communal definition; as it produces discriminatory identities, those identities then tend to rise up, prepared to repay the cruelty with which they were abjected with further violence. Thus Francie rises up to murder Mrs. Nugent; Josie rises up to take on Pat Lacey; and all of McDonagh's characters rise up against each other. In the place of a positive articulation of identity comes, instead, identity by negation.

Chains of Abjection

Part of the narrative we have been tracing—the idea that violence engenders violence, or that the abused become abusers—will seem quite familiar. Horror films turn on similar revelations all the time. In the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, Freddy is eventually revealed to be the child of a rape and the product of an abusive foster-father and a brutal school environment in which he is constantly bullied.⁵⁵ Jason Voorhees, in the *Friday the 13th* franchise, was a disfigured young boy when promiscuous camp counselors made fun of him, eventually allowing him to drown, thereby providing his undead drive for vengeance against promiscuous teens in all the later movies. *Psycho IV: The Beginning* goes back to Norman's childhood to display his mother's inexplicable behavior: alternatively inviting a naked, teenage Norman into her bed and beating him for impure thoughts. The 1994 serial killer flick *Natural Born Killers* gives its heroes/ villains Mickey and Mallory the motivations of parental abuse, alternatively physical and sexual. The trope is so common as to seem a cliché. Even comedic horror, like the *Silent Night, Deadly Night* series, picks up on it: Billy

⁵⁵ And this rape is no ordinary rape. Freddy's mother (alternatively a health care worker or a nun, maybe both) was locked up and serially raped over the period of a week by a ward of one hundred psychopaths

Caldwell sees his parents killed by a man in a Santa suit, which is why he subsequently puts on a Santa suit and kills others. Of course.

An audience—whether reading or viewing—wants the backstory. The backstory inevitably provides an explanation, one that takes the form of: the bad guy was treated very cruelly by someone in his or her past, and this is why he (she only in very occasional cases) is a vicious murderer. He was twisted by his childhood. This explanation, in fact, goes back at least as far as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which readers find the creature more sympathetic than his creator due to Victor's total neglect of his responsibilities toward his creation. Bad parenting produces monsters. And it is easy to find this plot operating outside of the film studios, as it is commonly used in court cases as well. Evidence of childhood abuse can provide mitigating factors that can lead to a reduced sentence (or perhaps a verdict of insanity) in criminal cases. Contemporary society understands that those who are abused may well go on to become abusers. Violence, and the monstrosity that can stem from it, becomes represented as a neverending chain, duplicating itself in new generations like a virus.

However, these works also uniformly present a problem with the use of abjection as a prop for a particular construction of identity. For as soon as a “monster” is rejected by the community and labeled as abject and monstrous, he turns around and begins to abject others. If Freddy Krueger, the child abuser, is labeled as monstrous and abject by his community and killed off, he rises from the grave to kill again and again. It seems that once abjection starts, it keeps going. Thus, it rarely provides a clean method for patrolling the borders of identity. Though the process of labeling something as abject may be meant to preserve borders, it

often ends up undermining them. We have seen a similar narrative at work through these contemporary Irish novels.

And if these works implicate the audience within this process of abjection, as does *A Skull in Connemara*, the challenge becomes to *stop the process*. Patrick McCabe's *Emerald Germs of Ireland* implicitly asks its readers to do just this when it pairs McCabe's usual portrayal of a chain of abjection with a particular narrative voice. The central character, Pat McNab, is always ready to present someone to blame: "It's a pity all the same that it had to be spoiled. That he had to go and spoil it" (63). The "it" in this case is his life, and the "he" is Pat's sadistic, militaristic father Captain Victor McNab, a man who belittles and criticizes his son until he feels quite worthless. However, the Captain's desire to make his son into a real man, not a "nancy" boy, leads him to teach Pat about violence. When Victor McNab tells Pat (at the age of seven) that "I had to execute two men once," Pat longs to ask: "'So what did you do?' he heard a whisper echo. 'Bash his head in with your gun butt? Make him eat dynamite? Is that what you did, Daddy? Please tell me!'" (149). Pat has learned to equate power with violence, and his curiosity about violence foreshadows his final response to his father's brutality: murder. Victor, in abusing his son, taught Pat that violence was the best way to feel in control of your life; this is a lesson that Pat learns well. Much later in the book, both Pat and his mother participate in the murder of Scott Buglass, an English singer who humiliates Pat. Though Mrs. McNab begins the murder (bashing Scott's head with maracas), Pat eventually helps out, and they "reduced the tormented musician to a helpless mass of unrecognizable pulp in what might be described as an orgy of bloody, frenzied, alternative 'bebop' improvisation" (283). Pat thus learns—with the help of his parents—to repay cruelty and humiliation with more cruelty and humiliation (and, most likely, death). As he is

abjected, so he abjects, and it starts, for him, within the home: specifically in his militaristic father's rejection of Pat as a nancy boy, as not masculine in the way an Irish boy should be (ie, a representative of revolutionary nationalism). Pat learns eventually that all the men and women who cross his path are "germs"—worthless beings, ripe for the slaughter, and he becomes a true psycho.

As the book closes, Pat is observing his latest victim, the urbane Dexy McGann:

... there can be no denying the dramatic altering of Pat's features and the sudden departure from the region of his eyes of what is commonly known as 'human feeling' or 'sympathy.' Something which, sadly, perhaps due to a corrosive urbaneness which had over the years seen off his natural rustic qualities of instinct and alertness, blithely striding in as Pat smiled and held the door open, blissfully unaware of the word 'germ' which issued almost inaudibly from the side of his host's mouth, behind him swinging shut an outwardly unremarkable, old-fashioned wooden door which, had the insouciant Dexy McGann but known it, might equally have been fashioned of the most ungiving, hyperborean steel ever struck in the flaming deepest furnaces of the blackest pits of hell. (306)

The reader, however, may be confused by this description of Pat's house as a flaming furnace in the "blackest pits of hell," given the narrator's insistence throughout that Pat is "the most ordinary fellow you could ever hope to meet" (xii). More than ordinary, Pat is almost someone to be admired: "No, Pat was no sociopath, and in the fullness of time the truth will emerge and the enormity of Pat's heart and generous nature be finally revealed to the world" (116). The narrator thus describes Pat as normal, even sweet and sensitive, and argues that his many acts of disgusting murder are excusable aberrations in an otherwise darling man; those who condemn Pat outright "would never know of the emotional turmoil and deep, impenetrable hurt which had led him to commit what were, incontrovertibly, by 'normal society' classified as 'unspeakable acts'" (138). Throughout the book, then, the narrator indulges in camp and excessive pop-psychology, which allows him to excuse "unspeakable acts" based on the criminal's "emotional turmoil and deep, impenetrable hurt"; the narrator

suggests that Pat's crimes are mitigated by his unspeakable pain. Readers may be uncomfortable with these assertions that Pat, despite being a serial killer, is actually a normal, sweet, caring man. Certainly, the gap between the narrator's presentation of Pat's enormous heart and "generous nature" and the acts that the book has described encourages a reader to be critical of the narrator's explanations. McMullen has noted that "the reader grows impatient with the exonerations of the soft-mouthed narrator, which often seem more grotesque than the behavior they attempt to explain," but she has not offered any reason McCabe might include such a narrator. I think that McCabe intends readers to be troubled by these assertions. The narrator provides one way of interpreting the action—but I think we are encouraged to find the narrator's reading of Pat insufficient.⁵⁶

There are several problems with this interpretation of Pat's life and motivation. Though he is humiliated as a young man by his father and by his classmates, many people have similar experiences and do not subsequently execute over fifty people. The motivation of "impenetrable hurt" seems overstated. Things do probably go downhill for Pat after he murders his father, but no one else can be blamed for that as he performs the murder himself. The narrator's claims thus seem to be particularly noxious parodies of the contemporary idea that a troubled childhood mitigates responsibility for subsequent criminal acts—a paradigm that can make no place for actual evil, but instead insists on rationally understood causes and effects, and a paradigm that anticipates the further continuation of abuse and violence, always excused by the abuse and violence that preceded it. Such an explanation is not sufficient to explain Pat's behavior; certainly, Pat's childhood was not happy, but this does

⁵⁶ Many other examples of readers needing to read *in opposition* to a text's narrator exist, perhaps the most famous example being Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*. Indeed, the "unreliable narrator" is a cliché in postmodern fiction. McCabe himself, when not writing in first person, usually uses a problematic narrator who seems to voice opinions that directly oppose a reader's likely interpretations—as in *The Dead School*.

not *excuse* his subsequent behavior. McCabe thus uses the narrator's overstated psychological readings to highlight the failure of the logic that asserts that a rough start excuses later psychosis—or that *being abjected* is a sufficient excuse for subsequent *abjections*. Certainly, McCabe's books proliferate with characters who follow exactly this trajectory, but the excesses of the narrator in *Emerald Germs* point toward a moral, of a kind, however obliquely presented—that the chain of abjection must, at some point, be broken; that someone must have the courage to rise *above* cruel treatment, to resist passing that treatment on to others. The narrator's interpretations thus provide readers with a foil—his analyses are insufficient, and in considering why his interpretations fail, readers must contemplate a possibility of escape from the endless repetitions, recyclings, and duplications rampant throughout *Emerald Germs*—into a world where cycles can stop, where a new history could start. It is thus a gesture toward imagining a better world, though McCabe's work never brings its readers a community in which abjection could be said to be a thing of the past.

Perhaps it never will be a thing of the past in any nation. Certainly it's tempting, and close to universal, to define yourself, your community, or your nation by that which it isn't: to create scapegoats, to take them out. We could dredge up many examples from throughout the twentieth century that display abjection is alive and well—in ethnic cleansing, in genocide, and even in garden variety racism. You could find examples in Ireland today. According to Declan Kiberd, “racism of the most ugly kind undeniably exists in Irish society: and the presence of ever-growing numbers of refugees and migrants from overseas has brought it to the surface” (“Strangers” 51). Many Irish possess the “paranoid idea that foreigners are intrinsically untrustworthy and represent at best a threat to ‘our’ culture and at

worst a danger to the very security of the state,” and this paranoia demonstrates the societal tendency to manufacture monsters that we have been discussing (61). Many, in Ireland and abroad, found the Irish response to the recent constitutional referendum on immigration and citizenship disturbing: children born in Ireland are no longer automatically entitled to Irish citizenship due to widespread fears that immigrants were exploiting this right. Racist attacks in Dublin seem to be on the rise (Kiberd 47).

And it is not only immigrants who are subject to such abjecting tendencies. In 1988, the European Court of Human Rights’ decision on *Norris V Ireland* struck down an Irish high court’s 1983 decision that the state had the right to regulate private acts between male adults. The Irish were then forced into legislation in 1993 which decriminalized private consensual acts between men aged at least seventeen, but the bill, the Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Act 1993, was packed full of new draconian legislation against prostitution. When one abjected group escaped the state’s snare, another was brought in. Patrick Hanafin argues that: “Therefore, so-called progressive Irish society must continue to have socially abjected groups against which the dominant group identity can define itself” (57)—whether various immigrant groups, homosexuals, or prostitutes.

Kiberd suggests that scapegoating and the violence that often follows are “murderous distress signal[s] emitted by people who have turned their back on their own traditional culture” (56). This interpretation is problematic, in that it renders abjection a localized process at work only in certain dysfunctional cultures, when we have already discussed its nearly universal relevance during nation-building. Certainly, it may be more attractive during periods of anxiety, either during the formation of a nation or during that nation’s apparent disillusion. Discussing *Ulysses*, Kiberd demonstrates that James Joyce understood this

process: “those who lack a sophisticated sense of their own origins are more likely to seek a simplified version of the past, in whose name to lash out at the ‘foreign’” (65). And, indeed, Joyce provides one very clear articulation of the process we have been describing in the Dubliners’ story “Counterparts,” in which Farrington, derided as lazy and worthless by his boss, goes home to beat his son. Kiberd concludes that “only a people secure in their national philosophy are capable of dealing confidently with those who come among them with deep commitments to alternative codes”—and, apparently, that does not currently include the Irish in Kiberd’s book (74). While I would resist Kiberd’s tendency to localize abjection, to make it a symptom of only a very sick society, it remains that it is a process at work in Ireland (and other nations) today, and it is a troubling one. I think the answer as to who abjects and why is more complicated than Kiberd suggests. If there were a magic pill that could stop holocausts or genocides from ever happening again, I would hope that we’d all be happy to take it. But we are probably all as likely to define ourselves negatively as positively.

These authors, however, seem to see this as a particular problem in contemporary Ireland, and certainly sectarian conflicts like those in the North cast such processes in clearer relief. The other side is the monstrous, inhuman, incomprehensible foreign, with which there can be no negotiation or compromise. One Unionist-sponsored website on IRA “atrocities” labels the group as “blood thirsty monsters” (“Sinn Fein IRA atrocities”). Another website, sponsored by the victims’ rights group FAIR, calls the nationalist Brendan ‘Bik’ McFarlane a “monster” (“FAIR Response to Irish News Article”). The Ulster Protestant Movement for Justice calls the IRA a “Frankenstein’s monster” in one comment from Liam Clarke. On the other side, unionists as a whole are called a “sectarian monster” by Phil Mitchinson on a socialist website (par. 6). Chris Harman, writing for *The Socialist Review*, revisits the Shelley

metaphor, referencing the “Frankenstein's monster of Orange sectarianism” (par. 5).

Whatever side you stand on, the other side is inhuman—not worth attempting to understand.

We should take a step back here and notice that these authors’ demonization of a Gaelic Romantic Ireland provides another example of the process we have been discussing. That Ireland is a monster to be killed off—something repressive, twisted, and wrong: an inhuman construct produced by an inhuman, intolerant man. For them, the world of the 1937 constitution is the abject, is something to define a new Ireland against: whatever we are, we aren’t *that*. But there is some possibility that they may throw the baby out with the bathwater by producing de Valera’s Ireland as a totalizing myth and monster (something ununderstandable, inhuman) to be scapegoated and killed. In the previous chapter, we discussed the ambiguity presented in the writers’ implicit nostalgia. The Ireland that these works show evolving out of the death of de Valerian values is nothing to write home about: it’s murder, hatred, and foxy boxing. There might be something valuable hidden within any monster—and, perhaps, for these writers, de Valera’s vision has a “coherent idealism” (in Neil Jordan’s terms) that they do not see in the contemporary.

At this point, we will begin to move forward into the contemporary, asking what kind of future these works present for Ireland. If de Valerian ideology needs to die, and if the nation is caught up in cycles of abjection, constantly producing monsters and scapegoats, where does that leave us? Could a positive future be forged out of the monstrous? Could the abjected identities of the monsters we have considered in this chapter offer a corrective to the 1937 constitution’s construction of Ireland: an Ireland that would acknowledge homosexuality, alcoholism, and clerical abuse? In short, out of these monsters and corpses, can we piece together something that might be a nation?

CHAPTER V

STITCHED SELVES:

MONSTROSITY, HYBRIDITY, AND IRELAND'S FUTURE

I'm 39 now [1995] and until I was about ten, Ireland was a very grey place. If you look at the cabinet papers that have just been released, you actually realize what sort of place you were living in and the state that your father and mother lived through. The abuse they had to put up with, like living in fear of the next life, living in fear of their jobs simply because a certain section of the population had taken control and had actually made the country a more illiberal place than when the British were here; that was the great tragedy of the free state. These people got to power through isolationism. Anything that brings in colour, reveals the true nature of the people, which certainly isn't joylessness is fine with me. This was the image that the people found imposed on them. I know what that other world is like and I know what liberation and excitement I felt with the passing of that isolationism. For example I just love cable TV, I'm zapping all the time. You don't have to take it all, you dump what you don't want. We don't need people to look after us, we've had that for too long. – Patrick McCabe, interview with Pat Collins

Given Patrick McCabe's expressed fondness for the "new world" of a recently open and liberated Ireland after 1966, a reader might be forgiven for expecting his works to present an essentially progress-oriented narrative.⁵⁷ McCabe suggests that though the free state got off to a rough start, it eventually found its legs, kicked out the illiberal isolationists who were in control, and things became better. While this is the sort of narrative that McCabe ascribes to Irish history, it is not quite (or even at all) the narrative that shows up in his books and short stories. In previous chapters, I have argued that contemporary Irish writers invest significant time and energy in killing off representatives of Gaelic Romantic

⁵⁷ 1966 is, not incidentally, the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising and a last high point for Republican nationalism before the resumption of sectarian violence in 1968.

values when such representatives crop up in their works. I have subsequently argued that these authors also integrate powerful critiques of abjection, one process by which national identities are constructed. In this chapter, I would like to move forward to consider whether these authors offer any positive possibilities for an Irish national identity in the future, especially as a hybrid, globalized state. In order to address this issue, we will begin with how, exactly, these authors present the relationship between the present and the past. How does history influence current events: is our move into this “new world” limited by our relationship with the monstrous repressed of the old? Is history a deterministic force, corralling the present into a particular shape, or is it something that could be sloughed off and forgotten?

I have already demonstrated that for these writers the past is not a wellspring of originary national identity, to which they return for periodic nationalist drinks, as if it were some very strong Guinness. Instead, when the authors discuss the past directly, it is often as a “great tragedy” as McCabe suggests above—as a period in which marvelous things could have happened, and indeed were conceived by some, but a period that ultimately failed to live up to its promise as the economy stagnated, censorship continued, and individual rights gained no ground. However, the kind of history finally presented in these works is more than just a failure; it seems to be something much more dangerous, as it ultimately emerges as a slippery and shapeshifting creature: a sort of Irish Bog Thing.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ This image seems appropriate as a combination of *The Swamp Thing* and Heaney’s interpretation of the Irish bog in poems like “Punishment” and “The Tollund Man,” in which a buried past suddenly becomes present. In *Preoccupations*, Heaney has argued that Irish poets of this century demonstrated “an attempt to define and interpret the present by bringing it into significant relationship with the past, and I believe that effort in our present circumstances has to be urgently renewed” (60). The bog is thus a place where the divide between present and past becomes less fixed.

In Martin McDonagh's work, Leenane and Aran are strangely timeless. In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, though the work is supposedly set around the filming of *Man of Aran* in 1934, the children talk like contemporary kids: full of demands, witticisms, and cracks that seem all too postmodern. In the Leenane trilogy, there is nothing aside from references to TV shows (shows that are primarily from the 60s and 70s) that would distinguish the supposedly contemporary Leenane from a much earlier household. As José Laners notes, "McDonagh's world is stuck in an image of the past and unable to move beyond it" (215); though the jokes may be postmodern, the environment is always entirely pre-modern. McDonagh, then, constantly operates within the Gibbons "repressed" of mid-century Ireland—full of unemployment, boredom, and scandal—showing its refusal to die even within a contemporary landscape. The past seems inescapable, and in fact becomes the present, and McDonagh thus reflects a certain group of historians who have argued that Ireland never became (or has become) modern.⁵⁹ This is an Ireland whose defining feature is a bond with history that becomes destiny, and thus an Ireland that is necessarily static—unable to escape from those ills that plagued Ireland mid-century.

This is not a realistic depiction of contemporary Connemara. In 2001, James McDaid, the Minister for Tourism, gave a speech in which he pointed out that: "From 1989 to the end of 2000, employment in the industry doubled, overseas visitor numbers showed a two and a half fold increase and foreign visitor revenue trebled"; he goes on to note that county Galway's "total revenue from tourism in 2000 amounted to nearly £500m (€ 635m) and that it welcomed 2.5m visitors" ("Government Support for Tourism Development"; "Conclusion"). Certainly, then, the economic situation in Connemara has improved over the last fifty years.

⁵⁹ Fintan O'Toole, for example, argues that "We have gone from the few hungry acres to the Financial Services Centre with only a half-finished project of modernity in between" (qtd. in Boyce 257).

The past becomes, for McDonagh, a sort of revenant zombie, undead and unkillable, determined to feed on the present.

McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* presents a slightly more complicated vision of the present's relationship with the past. In this novel, the kind of past generally investigated is a personal rather than national history; it thus functions more as memory than as history, strictly speaking. However, the reasons that characters turn to the past, and the results of that turn, are the same in *The Butcher Boy* and McCabe's later novels that deal more explicitly with national history. In all of these works, McCabe presents a problem: characters attempt to use an idealized vision of the past as a way to cope with the brutality of their lives, but this rarely works. When Francie Brady's life becomes increasingly chaotic and empty, he turns to several treasured moments of intense beauty from his past. He believes in a history in which relationships were meaningful and caring—in which he and Joe traipse across the countryside, and in which his parents laugh and trade affectionate jokes. Believing in the veracity of these moments allows Francie to also believe that life is not, necessarily, always horrific. He thus idealizes these pieces of his history, specifically his youthful friendship with Joe and his parents' honeymoon at Bundoran. Francie remembers this original moment of perfection with Joe while in a church, listening to a girl, dressed all in white, singing. The setting is perfectly appropriate, for Francie clings to this memory with the tenacity of religious faith.

She was wearing a white dress and singing a song about gardens. I never heard singing like it. The notes of the piano were clear as spring water rolling down a rock and they made me think about Joe. The first time I met him was in the lane at the back of our house. We must have been four or five at the most. He was hunkered down at the big puddle beside the chickenhouse. It had been frozen over for weeks and he was hacking away at the ice with a bit of a stick. I stood looking at him for a while and then I said to him what would you do if you won a hundred million billion trillion dollars? He didn't look up, he just went on hacking. Then he told me what

he'd do and that kept us going for a long time. That was the first time I met Joe Purcell.

There was a snowdrop on the ditch that day I remember because there was only one. It was one of those days when you can nearly hear every sound in the town as clear as the girl was singing now. They were the best days, them days with Joe. They were the best days I ever knew, before da and Nugent and all this started. (42-44)

On holy ground, Francie looks back through his past and isolates a moment of perfection, the perfect and idealized instant that began his friendship with Joe. It is notably just this incident, of hacking at the ice and discussing the possibilities associated with a “hundred million billion trillion dollars,” that is repeated on the final page of the book with the somewhat-lacking bogman who functions as Joe's replacement. As Francie becomes increasingly disturbed, he returns continually to this moment through hallucinations (75, 153, 202).⁶⁰ Francie also wonders if the experience, in all its imagined nostalgic perfection, truly happened—certainly his present life would suggest that such happiness is impossible. It becomes a touchstone for him—a McCabian version of religious faith—throughout all the terrible things that happen.⁶¹ The memory thus gets invested with a great deal of significance, and this instant in the past becomes one way Francie copes.

His parents' honeymoon operates similarly for Francie. Though he was not present as he was not yet born, his father tells him about his and Annie's trip to Bundoran after their wedding. As Benny Brady tells it, the honeymoon was a period of laughter, promise, and joy; he claims that he played music constantly and the young Bradys were popular and admired.

⁶⁰ The image associated with Joe—of hacking at ice—thus provides one way to represent a certain relationship with history, in which the present constantly mines the past, and implicitly violates it. The repetition of this moment also provides a rather gothic view of time, as Francie's irrecoverable loss repeats over and over.

⁶¹ This is similar to Wordsworth's notion of “spots of time” in *The Prelude*. The perfections of the past become touchstones which the present can mine periodically for inspiration or sustenance. Though one could argue that this is a parodic use of Wordsworth on McCabe's part, I don't think so—these moments are presented as genuinely beautiful, though they may be insufficient bases for grounding a self.

Benny tells Francie what the hotel owner said about them, and Francie begins to fantasize about this perfect period in his parents' lives:

... I wonder could we persuade Mr Brady to give us another rendition? That's what she used to say. *You're my special guests! The lovebirds! Benny and Annie Brady.* Below the bedroom window the hush of the sea and ma I could see her lying there on the bed with him but it was a different woman, it was the ghost of what could have been ma. . . . And afterwards on the esplanade he held her in his arms and said to her are you prepared to live on potatoes and salt for the rest of your days and what did ma do she tossed back her wavy hair and laughed is that all you can offer a good-looking girl like me Benny Brady? Then they both got down on their knees and said the rosary together on the rocks and I wondered how it could ever have been, that moment, with its half-heard prayers carried away and the carnival swirling in the distance, the waves lapping on the shore and da fingering the beads and looking longingly into her eyes just as he did now. You could almost hear the whisper of the dead afternoon as we stood there in the empty, lost silence of that huge room. (90-91)

Again, in the face of an imagined and lost perfection, Francie wonders if this imagined experience could have really happened. These memories provide a counterpoint that attempts to balance the terrible bleakness of Francie's lived experience; he needs to believe in the possibility of a better past—a time when things were different and full of possibility, a time which, if it existed, could mean that things would get better in the future. In order to access this use of history, which promises the possibility of a better future, Francie must prove that these moments actually happened. He then seeks to confirm his idealized friendship with Joe and the idealized Brady honeymoon when he travels to Bundoran.

Neither of these, however, will work out well for Francie. Francie's trip to Bundoran reveals that his parents were apparently never truly happy when he visits the owner of the honeymoon hotel—a woman who, in Benny's version, called the two “the lovebirds” and asked Benny to play his instrument for the hotel guests:

What can I tell you about a man who behaved the way he did in front of his wife. No better than a pig, the way he disgraced himself here. Any man who'd insult a priest the way he did. Poor Father McGivney who wouldn't hurt a fly coming here

for over twenty years! God knows he works hard enough in the orphanage in Belfast without having to endure abuse the like of what that man gave him! God help the poor woman, she mustn't have seen him sober a day in their whole honeymoon! (193)

Even on the honeymoon, Benny Brady was a cruel drunk; Benny's presentation of his memories, then, cannot be trusted.⁶² And as memories are how we all access any personal past that has not been codified and recorded, it becomes hard to imagine how to interact with history. Either Benny straight-out lied, or his own desire to believe in a better past altered and colored his memories. And either the B&B owner is correct, and Benny behaved terribly, or she is lying for some reason of her own. The point is not necessarily who is correct and who isn't, but that any sort of concrete access to a verifiable past, through memory or history, is impossible. What "really happened" is not accessible; at the very least, it is hard to pick out from competing accounts. Thus, idealization of the past may well rest on nothing but desire: it is a personal construction with no exterior truth value. The trip to Bundoran also reveals an essentially altered Joe, a Joe that apparently no longer remembers or values the perfection of their youthful friendship:

Joe said to me: What do you want?
No he didn't. He said: What do *you* want?
It was no use me trying to say I wanted us to ride out Joe I wanted us to talk about the old days and what we'd do if we won a hundred million trillion dollars maybe go tracking in the mountains I don't know Joe, it was no use my saying that for I knew it wouldn't come out right so I said nothing I just stood there looking at him. (202-203)

Though we looked at this passage earlier as evidence of Joe's alien status, it is also important to consider as a moment in which Francie's interpretation of his own past breaks down. Joe no longer wants to be friends with Francie. Though this experience does not exactly reveal Francie's memory of his first meeting with Joe to be false, it does suggest that the meaning he attributed to that memory was not shared: Joe no longer cares about tracking or the

⁶² There is something potentially heroic in this, however. In McCabe's universe, attacking a priest isn't necessarily a bad thing.

imaginative prospects of winning massive amounts of money. Many years later, Francie is still fixated on a conversation the two boys had when they were four or five. While Joe has moved on, Francie is stuck in the past. Memory is thus a strange, slippery thing; even if it were to remember the past accurately, it invests some events with symbolic resonance that may not be shared by others. Their memories may then be effectively different. Our access to the past cannot be pure or unlimited. *The Butcher Boy* presents the idealization of the past as a project fraught with dangers, as history cannot be relied upon. If you invest too much in a particular vision of the past, you may be in serious trouble. History—as a collection of memories—is thus a slippery, shifting ground.

This kind of vision of the past, in which it provides inspiration and a promise that the future will get better, is similar to Nietzsche's articulation of monumental history. As Joep Leerssen describes it:

Monumental history, in Nietzsche's view, is a selection of the great achievements from the past, as a palliative against the individual's sense of transitoriness and insignificance. These great pinnacles of human achievement, selected from the past, give an edifying sense that greatness was once possible, and is possible still. Monumental history is useful because it provides present generations with inspiration. (207)

A monumental vision of history upholds particular moments as idealized touchstones that mitigate an individual's sense of insignificance or despair. This is exactly how Francie, and many of McCabe's characters, use the past. This kind of monumental history is often associated with "cultural myths of origin" (Bishai 9), and Ian McBride describes this kind of monumental history in Ireland as the "triumphal manifestation of the national soul" (10).

Linda Bishai notes that:

Monumental history inspires foolish courage and fanaticism, as men struggle to imitate or recreate heroic struggles. But monumental history also deals in fictions because in order to depict historical events as epic and worthy, the effects must be

exaggerated at the expense of the many small motives and causes, so that history becomes a string of "effects in themselves." (9)

If history becomes codified as a teleological narrative marching ever forward, with national heroes and saints in the front, then that vision of history may ward off despair, but it is also dangerously fragile. As Francie discovers, depending overmuch on such a heroized history has implicit dangers, for any critical interaction with history (such as trying to track down 'what really happened') may well subvert a monumental vision of a personal or national past. If Francie gets caught between an idealized, monumental vision of the past and a terrible present which subverts that idealization, his groping toward a basis for meaningful existence parallels Raphael Bell's, though, in Raphael's case, the process is tied explicitly to the constitutional ideal of revolutionary nationalism.

The Dead School presents the idealization of the past as similarly dangerous. For Raphael, memories of his youth in Cork with a nationalist father and kind, domestic mother provide the basis for his identity. As we discussed previously, Raphael invests the memory of his father's Republican martyrdom with significant power, believing that the nation was founded on the backs of such dead saints. Raphael's vision of history is thus one of unceasing progress; though the nation was long held down by colonial oppressors, it is now free, and has—through the efforts and deaths of national heroes—achieved its proper and glorious fate as a Catholic nation. He is quite invested, then, in a monumental vision of historical progress. However, his faith in his father is undermined by contemporary events when he finds out that the IRA sometimes kills civilians, women, and children; these events force him to think of this heroic history more critically. His idealization of the national past thus rests on an understanding of that past that may be false. Raphael must consider that perhaps those who fought for Ireland's independence were no different from the

contemporary IRA: senseless butchers. To imagine history as linear and progress driven, or to depend overmuch on particular, idealized historical events, is to invite disillusion. An uncritical, monumental approach toward history thus presents a very problematic basis for identity.

In *Carn*, any attempt to idealize the nation's history is not just problematic, or doomed to failure: it is brutal. *Carn* explicitly makes a connection between the idealization of the past and a tendency to abject others. When the men in the pub watch the earlier discussed slasher film, McCabe presents that film *specifically* within the context of an idealized history. The men view the film while discussing their belief that life was better, was coherent, was whole, at some earlier point in the town's existence.

On the video screen above them, the crazed adolescent in the asbestos suit dragged the body of a screaming young girl into a freezer as the soundtrack blared. An old man sat transfixed beneath the screen, his terrified, perplexed eyes locked helplessly into every movement of the deranged youth. Two men in the corner argued bitterly about the actual date of the closure of the railway. 'It was 1959,' said Francie Mohan without looking away from the freezer where the adolescent was sharpening up a butcher's knife to disembowel the girl. 'What did I tell you?' said the man. '1959. Those were the days—what do you say, Francie? The days before they closed the railway.' (230-231)

The juxtaposition of these two threads—the men's idealization of the town's history and the exploitative slasher flick—suggest their thematic similarity. The idealization of history, the presentation of an originary national unity that has been lost, is the source of violence. The nostalgic ideal of "the days" involves a romantic construction of lost perfection, and thus is similar to Nietzsche's second category describing humans' potential relationships with their past: the antiquarian. An antiquarian interaction with history is preservationist, and the "restrictedness of vision of antiquarian history often results in an inability to nourish the growth of new continuing life so that the living culture becomes mummified" (Bishai 10).

Furthermore, as both monumental and antiquarian history use an idealized past as a way to live in the present, they can “spur groups on in cycles of intense violence and conflict in the name of the honor of the past which must be avenged and continued” (Bishai 9). Once you believe in a lost perfection, an ideal that seems just out of reach, that sense of loss can lead to anger for that loss, which leads in turn to the creation of scapegoats—to sectarian violence, vengeful rape, and meaningless deaths. After all, the bartender rapes Josie Keenan because she is not a “Little Flower”—not a teacher of little children or the idealized vision of saintly, domestic womanhood advocated by an idealized, pre-1959 Ireland. As the men continue their fruitless idealization of pre-railroad Carn, “The girl on the screen screamed as a jet of blood splashed across the visor of the madman’s asbestos suit. He raised the butcher’s knife and brought it down in a sweeping arc with a maniacal laugh” (231). For there is no unity, nothing pure, and even if the past were perfect, it is irrecoverable and lost; only memory can access it, and memory is far from reliable. Implicitly, the film slashes open a presumption that history is objective or accessible. The women of the town go much further back in time to find their perfection:

they had come to the feet of the Virgin but for a sign that would take them back to the way it had been all those years ago, long before James Cooney, when there had been no questions to answer, when they had toiled long hours in the summer hayfields with the unquestioning acceptance of children, their sleep sound and undisturbed. (233-4)

As these idealized pasts move further and further back in time, we get the sense of an infinitely receding horizon, of a coherent national identity that recedes even as you grasp for it. The real evil in *Carn* thus seems to be the romanticization of history—the attempt to rely

on a glorious national or communal past as a basis for identity.⁶³ For all of these characters are oriented toward their pasts, rather than their futures, as they seem trapped in cycles of repeating trauma—from which the appeal to a heroic, teleological past cannot rescue them. In Reinhart Koselleck's terms, their horizon of expectation, or the possibilities they see for their futures, is always excessively limited by their experiences in and visions of the past. To idealize a moment in history can lead to abjection: the attempt to expel those who trouble or violate that romantic vision. The idealization of particular moments of history can then lead to violence, as the community's abjects are scapegoated and, perhaps, murdered.

In all these works, as soon as you attempt to put weight on history, it shifts or buckles; the past thus emerges as a Protean shape-shifter. A monumental or antiquarian vision of Irish history is not exactly a failure: it is a dangerous construction, something very risky to depend upon. Because such visions are teleologically driven, triumphal history can easily be subverted by any critical interaction with history. McCabe explicitly suggests, in *The Dead School* and *Carn* especially, that the idealization of a republican nationalist history of violence is particularly problematic. Many people felt just this way after sectarian violence exploded in the North in 1968; John Regan writes,

That the Southern state was a product in part of unaccountable revolutionary violence remains an uncomfortable truth too difficult for many nationalists to accept as contemporary manifestations of such violence—car bombs, disintegrated bodies, broken families—flickered across their television screens. (xiii)

It becomes difficult to idealize a national past of republican violence in the midst of current acts of republican violence, acts with which most people in the Republic cannot agree. The idealization of the past, of a particular narrative about Ireland, leads only to a sense of loss

⁶³ As such, *Carn* certainly has many parallels in Irish literature; Joyce's *Dubliners* similarly suggests that Dublin's malaise is that degrading conditions give rise to impossible dreams, and that the failure of those dreams only produces more despair and cynicism. To idealize, or even to hope, is incredibly dangerous.

and rage as people seek to recover something that is not recoverable and may never have existed. McCabe may thus be commenting on the centrality of the interpretation of the past to Irish debates and conflicts over national identity. Ian McBride notes that “In Ireland, perhaps more than in other cultures, collective groups have thus expressed their values and assumptions through their representations of the past” (3). There is a great deal at stake for any nation, perhaps particularly Ireland, in representations of the past.

Moments of colonial resistance, whether Wolfe Tone’s 1798 rebellion, Robert Emmet’s 1803 speech from the dock, or the “martyrdom” of sixteen men following Easter 1916, provide originary myths for a monumental version of Irish history: a distinctly nationalist consciousness. In Northern Ireland, commemorations of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, in which the Catholic king James II was defeated by the Protestant king William III, regularly become bloody as Unionists see the Protestant victory as a foundational moment for Unionist identity.⁶⁴ Certainly, the idealization of this past event by the Unionist community—an idealization that has little to do with reality—has produced scapegoats and killed many people. Representations of the past and commemorations of past events thus provide stages for the enactment of identities. McBride points out, however, that memory is “historically constructed” and communities are ‘imagined’ or ‘narrated’ through these acts of communal, historical memory (4-7). Such politicized, patriotic acts of memory cannot possibly present an accurate reenactment of a particular historical event; they thus provide displays and performances of particular identities. The past, then, is an object of constant appropriation (and perhaps abuse), always liable to idealization and reconstruction, or

⁶⁴ This particular construction of history ignores the facts that Protestants and Catholics actually fought on both sides, and that William’s elite force (the Dutch Blue Guards) were not only Catholic, but also carried the Papal Banner in battle (O’Mahony 38). Furthermore, to use the event as a basis for Unionist identity is quite anachronistic, as the idea of Union doesn’t come into Ireland until 1800. The campaign was thus really over succession, not religion, but it has subsequently been constructed as a symbol of Irish Protestant identity.

revision. If McCabe's characters are constantly creating idyllic Irelands out of shards of idealized history, they are perhaps reflecting a tendency to dig up the past, brush it off, and invest it with meaning current in Irish sectarian politics today. Indeed, those of McCabe's characters that succumb to an idealized vision of their past must generally confront the possibility that their memories are either false or incomplete—for all of them, the idealization of history is a project fraught with dangers, as that history tends to shift and subvert any interpretation thrust upon it. McCabe suggests that resting your (or your nation's) identity upon any historical construction is very dangerous, and perhaps doomed to failure. It thus seems that any livable national future must similarly reject dependence on imagined access to a coherent, heroic past: namely, the idealized national past of cosy homesteads, family values, and revolutionary nationalism.

The increasing critical interaction with nationalist histories throughout the world, mainly in the name of revisionism, subverts antiquarian and monumental histories. As such, the revisionist impulse moves away from some of the atavistic and origin-driven logic of romantic, nationalist history. However, Nietzsche also suggests that a world deprived of history is not possible, or desirable; Bishai writes that "Since history, and the necessity of living in the past, determines the boundaries of our identities, human beings cannot live without memory" (7). If a monumental or antiquarian approach to history is not viable, we must consider what kind of history could open up new horizons of expectation, using Koselleck's term, for national identities.

A New Ireland?

It may be hard to conceive of a nation without history—of a people who could define themselves as a people without investing in common historical interpretations and common heroes. Certainly, America, though ethnically and religiously diverse, founds its identity on the political freedoms embodied in figures like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson. Attempts to demythologize these figures are likely to meet with severe opposition, as have those doing research on Jefferson’s apparent sexual relationship with his slave Sally Hemings.⁶⁵ Indeed, the construction of heroes provides the twin to the construction of monsters; monsters are crafted out of the abjected pieces of national identity, while heroes are stitched out of its ideals.⁶⁶ Either one is an act of mythmaking in the service of a coherent national identity with clearly labeled heroes and scapegoats. Either requires a partial view of history—one that makes coherence out of chaos. If Jefferson is our nation’s hero and founding father, then it is “morally impossible” that he fathered a child with a slave. If “terrorists” are monstrous, inhuman beasts, then we do not need to consider whether their concerns—such as ending occupation from a foreign country—might be justified. Such is the logic of heroes or monsters.

⁶⁵ Many denials of this relationship, which seems highly likely given DNA evidence, rest on little more than the supposed “moral impossibility” of Jefferson having an extra-marital relationship with a slave. See “The Thomas Jefferson - Sally Hemings Myth and the Politicization of American History” by David Mayer for one example. The other side, as one might expect, wishes explicitly to “challenge the conventional history of the United States, which has always played down the slavemaster origins of the republic” and use Jefferson’s story to personify “troubling matters of race, slavery, sexuality and hypocrisy that root in the earliest events of the country Jefferson helped to found” (Hotz). Obviously, what is at stake is two competing visions of the nation: one which wishes to uphold the heroism of Jefferson as a symbol of liberty, and the other which wishes to impugn Jefferson in order to show a national history in which many were deprived of their liberty by unequal power relations, especially through slavery.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, heroes are also open to reinscription as monsters. Note the last decade’s vicious attacks on de Valera (Coogan’s biography being one) as his vision of a conservative Catholic nation went out of favor, and the corresponding rise in the fortunes of Lemass as creator of the Celtic Tiger economy. At this point in historical criticism, de Valera is the nation’s abject. As he said himself, discussing Michael Collins, we must have scapegoats (Coogan, *Ireland* 100).

Are there other options then? A nation that wouldn't depend on idealized histories and heroes, or need to scapegoat foreigners and other abject identities, in order to pretend to coherence as a people? In his essay "DissemiNation," Homi Bhabha argues that a concept of nationhood based on originary identity and heroic history needs to go, and literature is one place where such concepts could be subverted (or inculcated):

Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. (300)

The nation creates a mythical, unitary identity out of diverse, plural parts: piecing together a monstrous combination of partially understood histories, religious traditions, and moral values, then claiming that the product is unified, is whole, and always was whole. This is a monumental, teleological sort of construction. From a revisionist or postcolonial point of view, such national identities are highly problematic, as they rest on false or constructed premises and also necessitate the creation of "discriminatory identities"—the manufacture and labeling of that which the nation is not (Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders" 173). The alternative to such a problematic articulation of originary, essentialist identity would be something much more fluid, diverse, and pluralized—a nation open to half-truths, to unfixed histories and identities. Such a nation might operate between the lines of categorization, might, in fact, trouble and deny such classification: it might, in short, be something we could call monstrous. That could be a positive development.

In his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders," Homi Bhabha uses the term "hybridity" to express these possibilities. Though it is the "production of 'discriminatory identities' that

secure[s] the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority,” those monstrous ‘discriminatory identities’ rarely prove docile (173). Another possibility emerges, a different kind of space: “It is precisely as a separation from origins and essences that this colonial space is constructed” (181). As the original identity of authority attempts to enforce the construction of devalued ‘discriminatory identities,’ those identities escape that authority and elude its grasp by refusing such definition. They emerge somewhere between the discriminatory identity that power expects and something else—something perhaps revolutionary. The hybrid is thus a split screen:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (173)

Through the very performance of its ‘discriminatory identity,’ the hybrid displays the “deformation and displacement” created by the exercise of colonial power. Through “displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition,” the hybrid undermines power’s articulation of an originary, unified identity (166). In other terms, identity is revealed as something more fluid and complex than the dialectics of authentic/ false, pure/ impure, colonizer/ colonized, or “the people”/ its monsters would suggest. Like the abject, the hybrid undermines such categorizations.

Looking at these contemporary Irish texts, then, we might consider where rebellious, hybrid identities separated from a Gaelic Romantic paradigm appear in contemporary literature, and then consider whether these identities perform a subversive function, creating

a space in which something other than essentialist definitions of Irishness could emerge.⁶⁷

Homi Bhabha's articulation of hybridity suggests that the hybrid could provide a model for culture that operates between the authentic and the false: where repetition of the authentic alongside its distortion and displacement allows for the construction of something new, untied to origins. The quote with which we opened suggested that Patrick McCabe views the new information available through expanding media with excitement: as other global cultures become available through mass entertainment, perhaps a globalized, hybrid identity could replace the dependence on origins apparent in a Gaelic Romantic vision of Irishness. Certainly, all the works we have discussed are invested in presenting an Ireland that increasingly interacts with culture (whether TV, radio, magazines, or comics) that is not explicitly Irish. And we might expect—given McCabe's expression of enthusiasm for these outlets—that this literature would present a vision of a new Ireland in which cultural nationalism is tempered by the liberalizing internationalism of worldwide media.

McCabe would seem, in the Collins interview, to be speaking up in opposition to conservative cultural forces that deride the influx of global media as cultural imperialism: a view that has received much airtime, in Ireland and pretty much every other nation, as the originary national identity (itself a construction, as we've discussed) is depicted as being in danger of disillusion. John Ardagh notes that some Irish saw the encroachment of globalization as "neocolonialism by the back door" as the Irish consumed "Anglo-American commercial popular culture" in "British TV networks or American soap material" (10). He goes on to quote the historian F.S.L. Lyons, writing in 1979: "It could very easily and quickly happen that Anglo-Americanism could extinguish what remains of our local and

⁶⁷ Certainly, contemporary authors are not the only ones who write counter to this kind of paradigm of Irishness. I suggested in my introduction that writers like Synge and O'Casey also worked against the consolidation of a Gaelic Romantic Irish identity.

regional identities” (11). Though Lyons here describes “identities” in the plural, as opposed to one coherent overarching vision of Irishness, he still implies a base of “Irishness” that is opposed to “Anglo-Americanism.” As O’Mahony and Delanty put it:

More generally, during the time when the country has been receptive to outside influences, and with ever more impetus, the globalization process, interacting with an indigenous culture, is increasingly creating a hybrid culture with strong American and, latterly, European influences reshaping lifestyles and identities. This process has further added to the fragmentation of an homogenous cultural identity and to the sense of cultural uprooting experiences by many. (178)

One thing to notice in these and similar proclamations is that they posit the positive existence of “homogenous cultural identity” to be depleted. The idea of cultural *loss* depends on a belief in an *originary culture* to lose—an originary culture that was, in fact, in this case (and many others), largely constructed by the state. Again, this is not to say that competing visions of Irishness did not exist, but to say that a prevailing, constitutionally supported vision of Irish identity was perceived by many as being under threat from encroaching global and Anglo-American forces. McCabe’s comment, then, seems to argue against the illiberality produced by that construction of nationhood, and to argue for a newly open, liberalized, globalized state. While this is what McCabe says, his works—and those of his contemporaries—seem to say something quite different. While all of these works present alternative, more globalized identities, the future for such hybrid Irish selves seems rather bleak.

In Martin McDonagh’s work, though characters do listen to Irish music, most of the other supposed elements of Irish culture are missing. No one attends mass; not one character is taking step dancing lessons or buying tickets for the Abbey Theatre; no one participates in hurling matches. Admittedly, there is a lot of drinking of *poitín* in McDonagh’s plays, but the drink is often used in the service of violence. In *A Skull in Connemara*, Mick and Mairtin

drink while smashing skulls to bits; Dana's "All Kinds of Everything" provides the soundtrack. Thus, when McDonagh does integrate aspects of apparently "Irish" culture, he usually moves those aspects into the realm of the abject by associating them with new, violent contexts.

Most of the cultural artifacts mentioned in his plays, however, are not Irish: they are British, Australian, or American. In *Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Pato expresses his fondness for the 1980's Australian soap *Sons and Daughters*, in which "Everybody's always killing each other and a lot of the girls do have swimsuits" (52). Though Maureen calls such stuff "Australian oul shite," Ray responds: "Sure, that's why I do like it. Who wants to see Ireland on telly" (75-6). *A Skull in Connemara* references a wide range of American cop shows from the '70s and '80s: *Hill Street Blues*, *Quincy*, *McMillan and Wife*, and *Starsky and Hutch*. *The Lonesome West* adds references to *Alias*, *Smith and Jones* as well as the British women's publications *Take a Break* and *Woman's Own*. The main plot device of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is the filming of an American movie on the island. The kids on Inishmaan also spend their time pining after foreign candy not usually available in Aran. In all of these cases, entertainment is not located within a traditional Irish culture: it is foreign and imported. As Ray says, "All you have to do is look out your window to see Ireland. And it's soon bored you'd be. 'There goes a calf'" (75). If Ireland is associated with anything, it is boredom, and imported entertainment offers an escape from that boredom. Whether such escape is presented positively is another matter.

In fact, a reader could amass significantly more evidence that non-Irish entertainment is, if anything, *dangerous* to the inhabitants of these rural areas. When Mick questions Thomas about his career, saying "I thought the way you do talk about it, just like *Hill Street*

Blues your job is,” Thomas responds “I would *like* there to be bodies flying about everywhere, but there never is” (120). Presumably, shows like *Hill Street Blues* led Thomas to suspect detective work should be about “bodies flying about,” and he is subsequently disappointed in his own life and career. Perhaps Ray Dooley’s love of shows in which “Everybody’s always killing each other” bears some responsibility for his violent tendencies—bottling a couple girls at a club included (52). While it would be hard to argue that McDonagh claims violent entertainment directly produces violence, it certainly doesn’t seem to produce anything positive.

For Roddy Doyle, the mixture of Irish and American culture allows for something much more promising. In *The Commitments*, the central characters, using American acts like James Brown as their inspiration, attempt to form a soul group. As Jimmy describes it, the choice rests on a sense of solidarity in oppression and working class roots: “The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads” (13). Though their experiment does not ultimately succeed (it is undermined by the everyday world of girls, jealousy, and self-interest), the young men are determined to pursue new musical combinations, and the book closes as they decide on a “country-punk” direction, since “half the country is fuckin’ farmers” (139). It seems like, in these novels, hybridity produces intriguing combinations and new possibilities. That working class Dublin boys would sense solidarity with black soul singers shows an evolving urban class consciousness not accounted for in de Valerian constructions of the happy rural poor in cosy homesteads. But it is only a moment, and is undermined by the short sightedness of the moment’s participants. Long term change doesn’t quite seem possible.

In Patrick McCabe’s world, the intervention of global media actually seems, at times, explicitly dangerous. *Carn* provides the simplest example of this phenomenon in his work.

James Cooney, always the opportunist, is ready to step in when the traditional bastions of Irishness (the family, the church, nationalism) fail, offering a simulacrum of American identity and culture to the townspeople of Carn—a simulacrum that they are all too eager to accept. He produces an Americanized bar, dancehall, and hotel:

He had been quick to notice the change in the people since he had built the meat plant and given them money for their televisions and records and fridge-freezers and clothes. He knew the eagerness with which they watched detectives from the Bronx roar down highways bigger than any roads they had ever seen in their lives. He monitored their speech which took its cue from the soap operas and the songs. (9)

Though the people still pay lip service to an idealized Ireland of the past, they seem eager to embrace the new, materialistic culture offered to them by James Cooney. As soon as they bring home paychecks from his factory, they spend their money on new housewares and on entertainment, TV shows and films that package an exciting and foreign way of life. This new life may even be dangerous, but its dangers are safely packaged and unreal; the scrapes of a detective in the Bronx are certainly not equivalent to sectarian bombings. The newly created Turnpike Inn features images of John F. Kennedy, Davy Crockett, American Flags, and barbequed chickens—new images of culture, nationalism, and heroism to replace what was lost. Behind the lounge bar, covering most of one wall, hangs a “sepia photograph of a market day in the thirties” (11); one can only guess, given the American origins of *all* the other decorations, that this may well be an *American* market. In any case, the bar as a whole offers a packaged nostalgia for an American past, which consumers can imagine to be heroic and coherent. James Cooney thus sets the stage for cultural immigration, in which the people of the town adopt America as their home. Soon, instead of a community ceilidh, youths “aped dances from England and America” (7); instead of traditional ballads, young Sadie likes Elvis Presley. Instead of neighbors, the people of the town have JR Ewing (130). Even

the voice of a young man doing a car commercial seems “uncertain of its origins, waver[ing] between American and Irish inflections” (131).

While some writers would valorize this process as indicative of national growth—in which the new generation can keep what is good in the traditional culture and steal what’s good in new cultures—Patrick McCabe seems very skeptical of this hybridity. American culture and entertainment offer temporary escape, but offer nothing more permanent. All they seems to do is produce a hopeless urge to escape from Ireland: something most of the characters either cannot afford to do or lack the courage to try. Like Joyce’s Eveline, Sadie is offered the chance to leave Carn for Europe, but she ultimately cannot bring herself to leave her house. Indeed, McCabe might agree with several of the novel’s priests, one of whom suggests that “the insidious tide of alien values and beliefs” was going to “destroy the traditional way of life in Carn and in Ireland as a whole,” except that that “traditional” way of life seems already to be long gone, and that, for McCabe, an appeal to origins is highly problematic (87). Certainly, this influx of global media is not shown to produce anything positive. A few good movies or American beers will not drown out the taste of sexual abuse or sectarian bombings. As the young people become disillusioned with what Carn has to offer, they long to escape to England, America, or Europe, but this is only possible for a privileged few. And these other cultures may not actually be any better, as Josie Keenan only finds disgust and darkness anywhere she goes, whether Liverpool, Manchester, or Carn.

This tension between a desire for national integration and the forces creating national fragmentation is nowhere illustrated better than the party following the announcement of the plant’s closing:

Northmen southmen comrades all

Dublin Belfast Cork and Donegal

*We're on the one road singing along
Singing a soldier's song.*

The footballers chanted, *Here We Go Here We Go . . .*

"Got my motersickle outside and I'm heading out on the road!" sang the bikers.

The songs collided with each other and made no sense. But no one was about to give an inch and with each new verse they hurled themselves further into the chaos. (194)

When people cannot agree even to sing a song of unity together, but must interrupt the melody with competing songs, there seems to be little hope for integration in that community. The competing cultures, or hybridity, of this small community create chaos—the competing songs collide and make “no sense,” and no one is willing to compromise—rather than creative, adaptive identity formation. Here, hybridity is rendered rather conservatively as chaos and fracture. Nothing enabling comes from it, and this passage thus recalls Declan Kiberd’s assertion that “only a people secure in their national philosophy are capable of dealing confidently” with hybridity (“Strangers” 74). Indeed, the unwillingness to “give an inch” suggests that these identities are seen as being in competition, and that such competition is potentially violent. Everything seems to be falling apart, not together. Neither the originary myth of Irish republicanism nor the supplanting culture of American commercialism provides a coherent foundation, and the hybridity of the community seems, in fact, to threaten violence.

In *The Butcher Boy*, McCabe takes his interest in the influences of globalized media and entertainment further. While in *Carn*, this media offers a competing source of culture through offering entertainment and goods that people can buy into if they wish to do so, in McCabe’s later books this media offers competing *selves*, as his characters seek to *become* someone else through the intermediary of film, TV, or comics. For Francie Brady, comics, film, and TV offer a way to cope with an indifferent and even hostile landscape; he adopts various personalities from these sources as a way to feel in control of his environment.

Figures from film, like John Wayne, and from comics, like Algernon Carruthers and Adam Eterno Time Lord, possess traits Francie does not have: masculinity, money, supernatural powers. Through these shifting identifications, Francie is able to subsume his identity within others that presumably have more control. When Mrs. Connolly comes to tell Mr. Brady that Mrs. Brady has been taken to the “garage,” Francie processes this conversation only interspersed with scenes of the hypermasculine, always in control, John Wayne: “I could see Mrs Connolly pulling the zipper of her housecoat up and down going terrible terrible but I didn’t care. *Take ’em to Missouri!* said John Wayne and *hee-yah!* he rode off in a thunder of hooves” (9). Losing himself in this television show allows him to feign indifference to the occurrences within his home, and John Wayne later becomes one of Francie’s favored alternative identities. Similarly, following his parents’ bitter fighting during the disastrous party for Uncle Alo, Francie decides to run away, and explicitly states that he wishes to no longer be himself:

I was like the boy on the back of a colouring book I had. His cheeks were fat red plums and he blew a puffjet of steam from his mouth as he walked up one side of the globe and back down the other. I had a name for him. I called him The Boy Who Could Walk For Ever and that was what I wanted to do now—become him once and for all. (38-39)

Notably, “The Boy Who Could Walk For Ever” is not an inspiration exactly: he is an alternate self, someone Francie could “become” in order to escape. Once in Dublin, many of these alternate identities become associated with Philip Nugent: “Who’s going to pay for this? says the waiter licking his pencil hmm hmm. I am my man I said, Mr Algernon Carruthers. I seen that in one of Philip’s comics. Algernon Carruthers always on these ships going around the world and eating big dinners. Certainly Master Carruthers he says. I knew what he thought that I was one of these boy millionaires” (41). Both Algernon Carruthers and

the later Adam Eterno Time Lord are figures picked out specifically from Philip's comic collection, and they thus become associated with the power, wealth, and prestige attributed to the Nugents. All of these alternative selves provide a way to *escape* from being Francie into a world of wide open spaces, wealth, and power.

These associations are then only one quick step removed from Francie's most powerful and compelling alternate identity: Philip himself. When he invades the Nugents' home, one of his first acts is to dress up in Philip's uniform and stroll through the house "like Philip," having Mrs Nugent serve him tea (63). Of course, subconsciously, he is aware that this identification is problematic, and his jealousy of the Nugents and desire to be one of them conflicts with his need to be loyal to his mother; when he breaks into the Nugents' home, he imagines Philip taunting him: "You know what he's doing here don't you mother? He wants to be one of us. He wants his name to be Francis Nugent. That's what he's wanted all along! We know that—don't we mother?" (64). And Philip, as was previously discussed, is associated with power, wealth, and Britishness.

The ideas of control and power associated with these alternative identities are also allied with masculinity and violence. The John Wayne identity provides an outlet for Francie's increasingly violent tendencies:

When Leddy wasn't there I said to the swinging pigs: OK Porky its the end of the road. Then I'd say blam! and take the fat head off them with the captive bolt pistol. Take `em to Missouri men, I'd shout. O please don't kill me I'm too fat to run away! Too bad, Piggy! Blam! Pinky and Perky—eat lead! (134)

Thus the kind of escape and power offered by many of these alternative identities in McCabe's work is specifically sadistic—power through manipulating and hurting others. Like in McDonagh's work, the influx of non-Irish entertainment forms is tied to a rise in

violence. Though Francie uses these alternative identities to feel in control of his life, in actuality, Francie's situation seems to be almost totally outside his control. Certainly the suicide of his mother, the death of his father, and the abuse by the priest Tiddly are all events that Francie could not reasonably have expected to prevent. His attempt to depend upon these masks as defenses against the irrational and cruel actions of others seems doomed to failure—pretending to be John Wayne will not get you through the death of both your parents. It may, however, as we previously discussed, enable one to pretend to be a violent, cruel badass—which would then enable one to kill the alien Mrs. Nugent. Thus in *The Butcher Boy* international culture offers new *identities* which one could take on and off like new skins instead of just new forms of entertainment.

The Dead School presents a similar vision of global popular culture. Malachy Dudgeon lives in a globalized, Americanized, young Ireland. He enjoys drugs, London, and the ever expanding world of music, especially bands like Bob Marley, the New York Dolls, The Ramones, and Thin Lizzy and Rory Gallagher, all of which reveal the growing popular power of rock music as well as its growing market. Bands like Thin Lizzy display the increasing racial and cultural dimensions of Ireland, as its lead singer Phil Lynott was a son of a South African farmer and an Irish mother. Popular culture for Irish young people is here becoming increasingly global, stretching from Jamaica to America to England and back to Ireland.

Using this broad range of cultural influences, Malachy adopts the personas of various tough guy film noir, drama, and action heroes like Joe Buck from *Midnight Cowboy*, Bennie from *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, and J.J. Gittes from *Chinatown*. His earliest impersonation is of Tony Rome, “the famous detective he had seen at the pictures,” who will

help him to track down his mother's mysterious movements and discover her committing adultery (16). The attraction of Tony Rome, and all the characters that follow him, is similar: "One thing you did not want to do and that was mess with Tony" (16); the powers attributed to Jack Nicholson, who played J.J. Gittes, are the same: "You didn't fuck around with Jack. Other people maybe. But not Jack" (166). Malachy adopts these characters as temporary personalities and shields: "Benny was cool. He was even cooler than Joe Buck. Malachy decided that he would be him now" (72).⁶⁸ *Being* these macho heroes allows Malachy to pretend he is "so cool—so assured" when he is actually terrified or incredibly depressed (265). However, none of these various personalities, which Malachy seems to take on and off at will, provides any substantial protection from Malachy's perception of his real identity:

If Malachy had really been Joe Buck or Benny of any of these headbangers whose antics he spent most of his college days aping trying to impress Marion, he would have grinned from ear to ear and drawled laconically 'Hell—you are quite a guy, ain't you, Mr Bell? You sure are one hell of a crazy guy. You know who you're talking to here?' But, as he knew more than anyone, he wasn't Joe Buck, was he? He was Malachy Dudgeon, that's who he was, son of Packie the biggest bollocks in the town. (111)

Malachy perceives his own identity as essentially flawed and weak, deriving from his father's emasculation as a cuckolded man and a suicide. He chooses his alternate identities in order to imagine himself to be a hypermasculine, violent ladykiller. That this project might be doomed to failure is certainly underscored by Malachy's own inability to understand the movies he is mimicking. In *Midnight Cowboy*, Joe Buck is a naive Texan dishwasher who strangely believes that women in the big city can't find a "real" man and will happily pay big bucks for his sexual services; Joe Buck is, then, a rube, hoodwinked by the prostitute Cass and by the con man Ratso Rizzo, and very possibly a closeted homosexual. J.J. Gittes from *Chinatown* is no better. Several times, Gittes offers confident interpretations of his evidence,

⁶⁸ Though the film's character is spelled Bennie, Malachy consistently uses "Benny" instead.

only to later discover that his interpretations don't hold water; he gets his nose sliced up and, despite his best intentions, gets the woman he intended to protect killed. In *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, Bennie eventually is driven mad. None of these men, then, really provide effective models for Malachy's attempt to become cool, macho, and self-assured, but Malachy does not seem aware of that fact: he only internalizes their almost parodically masculine facades and their willingness to use violence.

Malachy then attempts to use these men as stereotypical images of American Hollywood masculinity, which would enable him to pretend control over troublesome situations; these attempts, however, do not usually pan out for him. It is J.J. Gittes, played by Jack Nicholson, whom Malachy impersonates when he plans to murder Raphael Bell—this character provides him with the machismo and control necessary to plan such an act. Malachy uses figures from American cinema in order to imagine himself as macho and powerful; like Francie, he demonstrates no awareness of or interest in Irish history or mythology. Even if he did remember Cú Chulainn from school, it seems unlikely that Malachy would be tempted to relinquish Jack Nicholson's place in his pantheon. While Raphael Bell might go out to the Abbey or to see his young charges perform hymns in Latin, Malachy is heading to the local cinema for violent, American film entertainment. Without Raphael's secure basis in religion, family, and nationalist pride, Malachy turns to the world of the international culture industry in order to escape from his sense of failure and despair. And for both Francie Brady and Malachy Dudgeon, the choice to craft alternative selves out of global pop culture leads directly to violence; the machismo the characters associate with figures like John Wayne or J.J. Gittes allows them to pursue violent solutions to their problems. Eoin McNamee uses this same paradigm in *Resurrection Man*; Victor understands

his path as a murderer partially through gangster movies: “After the Apollo [cinema] Victor worked hard at getting the gangster walk right. It was a combination of lethal movements and unexpected half-looks” (5). This is scarcely a productive, adaptive hybridity. Rather, global pop culture is brought in to play the Hyde to an Irish Jekyll.

For, it may be apparent at this point that the horror genre was the source of critical meditations on hybridity long before Homi Bhabha coined the term. The definition of monstrosity, like hybridity, is that which troubles borders and categories, that which destabilizes identities by calling categorical divides into question. And horror is exactly where authors have always meditated on the nature and process of identity formation by providing metaphors through which we can understand the necessary hybridity/ monstrosity of subjecthood. Discussing several horror films, Karen Pike points out that “The fantastic’s subversion of the notion of a coherent subject is usually accomplished through a literal transformation of a subject into something multiple or partial.” In Stevenson’s story, the self has two halves: a respectable, socialized half and a beastly, sadistic half. Mary Shelley provides an alternative model in Frankenstein’s creature: a self pieced together out of bits and pieces of earlier selves, out of shards of history. Modern horror films pursue similar metaphors. Norman Bates wears his mother’s clothes in order to become her, and thus become a killer. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* films, Leatherface wears masks made out of human faces in order to alter his identity (becoming a woman at some points)—a metaphor duplicated by both Buffalo Bill and Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*. This form of masking—of putting on new faces—is only what Malachy and Francie do, rendered literally. Stories about monsters have always been where cultures place their desires and anxieties regarding alternative or new identities.

Furthermore, the gothic genre popularized the figure of the doppelganger or gothic double, which can either be an alternative self concealed within one body (a sort of split personality, à la *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), or an alternative self projected into another body. This idea of the gothic doppelganger as a split personality is seen very vividly in the many McCabe characters who adopt figures from film or comics as alternative selves. Notably, McCabe also includes the second kind of doppelganger, in which a self occupies two bodies, through his presentation of Malachy and Raphael in *The Dead School*. Though the two characters seem quite different, they occasionally share thoughts and memories, revealing that their consciousnesses are strangely, and closely, linked. McCabe emphasizes the close ties between his two central characters throughout the novel—both their fathers die early, their mothers become a bit crazy, and they both become teachers, before both losing their beloveds and their jobs. The loose plotlines of their lives parallel frequently; Raphael also planned to name his stillborn son Maolseachlainn, which is Malachy's name. More than this, however, they haunt each other in moments of joined consciousness. When a very high Malachy sees the Prince, with “melting eyes,” asking him several times “Teacher, can I go to the toilet,” these are actually events and thoughts that belong to Raphael (208). Seven pages later, a child asks Raphael three times whether he can go to the toilet; Raphael also has haunting dreams about horses with “melting eyes” (120). When young, Raphael has a troubling vision of a shadow person “in the chimney corner armchair”; notably, this is where Malachy's mother generally sits (46, 75-6). Raphael and Malachy haunt each other, showing an identity that is more schizophrenic than separate, a twinned haunting that undercuts a reader's ability to separate out a Gaelic Romantic tradition and its globalized, violent offspring. This collapsing of Raphael and Malachy does not help us “unwind the messy skein

of identities and separate out the good from the ugly, the bad from the pure, the perverted from the kind, the sexual from the spiritual, the beautiful from the unhealthy” (Halberstam 59), as do the doppelgangers in some gothic texts. Instead, it shows the interdependence of such categories—their hybrid mixtures—and suggests that any possible Irish future will likely need to be part Raphael and part Malachy, rather than one or the other.

In horror, people are flesh, made of discrete parts—and those parts can be manipulated. Definitions of hybridity and monstrosity are remarkably similar, and whether these states are promising spaces for revolutionary identities depends very much on your point of view. For the authors we have discussed above, the monstrosity of hybrid identities that bring in elements of global pop culture, in which identity becomes a matter of malleable, interchangeable masks, does not fulfill the promise that postcolonial criticism often locates within the hybrid. These monstrous/ hybrid characters instead generally become sadistic and violent. Though we might look to the monstrous hybrid as an escape from identities based on unitary, essentialist origins, these authors ultimately don’t seem to embrace its possibilities. While a Gaelic Romantic national identity seems undesirable, the hybrid produced by global pop culture doesn’t seem any better—and, in fact, seems equally atavistic, as these works often tie hybridity to an increased propensity for violence. Perhaps some combination of these two identities, as seen in Malachy and Raphael, provides a better answer, but even this seems tenuous, as *The Dead School* ends quite unhappily for both characters. But before we write Ireland off completely, we should consider two recent novels by McCabe, *Breakfast on Pluto* and *Call Me the Breeze*, which offer, respectively, an extended meditation on the possible value of a monstrously hybrid positionality and an investigation of the possible futures for a nation dealing with a violent past.

Patrick Pussy Braden and Joseph Mary Tallon: Monsters or Saviors?

Breakfast on Pluto presents a self-conscious meditation on the possibilities inherent in a hybrid, liminal position, asking readers to consider Patrick Pussy Braden as a test case while this transvestite prostitute attempts to navigate the violent, sectarian world of the Troubles.⁶⁹ As a guide through the vagaries and violence of this period, Patrick Pussy Braden may seem like an odd choice. His decision to negotiate this dangerous landscape with “pastiche, wickedness and cheek” is not the standard one, which would more likely involve outrage, cries for vengeance, or at least very serious moral pronouncements (xi). But these responses, common as they are, have not been terribly productive in the past. Patrick McCabe then presents Patrick Pussy Braden—a child of violence, somewhere between genders and between nations—in a meditation on the possibilities inherent in a liminal, or perhaps monstrous, position. In his “Prelude,” McCabe suggests that Patrick Pussy has the opportunity to be either a hero or a monster, and presents his book as an investigation of what might happen to such a peculiar “emissary” (xi).⁷⁰

Of course, you can’t discuss a crossdressing man in the same breath as Northern Irish violence without also mentioning Neil Jordan’s 1992 *The Crying Game*. The narrative in Jordan’s film is actually quite similar to McCabe’s novel, even aside from these basic plot points. The crossdressing Dill first appears in the film as a passionate, emotionally savvy woman; his performance of femininity is strong and liberating, especially for any first time viewers who may not initially realize that Dill’s sex is male. Initially, as a woman, Dill is

⁶⁹ “The Troubles” generally refers to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland beginning in the late sixties. Some claim that this period ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement, while others claim that it has not yet ended.

⁷⁰ The idea of a “Patrick” and a “Pussy” being in one body again recalls the doppelganger motif of the gothic.

sexual while also being independent and sensible: a sort of superhero woman, a posterchild for the assets of genderbending. However, as the film progresses, Dill's performance of femininity moves increasingly toward a stereotype of women as needy, desperate, and jealous. Since the only real female in the film is Jude—a sadistic femme fatale who the film kills off—it is hard to rescue a workable performance of femininity from the film. Instead, it seems that as Fergus' masculinity rises—as he learns to be a real, protective, but not sadistic, man—Dill's femininity becomes increasingly desperate and shrill. The film's investment, then, seems to be in the humane masculinity seen in Fergus and Jody, and the initial promise of a strong and equally humane femininity in Dill isn't realized. Jordan does not ultimately deliver Dill as the genderbending superhero she might be. McCabe seems to take this tension, between Dill as potential superhero and Dill as hysterical female, as a starting point for his book, as he asks readers to consider the potential of a liminal position in national critique.

Breakfast on Pluto begins by setting a historical scene: “*The war begins, Battle of the Boyne, Ireland, July 1690,*” a heading that McCabe follows with a brief overview of this seminal fight, in which William of Orange defeats James the Second (ix). This event is presented as the seed of contemporary Irish history; it is also apparently the reason that: “Approximately one mile from [Tyreelin] is a place that looks mysteriously like [Patrick's home, the Republic of Ireland] but yet is a separate state, its terrain zig-zagged with roads that seem to go everywhere and nowhere at all” (ix). This separation is presented as a strange, even slightly supernatural fact, something that tests the borders of belief, and the North is presented as a fairy land of confused directions and purposeless movement. Furthermore, this ominous national doppelganger produces a universal atmosphere of anxiety, in which “Conspiracies seem to thread the most innocuous of conversations” and

“Dark things seemed to scurry about, always on the move” (ix, x). The ambiguous description “dark things” suggests the possibility of inhuman beasts and unknown boogeymen haunting the countryside. McCabe presents atrocities without motivation, separated from context, as moments of continuing, and apparently meaningless, historical horror: “Xmas 1881, a Catholic man disappeared and was found in a ditch, a crucifix hammered into his head” (x). In 1920, the country is “split from top to bottom,” as the people struggle to create a nation, and in 1922, there emerges “a geographical border drawn by a drunken man, every bit as tremulous and deceptive as the one which borders life and death” (x). This border seems simultaneously ridiculous, an irrational and nonsensical construct, and deeply profound, a source of danger and potential death. The model of the nation that McCabe presents is thus an irrationally split entity, characterized by periodic and meaningless violence, a place of arbitrary lines and definitions, separation and amputation: a monstrous geography.

As a counterpoint to this image of Ireland, McCabe presents his “hero(ine) Mr. Patrick Pussy Braden”—a perhaps oppositional figure of integration, someone who combines apparently separate categories as a hero and heroine, a Patrick and a Pussy (ix). If the history described above is one of borders and separations, Patrick Pussy is a young man who crosses such borders—whether national or sexual. He is presented as a sort of consequence or continuation of the history described above, and his birth date given the same degree of importance as the Battle of the Boyne, in the same italicized heading: “*March 1955; Two hundred and sixty-five years later.* Into the village of Tyreelin (pop. 1500) on the southern side of the Irish border, a young boy is born” (ix). The biblical language of this passage presents Patrick as a possible savior for this brutal and confused culture, the bearer of new

possibilities, or possibly a new religion, as the name Patrick suggests. Ultimately, Patrick Pussy chooses to “devote his life to a cause and one alone,” but that cause is not clearly nationalist: “That of ending, once and for all, this ugly state of perpetual limbo. To finding—finally, and for us all!—a map which might lead him to that place called home. Where all borders will ultimately vanish and perfume through Tyreelin Valley” (x-xi). Patrick Pussy is thus a possible savior or superhero, who, due to his own personal combination of genders, is uniquely qualified to quest for a world in which “all borders” vanish. In short, Patrick Pussy is the monstrous hybrid that undermines categorical boundaries—his own violation of boundaries could, maybe, point the way to new identities and ways of living in the North, in which boundaries are taken all too seriously. Furthermore, this “place called home” that Patrick might discover will provide an “end to abandonment, rage and lust for vengeance, the terror of galactic aloneness” as people will no longer be separated by arbitrary personal or national borders and could instead be integrated into one big, happy, global family (xi). This certainly seems to be an attractive dream. McCabe, however, presents doubts regarding Patrick Pussy’s chances:

But will it all be so easy for him, this fragile, flamboyant self-styled emissary, or shall he prove nothing more than another false prophet, ending his days in a backstreet apartment, sucking his thumb and dreaming of Mama, a silly old Norman Bates of history? Or will he triumph, making it against all the odds through the gauntlet of misfits, dodgy politicians, errant priests, psychos and sad old lovers that is his world, laying his head beneath a flower-bordered print that bears the words at last: ‘You’re home.’? (xi)

Patrick Pussy’s idealism may not be realized, for many of the institutions and people in his world will be hostile to his desires. He may prove too “fragile” for the great task laid before him. He might, if he fails, become a “silly old Norman Bates of history.”

In this phrase, McCabe suggests one possible framework through which to interpret Patrick Pussy's goals and chances. If he may be the town's savior, he may also be its monster—a deviant freak, a “Norman Bates of history.” This “Prelude” to *Breakfast on Pluto* sets up a key problem within the text—that of how to read Patrick Pussy. Certainly, readers are encouraged to find Patrick Pussy entertaining and likable, but he presents a challenge both to readers and to characters who encounter him within the novel. Most readers and most of the supporting characters are not familiar with a large number of transvestite male prostitutes, so Patrick Pussy presents a challenge for interpretation. On the one hand, he may be a savior or superhero, a fabulously dressed Lurex Avenger out to forge a better, more humane world. On the other hand—and this is how many of the characters within *Breakfast on Pluto* interpret Patrick Pussy—he may be a monstrous, freakish anomaly. Patrick Pussy, as a liminal figure, between genders and nations, possesses all the possibilities of a radical outsider; like the Fool in a Shakespearean play, Patrick might be able to speak truth to power, or to understand clearly (and perhaps alter) the dynamics of his personal and his national situation. However, many of the characters that populate McCabe's novel interpret Patrick, instead, as a deviant freak. So, in the “Prelude,” McCabe ends by asking whether or not Patrick will succeed in his quest, implicitly foregrounding the question of the potential value of a liminal, borderline monstrous position in national reform and critique. His success, to a large degree, seems dependent on whether the people he encounters are willing to see the possibilities inherent in the monstrous position—to see him as a savior—or whether they dismiss him as a sexually twisted monster. For Patrick Pussy can thus be read as a potential “monster” on two primary levels: as a Norman Bates-esque sexually ambiguous Oedipal male,⁷¹ and as the nation's abject, as something that 1960's and 1970's ideas of Irish identity

⁷¹ Like most of McCabe's characters, Patrick has a thing for his mother. She disappeared after his birth, but he

cannot cope with, namely a transvestite male prostitute. Mid-century ideals of Irish identity, penetrated by the Catholic religion and an idealized history of masculine valor, sacrifice, and martyrdom, have little place for a “fairy” selling his body on the streets of London. Jennifer Jeffers notes that “the hegemonic control of the Catholic Church in *Breakfast in Pluto* ruins Pussy’s life by making his mother and, in turn, her baby abject by the measurement of these traditional standards” (164).⁷² Pussy imagines Jesus “wondering, I suppose, what He’d been drinking the day he went and made a twilight zone of a disaster like me” (63); readers and Pussy’s acquaintances are similarly forced to consider the “twilight zone”—that uncomfortable integration of various categories—that is Patrick Pussy. Though most readers are won over by the brazen hussy, many characters in the book are nonetheless much more likely to interpret Patrick Pussy as a monster than as an emissary.

If Patrick Pussy is the nation’s abject, a remnant that the nation cannot absorb, and a potential monster, he is thus in a unique position as an outsider. Without ties to family, religion, or nationalism, Patrick enjoys a privileged vantage point and a rare freedom. A direct foil to the fragmented nation, separated and violent, the strangely liminal and integrated Patrick Pussy can stick up for the abused and oppressed as a superhero of sorts: “*The Lurex Avenger!*” (155). And Tyreelin, as Patrick presents it, certainly needs a savior. The family is a site of miserly, animalistic contentiousness where “half-human children” fight over a “midget of a turkey” (9). The church houses Father Bernard, rapist, with his “trembling, veined stalks so invasive, angry” (27). Nationalism is a real haven only for

spends a great deal of time fantasizing about her, and a friend of his even suggests that his transvestite tendencies are based on wanting to *be* his lost mother. This focus on the lost mother is another Norman Bates parallel, though in Bates’s case she’s lost because she’s dead.

⁷² While Jeffers does describe Pussy as the Church’s abject, her definition derives from Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* not from Kristeva. She also is not interested in exploring Pussy’s specifically monstrous status or what the book might suggest about a hybrid position overall.

sadists, men who would mock a young boy with Down's syndrome before raping his mother and killing him. In this atmosphere, Patrick's "personal revolution" seems much more attractive than any sectarian revolt (22). This particular hero will "take it away, as though it had never been, the smell and stench that down the generations had a tainted valley filled," by covering the stench of rapist priests and meaningless, sadistic murders with the sweet smell of Chanel (154).

His philosophy is one of integration and the protection of the innocent and helpless; he steps in when no one else in the community does. As a man who goes out to the bars, and as a woman who recognizes another girl in danger, Patrick Pussy combines awareness and sympathy in his desire to help Martina, a young girl in the process of being seduced by Tommy McNamee. At the bar, "I saw her leaning across the pool table and one of [the men] publicly feeling himself. She didn't know this, of course, just like so many young girls of her age don't. Can't possibly, I suppose. Until it is too late" (107). Recognizing that all the men of the town objectify her and care nothing for her feelings or future, Patrick is "heartbroken by the thought of that innocent, credulous face" and takes it upon himself to tell her the real situation: "These people are just using you! You're only fifteen!" (107, 105). While his attempt to step in and tell Martina the truth doesn't go well, he is apparently the only person in the town who has noticed and who tries to step in and help her.

Martina's reaction to her knight in Gucci armor displays the main problem with Patrick Pussy's mission of salvation—while he may see himself as a glamorous superhero, others are likely to interpret him as a monster and a freak. His attempts to save Martina are greeted by her screams: "'Let me go,' she said, 'you get your hands off me now and let me go, you fucking queer!'" (106). This interpretation is mirrored by the town as a whole: "The

only reason the ‘Hello, honky tonks’ and ‘Ooh, you are awfuls’ had stopped was that they wanted absolutely *nothing* to do with me” (105). The dog Patrick buys for Charlie is strangled with barbed wire, and clothes left on the washing line are “dumped in the garden a few days later, ripped up and destroyed with all sorts of obscenities scrawled on them in lipstick” (195). Abby Freedman’s review of *Breakfast on Pluto* notes that, “People see him [Patrick] as the very embodiment of their society's degradation. Unwed marriage, bombs raining down - this they can handle. But clad in pink mohair, Pussy is the epitome of terror, and people flee him accordingly.” While many townspeople seemed willing to tolerate Patrick in his youth, when he fails to grow out of his effeminate habits and, in fact, becomes more flamboyant, tolerance seems to decrease radically. Patrick notices that “conversations would stop dead” whenever he walked into a local establishment (193). He begins to imagine people in the town, whether his father or his latest crush, asking him “Who or *what* are you,” which reveals their discomfort with his categorical transgressions and the key reason they cannot accept him (193, 177). People even sometimes read his clothes and behavior as a sign of a violent, heartless, serial killer heart, à la Norman Bates, as the London newspapers become all the more titillated and bloodthirsty after the revelation of Patrick’s style of dress:

nothing would convince them that the baby-faced male bomber they now had firmly in their grasp was anything other than a wicked little fucker who would stop at nothing in his determination to mutilate and maim, even going so far as to disguise himself as a tart, a piece of information which they had no hesitation in giving to the papers who by now of course were screaming to high heaven for a conviction. (143)

This particular interpretation of monstrosity owes a great deal to what McCabe presents as a general London interpretation of the Irish race as a whole as a big mess of bloodthirsty beasts. McCabe peppers the novel with periodic English rants against the Irish: “Bladhy bog Arabs!” or “String ’em up, the Irish cants, each and every farking one of ’em” (87, 73). It

seems apparent that if Patrick Pussy is the abjected monster of Tyreelin, then the Irish are the abjected monster of the British. As Kiberd said in *Inventing Ireland*, “If Ireland had never existed, the English would have invented it” (9). As in *The Butcher Boy*, this chain of abjection reveals a society prone to manufacturing and condemning demons, and the presentation of this chain on the personal and cultural level undercuts all accusations of monstrosity within the text. People always seem ready to create monsters, to render abject that which doesn’t fit their moral or cultural ideals, but in McCabe’s fictions such monsters are almost always the object of the reader’s sympathy.

Even aside from Patrick’s monstrous status as both a crossdressing homosexual prostitute and as an Irishman in London, several other factors make it unlikely that Patrick will arise as Tyreelin’s savior and superhero. Patrick’s privileged position as an outsider also makes him isolated and lonely. Without a family, religion, or community, Patrick feels his solitude very keenly and demonstrates a desperate need to belong. This generally takes the form of fantasies about an idealized family, in which he rewrites his own childhood and imagines an impossible future as a wife and mother. Many of these show his desire to find his own mother, who abandoned him at birth, and who he thinks would have provided him with a clear identity: “without her, how can I ever belong on this earth?” (102). He imagines her as an angelic figure of acceptance, a woman who understands and loves her son as he is; when he asks her whether he wears women’s clothes because his father was a priest, she replies, ““Of course not, silly, You simply wear them because that’s just how you are!”” (150). Certainly, one could read this as clear evidence of Patrick’s unresolved Oedipal feelings. As Terence suggests, deprived of a mother to love, Patrick becomes her: “After all—she could hardly walk away then!” (95). But without a mother or family, and believing

that without them he cannot “belong,” Patrick himself shows his shaky foundations. His tenuous grip on reality bodes ill for the success of his mission.

Though Patrick’s quest may be doomed to failure, due to others’ tendency to perceive him as monstrous as well as his own identity problems, the text suggests that the real evil in the book is the sectarian killers on both sides who murder the innocent alongside the guilty indiscriminately. The Unionists who murder Terence the Downs Syndrome boy and Pat McCrane demonstrate excessive sadism. They rape Terence’s mother before they kill him, and Pat McCrane is tortured with three hundred knife nicks and carved lines down his back. The narrator, Patrick Pussy, takes care to point out human details about these victims, whether Terence’s love of *Celebrity Squares* or Pat’s anxious desires for his upcoming wedding to Sandra. The Nationalist murder of a group of British soldiers seems like a similar miscarriage of justice; as the soldiers walk to the bar, they blame the politicians not the nationalists: “It’s the politicians wot facks it ap! Let ’em go and fack ’emselves!” (99). Though the dialect makes this rather humorous, certainly these soldiers are not insane, bloodthirsty unionists. These soldiers are average guys, and even uncommonly tolerant and understanding, but the men who kill them peremptorily call them “Fucking scum” (101). This lack of appreciation for innocence and this brutal culture of excessive, purposeless violence is the stench that Patrick Pussy imagines the Lurex Avenger might cover with the sweet smell of perfume. These men are the real evil of the text, as they create division and the desire for vengeance, which perpetuates the violence indefinitely.

Patrick Pussy does not seem to accomplish his goals; rejected by the town, he leaves, and at some point later enters a mental institution where he eventually becomes an outpatient. Tyreelin doesn’t seem ready for Patrick Pussy, so, after numerous incidents of violence and

abuse, he leaves. He seems to have become more of a “silly old Norman Bates of history,” sitting in his apartment reading and fantasizing about an impossible, perfect family, than a Lurex Avenger. The fault in this, however, seems to rest more with the members of the community that reviled and rejected him. It is all too easy to label a superhero as a monster, for the qualities that go into each are generally the same—a liminal or hybrid being, beyond the strictures of average mortals. The possibilities inherent in the postcolonial theory’s lauded hybrid and the monster are the same; whether you label such a person a savior or a monster depends on your own worldview. Both possibilities are inherent in the hybrid, but the beholder generally only perceives one. After all, a hero like Batman or Spiderman is only a small step from monstrosity. He combines the animal and the human, which can easily tip into the monstrous, as does the combination of human and insect in the film *The Fly*. The categories, indeed, often overlap.

It still seems possible that in another time and place Patrick Pussy could be a hero and lead a “personal revolution” toward a world in which children are loved and the innocent spared, a world in which the perfume of forgiveness settles over a very stinky town. Discussing the novel with Abby Freedman, McCabe said, “[Pussy] is bruised, damaged, but ultimately redeemable, if there is such a word. Anybody with that capacity for tenderness must be alright.” At the close of the “Prelude,” McCabe inserted the following: “BELFAST GOOD FRIDAY 1998 The war over, now perhaps we too can take—however tentatively—those first few steps which may end unease and see us there; home, belonging, and at peace” (xi). Certainly, McCabe is on Patrick Pussy’s side, longing for a nation no longer so brutal and mysterious, for a sensible and calm world, and he closes the novel with Patrick’s favorite fantasy:

to wake up in the hospital with my family all around me, exhausted after my ordeal maybe, but with a bloom like roses in my cheeks, as I stroke his soft and tender head, my little baby, watching them as they beam with pride, in their eye perhaps a tear or two—who cares!—hardly able to speak as they wipe it away and say! ‘He’s ours.’ (199)

This tender image of a cherished child cannot quite supplant so many previous images of abuse and abandonment. And for Patrick to give birth to a baby is quite impossible. But he offers us a vision of a cohesive, newly beautiful world in which the innocent are protected and mothers love their children. Nevertheless, this closing image offers to the reader the prerogative of the monstrous—to transcend categories and borders, and to imagine new worlds with new freedoms. Though perhaps Patrick does end up as a failed old Norman Bates of history, the text’s loving treatment of him suggests that his approach—the monstrous subversion of categories—is important and perhaps promising in working toward a world in which all subjects could belong equally within the state, and in which peace could prevail. As McCabe said to Abby Freedman, "I see this character [Patrick] as really a fictionalization of Mother Ireland. And she's almost getting there but not quite. She's saying to the reader, 'Why don't you get there? Don't be like this. Reach home.'"

McCabe’s most recent novel, *Call Me the Breeze*, is, in many ways, quite similar to *Breakfast on Pluto*. The main character’s name —Joseph Mary Tallon—figures him as a potential savior, or someone who could, at least, show the way to salvation.⁷³ And, like Patrick Pussy, Joseph Mary is born in a border town and lives amidst sectarian machinations, bombings, and murders. The most significant difference between these books is that *Call Me*

⁷³ It may also be a reference to Joseph Mary Plunkett, one of the signers of the 1916 Proclamation of an Irish Republic and one of the martyrs of Easter week, who was, in Coogan’s description, “an unlikely revolutionary” who had a taste for “flowing cloaks, bangles, and jewelry” and was educated in philosophy, science, and poetry (*Ireland* 43).

the Breeze moves forward into the present, at least as far as the year 2000.⁷⁴ The novel is thus unique within McCabe's canon, as he moves out of a brutal Ireland of the past. Most of the action occurs between 1976 and 2000, which extends the novel's scope beyond the apparently "brutal culture" of the country in the 1950s and 1960s into the era of the Celtic Tiger and EU projects. In doing so, the novel becomes a meditation on how properly to engage with a brutal past while immersed in the promise of a better present—how can an individual like Joseph Mary Tallon, himself guilty of an act of violence, reconcile himself with the past and achieve redemption? With such a horrific past, is it possible to move forward into a better future? Could the promise suggested by Patrick Pussy be mobilized? The attempt to answer these questions actually situates many of McCabe's themes, such as abjection and the masks made available by global popular culture, in the background, as issues relating to the nature of time, of representations of history, and of redemption move to the fore. These typically McCabe-ian themes that we have been tracing throughout almost become camp sideshows, which are mentioned (seemingly almost as inside jokes for McCabe's fans) but not developed.

The Ireland of *Call Me the Breeze* is, first of all, a quite literally brutal culture. McCabe situates the novel in Scotsfield—probably based on his hometown of Clones—a small border community with a significant Provisional Irish Republican Army presence and with frequent acts of violence. Joey, as he works at the local bar in 1976, finds himself privy to discussions of various violent acts perpetrated by the PIRA (and, interestingly, by British intelligence) in and around his town: the murder of the British salesman Campbell Morris, the assassination of the British Ambassador and his secretary, the Kingsmills massacre (in which ten Protestant workers were executed), the murder of Detective Tuite, and the

⁷⁴ Joey discusses watching *Gladiator*, which is a 2000 film (281).

bombing of Scotsfield during the Peace and Reconciliation Rally.⁷⁵ This is a world in which acts of extreme violence no longer seem exceptional; in 1976, assassinations and massacres happened one after the other. The apparatus of the state does not seem to fare much better initially. As Joey looks back in his jail journal, which apparently starts in early 1977, he writes: “Even flipping through it is enough to make the gloominess start insinuating itself again. You almost go into a foetal [sic] crouch as you turn each weighted and weary page, with talk of nothing—only strikes and abortion referenda, rain and misery in a country that seemed ruined” (103). This “ruined” country is familiar McCabe material; Bonehead even duplicates Benny Brady’s seminal, disastrous experience in a children’s home when his mother dies and his father becomes an alcoholic. It is later suggested that Bonehead may have been abused by the clergy who ran the home. State institutions, like the children’s home, thus become dysfunctional sites that create dysfunctional people; individual rights within the nation seem endangered, as labor movements, women’s movements, and peace movements meet with opposition (and sometimes vicious acts of violence, such as the bomb at the Peace and Reconciliation Rally).

In the face of this decay and violence, Joey does turn to one hypermasculine American figure—the character Travis Bickle, as played by Robert DeNiro, from *Taxi Driver*. Travis Bickle helps Joey to pursue a course of “total organization” and to become a man who could kidnap a young woman. He starts dressing like the character, gets his hair cut in a mohawk, and also adopts less obvious forms of imitation: “Sure I was influenced. I was even standing like De Niro, for God’s sake. With my legs apart and my two arms folded” (22). Joey uses Travis as a vehicle through which to feel in control and masculine, but he

⁷⁵ Many of the events discussed in the novel actually happened. The British Ambassador Christopher Ewart-Biggs and the civil servant Judith Cook were assassinated in Sandymount, County Dublin, in 1976. The Kingsmill massacre also occurred.

never becomes violent. When he kidnaps Jacy, he breaks her wrist quite accidentally, and the “explosives” strapped to his stomach, meant to keep the authorities at bay, are actually sand bags. Joey has no violent fantasies, and this shows a significant difference between Joey and characters like Francie or Malachy. Joey never attempts to abject others, to make them into something that isn’t quite human; he consistently resists blaming others for his misfortunes, and in this, he shows a definite move forward into a new realm of possibility for McCabe’s characters. In this sense at least, Joey has liberated himself from his past, letting go of his troubled childhood as any legitimating reason for current violence.

This is not to say, however, that other characters in *Call Me the Breeze* do not demonstrate this tendency toward abjection. Joey’s biological mother, driven mad by her husband’s infidelity and her shame, is institutionalized—“they wheeled her off gibbering about Chinamen” (4). We can infer Mrs. Tallon’s logic here. The national ideal—with its constitutional enshrinement of the home and the woman within the home—elides the possible cruelty and irresponsibility of husbands. Mrs. Tallon, as the rejected, shamed, emotionally abused woman, is thus someone who troubles the state’s definition of wifedom and motherhood. She has likely been ostracized by a community that isn’t sure how to cope with an abused and abandoned woman; she then becomes the state’s abject. Subsequently, she abjects someone else—in this case, Chinamen, a convenient site of ethnic and political difference. This moment, however, is given no narrative development and seems rather like a joke. As Mrs. Tallon, presumably, will have no Chinamen to abuse within the Irish mental institution, her choice of monster seems relatively innocuous and somewhat ridiculous.

Another example of the cyclic nature of abjection is Bonehead, who has been abused in a children’s home and reviled as a traveler. Bonehead tells Joey: “There’s plenty o’

travelers in this dump, Joesup, but I'm not one of them" (71)—a desperate claim that seems to be based on very little fact, as other inmates in the prison taunt Bonehead with his lack of a permanent dwelling. As a member of this generally despised group, Bonehead resists his categorization within it, and, in fact, becomes the most racist character in the book.

Regarding the travelers, Bonehead pronounces: "Hitler had the right idea, Joesup. People like that just have to be gassed-ed!" (73). Presumably, Bonehead seeks to bolster his tenuous status as a non-traveler through his display of hatred for the traveler community. Indeed, he is in jail for "a fatal affray in which an itinerant died," and, when another inmate accuses Bonehead of being a traveler, he "had your man up against the wall battering the living shit out of him" (71). Though this provides an excellent example of the recycling nature of abjection—as the abused Bonehead becomes a very violent abuser—it is not really taken seriously by the text. Bonehead, overall, is a quite sympathetic character, and his racism is almost presented as an endearing quirk. Certainly, the statement that travelers should be "gassed-ed" is written for laughs, as the camp excess of the statement combines with the incorrect grammar. Abjection also seems to be the stuff of comedy through Bonehead's ridiculous attempt to abject a community that he is, in fact, a member of. This method of self or communal definition thus comes to seem problematic and rather ridiculous—a common psychological process that can be deployed against anyone at any time, independent of the existence of a worthwhile or justifying motivation. The comedy inherent in Bonehead's racism thus reveals abjection's possibilities for abuse and the possibility for inconsistency or failure in the process.

Not all abjection in the novel is treated comedically; certainly, sectarian violence in the community of Scotsfield is deadly serious, as when an innocent English salesman like

Campbell Morris is murdered only for being English, and thus, in some abstract way, a participant in the abjection of the Irish. Most violence in the town relates specifically to the continuing colonial context of Northern Ireland because the paramilitaries in this border community are not prepared to accept the separation of the nation of Ireland into two states. The men of the community are particularly sensitive to perceived slights from the English. When two English foxy boxers rile the men up and then depart, the silent men think: “*Those English prostitutes have made fools of us! Come over and make their money and then what do they do? Fuck off!*”, and this humiliation from the colonizing force produces an atmosphere of simmering violence: “For the next couple of hours, it was like you were afraid to say anything—no matter how innocuous—in case a fight might break out” (46). Their humiliation at the hands of these English women produces the desire to become violent—to humiliate and hurt someone else, to abject them. It is thus clear that, in Scotsfield, abjection is not necessarily inherently funny. However, the comedy inherent in the presentations of Mrs. Tallon and of Bonehead forces the reader to recognize the probable failure of abjection as a process that might preserve individual or communal definition.

The Ireland presented in the first sections of the novel is then a familiarly dysfunctional one. McCabe, however, moves past 1976, and in doing so, presents an increasingly open, liberal community in Scotsfield and in the country. While McCabe’s previous novels universally condemn state-sponsored institutions like the church, children’s homes, and the law, *Call Me the Breeze* presents clearly favorable visions of the penitentiary and the church. After kidnapping Jacy and getting caught, Joey is sent to Mountjoy prison. Initially, he finds little to recommend it and attempts suicide. However, when Mervin takes

over the jail, everything changes: Mervin encourages the inmates to form a poetry association, to produce a play, and to start a magazine. Joey writes:

It was like Mervin had pushed open the doors of an old abandoned attic and thrown open all the windows. Had come stomping across those decrepit dusty floorboards and inhaled for himself a deep draught of air. ‘Smell that!’ you could hear him say. ‘Drink a draught of that fresh clean air! For don’t you know it, my men—the possibilities are limitless now!’ (117)

The prison becomes a site of successful rehabilitation instead of punishment. The promise of “fresh clean air” and endless possibilities suggests an opening up of the horizon of expectation, to use Reinhart Koselleck’s term. The future no longer seems bound to the limits of a brutal past. Joey gains a new sense of confidence in his abilities and returns to Scotsfield; Father Connolly suggests that Joey might take control of the “Tops of the Town” review in the community fair. Joey glosses Father Connolly’s personality in this way: “For that was one great thing you were able to say about Connolly: he always saw the best in everyone. And if you had something to offer the parish, then he would be the man to spot it” (122). Instead of cruelty and sexual abuse, the church here offers kindness, understanding, and support. Indeed, Father Connolly sums up the new situation when he says, “It may be true that the times now are better. That there’s a clean wind abroad and the cobwebs are all blowing away. I hope so, anyway, Joseph” (157). Again, the “clean wind” and the removal of cobwebs suggest a future whose horizon of expectation is opening up, no longer circumscribed by the terrors of past experience. This is certainly a new era for McCabe; Connolly argues for “the possibility of a new beginning for us in Scotsfield—no, not alone in Scotsfield but the entire island of Ireland” (39).

This possibility of a “new beginning,” however, raises the key question that preoccupies the novel—what is the proper relationship between the present and a brutal past?

Can that past be ignored and forgotten, or must it be remembered and commemorated? If the past is a source of trauma, how can one move past it into a livable future? Certainly, as we discussed earlier in this chapter, one cannot turn to a monumental or antiquarian vision of heroic national history; such constructions are fragile and may produce their own violence. The question then becomes what sort of relationship with the past best enables the opening up of new horizons of expectation for new futures, in which past trauma could stop recycling and repeating. The relationship with the dead is thus one site where these questions find expression. One day out at the reservoir, where the local Bennett, the salesman Morris, and his beloved Mona all died, Joey muses: “When you sat there listening, you could hear the rustling of the leaves, with the wind coming through them as though it were their voices trying to reach you in order to explain. What exactly had happened and how they were feeling now” (92). Joey fantasizes that it might be possible to communicate with the dead—that they might have revelations and emotions to share with us—though he cannot quite discern what those voices might actually be saying. Later, Joey looks into the eyes of the inflatable doll that substitutes for the dead Mona: “They could be troubling, those eyes. They were eyes that said: *‘I’m neutral. It’s nothing to do with me. None of it. It’s all the one to me, Joseph’*” (206). In this interpretation, the dead are silent and indifferent—neutral, with no lessons or emotions to share. Joey thus seems aware of two poles of possible relationships with the past, and participates in both: one, that the past can communicate with us and has lessons and revelations to impart, and that the past should therefore be studied and *remembered*, and two, that the past is dead and gone, indifferent, neutral—something to be overcome and *left behind*. Joey, in fact, is caught between these two interpretations, in which history must either be commemorated or surmounted.

Part of Joey's understanding of history rests on his understanding of time and the determinacy or indeterminacy of events in time. In the first half of the book, Joey is obsessed with Charles Manson. Though Manson is certainly a violent figure, this is not how Joey approaches or understands him, and this is quite similar to how Joey adopts Travis Bickle while purging him of any violent context.

The more I went through it the more sympathy I had for Manson. In the beginning his ideas were kind of OK. Called himself The Gardener and collected all the flower people. Maybe if the karma hadn't gone wrong, things might have worked out different. Who knows how it would have ended up? It was just that old karma going wrong, that's all. It was a pity but that's the way things go sometimes. They just go kind of astray. The karma gets . . . I don't know, turned inside out, I guess. (12)

Joey attempts to recover Charlie the Gardener from Charles Manson, to recover an alternative history: "A garden that could have been" (14). Of the monster, he attempts to make a savior—to construct an alternative history in which Charlie's karma went right. The figure of Charlie the Gardener—who becomes something like Joey's imaginary friend—thus reveals Joey's discomfort with a teleological vision of a linear history, in which various possibilities are distilled into one outcome. If most versions of history write Charles Manson off as a psychotic madman, Joey is interested in imaging a possible past in which things did not turn out that way. And if, as Koselleck suggests, our horizon of expectation is conditioned by the space of experience, or our visions of the future are conditioned by our relationships with the past, to imagine alternative histories is also to imagine alternative futures: to open up space for new horizons. As Kevin Whelan says:

Memory also makes us heirs of the past (what we call heritage) and its utopian possibilities. The promise of a historical event is always more than what actually happened. There is more in the past than what happened; at any given point in time, multiple trajectories toward the future were possible. (93)

To recover Charlie the Gardener out of Charles Manson is a utopian gesture, in which another trajectory toward the future—a notably less brutal one—becomes possible. Joey’s vision of Charlie the Gardener is thus one way in which Joey attempts to escape from a linear vision of history, in which he might well expect for his life to only get worse. Alternative pasts offer potential ways to live in a brutal present. This is similar to how McCabe’s characters generally idealize a moment in the past, but in this case, as Charlie the Gardener is only a potential history, it is not open to the same subversion as Francie’s or Raphael’s idealized histories.

This use of Charlie the Gardener also underscores McCabe’s interest in the possibilities inherent in the monstrous position, as Joey meditates on whether Charlie the Gardener could have been a savior of sorts. Joey wants to imagine a present and a past open to contingency, in which outcomes are not determined, in which things might always “have worked out different.” This does not seem terribly surprising coming from Joey in 1976, caught in a web of violence—murders, assassinations, bombings—that threatens to destroy the present and future. Joey contemplates an escape from determinism, the possibility of time outside history in which alternatives always exist, a place where the monstrous becomes, instead of dangerous, a space of possibility. Charlie the Gardener is a hero that Joey recovers out of someone considered to be a monster, Charles Manson.

Joey, however, seems unsure of how best to access this escape from determinist history. To just imagine an alternative past is not the same as emerging in a better future. Two competing ways to escape from teleologically driven history emerge, personified in Joey’s two love interests: Mona and Jacy. Both of these women function for Joey almost entirely as psychological constructions; readers are presented with plenty of evidence that

undercuts Joey's understandings of the two women. Mona, the woman with whom Joey's father conducted an adulterous affair, committed suicide some time before the beginning of the novel's narrative, but Joey has purchased an inflatable doll that he dresses as Mona. The "Mona" of the text is thus an inflatable stand-in, a blank slate, upon which Joey can project a certain understanding of the nature of time. Alternatively, Jacy is constructed as the perfect American blond girl from California, though she is later revealed to have been a whore, to have dark hair, and probably to be from Wicklow. Perhaps due to Joey's idealized construction of these two women, they become competing sites that allow him to personify two different possible relationships with the past and with history. With Mona, Joey embraces a vision of history based on *remembrance* and *commemoration*. Joey's fantasies with Mona always involve returning to the past, and perhaps altering that past for the better. On the other hand, Jacy embodies the escape from history, the possibility of *casting it off* entirely and moving into a new, free, historyless world. Neither of these, however, seems ultimately to hold up for Joey—they cannot offer the possibility of a true escape from a past that seems relentlessly embodied and immutable.

The plastic doll Mona is already the result of several cycles and repetitions; the doll provides a stand in for the real, dead, Mona, who herself provided a stand in for the dead biological mother Mrs. Tallon. If Mrs. Tallon is the original, real mother, the plastic doll is a (many steps removed) stand in for the loss of that original. Mona is thus, from the start, associated with a desire to return to origins and with those origins' ultimate irrecoverability. As you might suspect, the pleasures Joey experiences with the doll are primarily maternal (and predictably Oedipal):

She lifts her own skirt up. Ever so slowly, till it billows around your head like a parachute. And then it comes—that blissful feeling. When you put your thumb in

your mouth and you see the glittering stretch of water with her just standing beside it, staring off out to the horizon. She doesn't speak but you know what she's thinking. 'Out there is the precious harbour. That wondrous place where we'll all feel safe. One day we'll get there, Joseph.' 'Yes, Mona. I know we will' you are about to say, but when you look again she's gone and all you can hear are groans. (10)

Mona allows Joey to return to his childhood, to cycle back into his own history and become a baby—implicitly safe within the orgasmic “precious harbour” of Mona’s womb. The Cave of Dreams and Precious Harbour are thus both stand-ins for the womb, as Joey himself points out (333). Before her death, Mona advocated a history of repetition (with a difference), telling Joey: “You could be born again! To me! *Then* everything might come right!” (93). She thus argues that a return to origins, to the womb—a new start—enables one to rewrite history and make it better. Instead of ignoring or surpassing the past, one must return to it and rewrite it. This is exactly what Mona offers: a new birth, to a different mother. This proposed alteration of history is suggested as a corrective: history repeated may lead to success. Mona describes the main pleasure of the “precious harbour,” which is the vision of heaven that gets associated with her: “And all the things that have ever gone wrong, they’ll all have come right again. Because that’s what it’s like there, Joey” (92-3). The harbour is thus a place where history is fixed through rewriting and repetition—this heaven is the place where the *right* history happens. Joey describes his own attraction to her in these terms: “That was why I’d wanted to grow inside her. So that that second time I would know all about it [love], right from the beginning. But, even better still, believe in it” (94). The doll Mona, herself only the latest incarnation of a string of repetitions (real mother → Mona → doll Mona), offers Joey the continual promise of rebirth, of a return to origins associated with the purity of a new start, with the added benefit of new awareness, of knowing “all about it, right from the beginning.” And Joey describes his many conversions and new careers as a

string of rebirths, in each of which he reinvents himself and attempts to make a “new start.” History here becomes a series of repetitions, cycles that continually circle back, offering opportunities for revision and the ever approaching new beginning.

This version of history is, however, based on loss, as the loss of Joey’s mother and then of Mona provide the impetus for these rewritings of history. McCabe does seem to suggest that this vision of history may be unhealthy, as it leads Joey to sleep with and talk to an inflatable doll. With Mona, Joey is trapped in a cyclic, inescapable obsession with his own past and with his own loss. Kevin Whelan describes the difference between mourning and melancholia while discussing Paul Ricoeur’s three kinds of memory:⁷⁶

While mourning involves the reconciliation of self with the loss of objects of love, melancholia internalizes the loss as a despairing longing for reunification, and is therefore doomed to repetition (as a damaged form of resistance to the reality principle). Freud talks of the process of moving from melancholia to mourning (by moving from repetition, through remembering to reconciliation). At the individual level as well as the national level, this is necessary to move beyond an excessive or a repressed memory, which leads only to repetition or melancholia. (92)

What we seem to be dealing with here, then, is not just how to interact properly with history, but specifically how to overcome a history of trauma, whether Joey’s history of personal loss or his nation’s history of brutality and violence. Joey’s relationship with Mona exemplifies a traumatized, melancholic dependence on repetition as a salve for a “despairing longing for reunification.” Joep Leerssen describes trauma’s impact similarly:

it lies in the very nature of trauma that the sense of hurt and wounding recurs, makes itself felt time and time again, in self-renewing fresh manifestations of the original experience. Trauma is more than the experience of pain or injury: it is a wound-licking impulse which returns to, and revives, the painful memory in an ongoing recurrence. (220)

⁷⁶ The first level is the therapeutic, in which memory must balance between mourning and melancholia; the second is pragmatic, which links memory to identity; the third is ethical, in which you can heal memory through narrative, as we’ll discuss below.

The memory of trauma thus manifests itself in the urge to repeat, in a constant revisiting of the site of loss. Humorously, however, this is exactly what Joey hates about Beckett: “just when you think it’s all over—*thank fuck!*—they start it all over again” (142). This compulsion toward repetition of trauma is also one characteristic many critics associate with the Gothic; as Sage and Smith put it, “The Gothic is the perfect anonymous language for the peculiar unwillingness of the past to go away” (4).

The vision of history and time associated with Jacy is entirely different. Joey describes Jacy⁷⁷ as the ideal hippie California girl with long, straight blond hair, blue eyes, tan skin, and slim build. He attributes many qualities to her, some quite inappropriately; when he observes her attending mass, he desperately resists the logical conclusion—that Jacy is Catholic—instead voicing his belief that she just has a great deal of respect for other cultures and does not wish to offend the locals by behaving contrary to their traditions. Joey’s conception of his free-wheeling Californian Jacy does not allow her to be Catholic; her church attendance thus gets interpreted as self-effacing respect for others’ beliefs. He also believes that she knows the book *Siddhartha* as well as he does. His suspicions are confirmed when he breaks into her house and discovers the book, open to his favorite passage. In an interesting twist, however, the book turns out to belong to her roommate, not her. Jacy’s function for Joey might initially appear similar to Mona’s: “*I often ask myself: ‘Just what does Jacy mean?’ She makes me feel secure and believe in love, that’s what my Jacy means. She helps me and makes me want to—like The Seeker said—believe*” (7). Jacy thus becomes associated with the recovery of meaning—of belief and love—out of a difficult and violent time. More than this, however, she is associated with escape:

⁷⁷ The pun on “J.C.” seems to be another Christ allusion/ joke in the book. Certainly, Joey treats Jacy like his own personal savior.

I wondered what the Jace—I felt I knew her so well now it was OK to call her that—made of all that stuff, the killing and bombing, I mean. It was a long way from California, that was for sure. I had a fair idea she didn't give a fuck. 'If that's how they want to live their lives, well, that's fine. All I can say is, include me out.' The unblemished sands of Big Sur stretching out for miles behind her and the Pacific surf crashing. (16)

Jacy offers, instead of a world in which violence is rejected or could even be avoided, a world where it is irrelevant, where you can escape onto the sand of Big Sur and the politics of sectarian violence become meaningless. History is a choice—one you can opt out of. In short, Jacy, and the vision of America closely associated with her, offers escape from history into a land where the past is meaningless. He imagines Jacy telling him about Iowa:

“‘It's like heaven, Iowa,’ she said. ‘I spent all of my childhood summers there. And that's how I've always thought of it. With the golden corn swaying and the big blue sky seeming to stretch for ever—it's the way a child might imagine it to be. Paradise, you know?’ I could sense my eyes glittering. Glittering like that stretch of water I saw whenever I melted into Mona. Except that this was even more beautiful. (18)

The landscape of America that Jacy offers is one of huge cliffs, white sand, swaying corn—it is a landscape emptied of people and of history, a place where Jacy and Joey could drive endlessly in Joey's imagined road trip without meeting anyone. The “big blue sky” that seems “to stretch for ever” and the sands of Big Sur “stretching out for miles” are symbols of an opened horizon—a place in which the future, the horizon of expectation, is not limited by the past. Instead of repeating the past, one just drives away from it on an endless roadtrip through an open, empty landscape. Notably, Joey finds this ultimately more attractive than Mona's “precious harbour” in which history is altered and brought to the proper conclusion—a fact that becomes significant in the final pages of the book. The descriptions of California and Iowa emphasize space, solitude, and emptiness, showing that this fantasy is one of opening up, of a *new* land and a blank slate—history is left behind instead of

commemorated and rewritten. Jacy offers the *escape* from history, as Joey says: “All he wanted was to be there with her and forget the ‘World of Outside’, as he thought of it now. It was of no consequence. It was a stupid world, an empty one. A stupid fucking world of idiotic marksmen, tinkers’ fucking dogs and bomb-happy warmongers” (190). The trauma of the past becomes irrelevant, something to be forgotten and just left behind.

While this version of history does escape from trauma’s drive toward repetition, it seems a bit naive. To “forget” the ‘World of Outside,’ to consider it of ‘no consequence,’ may be similarly unhealthy. As Bishai points out, discussing Nietzsche, “the complete denial of the past results in a denial of one’s own participation in the chain of human history, and therefore also of the responsibility of being human” (11). There is no horizon of expectation separated from the space of experience; as Koselleck argues, the two determine each other, and to insist that the future could be totally untied from the past is a potentially dangerous and irresponsible argument, as learning then becomes impossible. This idea of history does presuppose that events *end* and then could be escaped or forgotten—that events don’t repeat in cycles, as Mona’s vision of history suggests—and this idea is at least as tempting for Joey as the idea of rebirth associated with Mona. After returning from jail and organizing the Tops of the Town variety show, Joey voices his longing for a history that *ends* and could be finally and totally over: “In a way I suppose I was hoping that the Tops could lay to rest for ever the memory of the first peace festival and all the other things associated with it” (129). Rather more ominously, this vision of an end-stopped history is also associated with the PIRA member and murderer Sandy, who says: “we have a duty to forget all these bad things that happened. It does no one any good to dwell on their past. You kidnap someone, terrify them, whatever. You do your time, and that’s it. You’ve paid your debt. End of story” (216-7).

Both versions of history thus seem problematic. The history that Sandy describes—in which the past is finished, over, and irrelevant—obscures the question of responsibility; readers are encouraged to think that Sandy’s past should not be forgotten, as he has never paid his debt through doing “time” or public repentance. Doing your time may not be the end of the story; questions of atonement and forgiveness remain. Certainly Joey feels throughout the narrative that he must atone for his crimes against Jacy and somehow be forgiven by her (an issue to which the fact that he “did his time” seems irrelevant)—that his past is continually with him, something he cannot escape. Thus, a vision of history as something that could be escaped sidesteps the moral issue of responsibility. Similarly, the vision of repetition and fulfillment associated with Mona seems insufficient. Though Joey is “reborn” numerous times, he fails to find his “home,” and each failure seems to become less bearable. Furthermore, he *cannot* become Mona’s child, despite his desire and his imaginings—there remains an original (the biological mother), who, while she’s inaccessible and lost in the past, cannot be written over. The return to origins is impossible. Repetitions and rewritings cannot obscure some kernel of a real past which remains, inviolate, in memory. Furthermore, the traumatic urge to repeat the loss of both his mothers through Mona has no natural end point; Joey merely re-engages and revisits his loss perpetually. Both these attempts to escape from a deterministic, linear history appear inadequate. The first—history as recycling repetition, in which the present offers opportunities to rewrite and fix the past—elides the presence of that past as a fixed entity; no matter how many new projects and new births Joey adopts, they will not *erase* the loss of his mothers or the kidnapping of Jacy in 1976. The second—the escape from history into a world where the past is irrelevant—elides the continuing relevance of the past to all characters in the book—whether Joey attempting

continual penitence for his crimes against Jacy, or the PIRA men continually attempting to cover up their past crimes. Bonehead articulates this difficulty quite well:

We're just fooling ourselves, you and me! We try to forget but we'll never be able to—you'll never be able to, because you *love* her! Merv is a good man! He's good, Joesup! But it's lies, all of it! Not everything is possible! The past will always catch up with you! Just when you think you've left it behind you look up and it's right there ahead of you! It's the God's honest truth and you know it, Joesup! (131)

Bonehead here argues that history cannot be forgotten, and instead that it is constantly—and perhaps debilitatingly—present, such that the horizon of expectation is severely limited.

Indeed, Bonehead's vision of the past is one in which it is constantly "ahead of you," waiting to be relived and repeated. Part of Bonehead's problem is that he cannot escape from his traumatic past because he cannot forgive: "'I can't forgive!' he kept repeating, with his fists up to his eyes. 'Some of the things they did to me in there, I haven't it in me to fucking forgive!'" (130). The possibility of moving forward into a livable present thus becomes associated with being able to forgive and receive forgiveness—this is the only kind of redemption that would allow the past to become anything less than a debilitating liability. If one could forgive, the past would no longer be constantly "ahead of you." As Kevin Whelan writes, "Memory allows us to liberate ourselves from the ligatures of the past through the capacity for forgiveness" (93). Forgiveness seems to be the only way to escape from the whirlwind of a deterministic history that seems determined to cycle downward, and to trap present actors within the scripts and effects of a brutal past. Without forgiveness, choices evaporate, as seen in the repetition of these lines from *Taxi Driver*: "*My whole life is pointed in one direction! I see that now! There has never been any choice for me!*" (173). Without forgiveness, trauma merely repeats and recycles. Near the close of the book, despairing of ever achieving redemption, Joey falls into the despair of a linear and deterministic history:

“‘Oh, what the fuck do you know, Bonehead!’ I said to him. ‘You know sweet fuck all about it! Anyway, it might just as well have happened that way as any other fucking way! It’s all the fucking same in the end!’” (236).

If the only way to escape from a brutal past into a livable future is forgiveness, the question becomes how to achieve forgiveness—how to represent the past meaningfully (which Joey always interprets as *realistically*) in order to ask pardon for your past crimes. And in this attempt to represent his past, Joey actually follows the advice of many theorists working on trauma and memory. Kevin Whelan describes Ricoeur’s third level of memory in this way:

it is always possible to educate or heal memory, through the suasion of narrative, which adjudicates between memory and forgetting. Memory is not coercive or intransigent; the availability of narrative enables choice in the creating (or fusing) of personal and collective identity. Narrative means that it is always possible to tell it another way; that possibility opens a space for the ‘other’, a space for dialogue, a negotiation of narratives. At this discursive level, the possibility of an ethical memory becomes possible. Its ethical force derives from its desire to open the past to the future, to help construct that future through recourse to the exemplarity of the past. Ethical memory is directed towards the future not the past. It avoids the entropy of the traumatic version of memory, fixated permanently in the past. It is regulated by the horizon of justice, seeking a memory which is just to the victims as well as the victors, while it seeks to inaugurate new institutions which guard against recurrence. (92-3)

As he says later in his essay, “Testimony—of the historian, the intellectual, the artist—is the link between inspiration and memory, between mourning and melancholia, between filiation and affiliation” (108). Leerssen similarly advocates “a form of self-historicisation, of constructing a personal historical narrative” as a palliative for a traumatized past (221). The personal historical narrative that Joey attempts to present revolves around 1976, specifically around Jacy’s kidnapping. He must figure out how to represent the brutality of that year. As Joey puts it, his films are an attempt to ask, “Do you think you could ever find it in your heart

to forgive me?” (247). He attempts two main methods of reconstructing the past: film and literature. Describing his film project, he says:

it’s about what has happened in our *heart*s and how it really is possible for art, when it acts as a mirror to the soul, to become a powerful agent for transformation and rebirth! If not outright absolution! . . . I suppose in a sense I want it to act as a symbol for Ireland and for what has been going on here this past thirty years. (265)

The mirroring effect of art, its ability to reflect the soul, offers the possibility of rebirth and absolution. Moreover, it may be more than a reflection of Joey’s soul—the film provides a “symbol for Ireland” and, potentially, a curative for the soul of the nation. He suggests that this is only possible, however, when art “acts as a mirror”—and Joey, therefore, becomes concerned with how to *realistically represent* events, with how to show “reality” and “truth” in the context of art. Through all Joey’s films and novels, he attempts to exorcise his past by representing it realistically—a goal which may be unreachable, and which leads to a variety of films and books, none of which ever seems good enough for Joey. As Joep Leerssen writes, trauma can give rise to the impulse “to describe the event or the story over and over again and yet feel that it is never adequately described or formulated in a final, definitive form” (221). He goes on to note that “A similar sense of the insufficiency of representation combined with an insistently repetitive attempt to tell the tale can be found in other cases sharing this traumatic quality” (221). If we see these narratives as Joey’s attempt to work through his traumatic past, then, we might expect to see Joey compelled to continually revisit his past and rewrite the narrative, as no approach ever seems sufficient. And, indeed, that is exactly the case.

What becomes notable in Joey’s attempts to realistically represent the past is his emphasis on style. He says he wants: “Just the crisp black-and-white realism of truth. Like a TV documentary from the early seventies” (166). Joey is thus developing a set of cinematic

tools that he believes will allow him to represent the actuality of his history: the use of black and white is one such tool, and he apparently learned this tool from other filmmakers producing television documentaries. He recognizes that this *style* has its own history, and he later asserts that he will base his evolving style on Cassavetes, because: “Truth and . . . *verisimilitude*—is that the word?—well, truth anyway would be of the essence” (206). His lack of confidence regarding the proper vocabulary—whether “*verisimilitude*” actually means the representation of truth—highlights the probable gap between the terms. While “*verisimilitude*” might attempt to represent, as realistically as possible, particular events, that representation cannot approach or “mirror” the inaccessible “truth” of history. Indeed, all of Joey’s diatribes on cinematic style only serve to highlight this distinction, as his attempt at “*verisimilitude*” always reveals the highly constructed nature of his representation: “Lots of hand-held camera movements, in what they called on the back of the case ‘*cinema verité style*’, as well as extreme close-ups and lots of rough-shod camerawork”; “*The more fucking realistic the better. A real, in your face, yeah-this-is-the-way-it-was-my-friend-type approach. With lots of fuzz guitar and heavy reverb*” (206-7). Certainly the events of 1976 were not conducted with a planned soundtrack, much less fuzz guitar and reverb. Though he always says he wants “realism” and the “truth,” his emphases on methodology and influences always serve to remind the reader that these visions of “truth” are (and must be) only representations. This is a realization that Joey himself eventually comes to. Regarding his earlier interpretation of cinema as truth, he says: “*But it isn’t you see! We are told that it’s truth! But that’s just . . . another lie! Cinema is just one man—or woman, excuse me!—who’s looking through an eyepiece! Or staring into a viewfinder and saying: ‘Yeah, this is what I see so therefore it must be the truth!’ Bollocks!*” (294). Joey here recognizes the situated and

contingent nature of cinematic representations. And this recognition is partially based on the creation of an actually “realistic” film—Sandy and Boyle’s filming of the torture of Mangan and the sexual exploits of Joey with the doll Mona.⁷⁸ Though these films are quite literally “realistic”—in that they represent events as they occur, without using actors—they also reveal a filtered, created reality as Boyle and Sandy choreograph the reality they then film. If film—created *even as events occur*—cannot accurately represent the real, and instead reveals a filtered and created interpretation, then how could Joey hope to “truthfully” represent the events of 1976 some twenty years after their occurrence?

Joey’s answer becomes that such cinematic representation is impossible, but he does not give up on his quest to accurately represent the past, in order to secure forgiveness and absolution. After his diatribe against cinematic realism, he slams down his book manuscript and proclaims: “You wanna find truth, you got it right there!” (294). The written word—his novel—becomes the medium through which a realistic representation of the past might be achieved. Though he admits that some of his novel “was mischievous,” he asserts that “almost all of the remainder told a somewhat harrowing story of a young boy growing up in Ireland. Digressive, perhaps, maybe a little overblown. But never, in its intent, anything other than serious” (304).⁷⁹ Joey, however, discovers that the author’s intent may have little or nothing to do with a book’s reception; the publishers find the book “absolutely hilarious” (304). His book, somehow, has failed to communicate, and this failure is what throws Joey into a depression from which he does not emerge, a depression, that as he says, is “different

⁷⁸ This scene is remarkably similar to one in McCabe’s short story “The Hands of Dingo Derry,” which also features the creation of a real mondo, exploitation film.

⁷⁹ McCabe’s descriptions of Joey’s book encourage readers to parallel the text with McCabe’s own *The Butcher Boy*—a similarly harrowing tale that many critics found hilarious. The comparison is also interesting given that McCabe has said: “People tell me ‘you’re funny’ and I say, ‘I’m not. I don’t think there’s anything funny in this world.’ . . . I’m more interested in what hurts people. And what makes people laugh” (qtd. in McMullen).

from the old ones” (246). For if film cannot represent the real, and if novels cannot communicate with their audience, how is any communication or representation possible? And if they are not, how can anyone be forgiven for their pasts? Joey is thus “back to square one” when “the editor Gail Marchant dropped her clanger and made me realize they hadn’t understood the book at all,” though he had been prepared to see writing as his latest rebirth, as “the only true answer” (206).

Joey, despite these setbacks, takes another shot at writing; Bonehead organizes Joey’s journals and notebooks so that Joey can make a narrative out of the scraps left of his past—which is the narrative that we then have as the readers of *Call Me the Breeze*. Joey, however, sees the novel as a *failed narrative*—he is only a “one-off man, the one-hit wonder, the naïve fluke artist who just happened to get lucky that one special time” (245). For Joey thinks that this second book does not quite hang together: “if I was any kind of writer at all, I’d have made something worthwhile out of it, instead of just sitting here rambling half the night, filling up pages with discursive nonsense” (1). “Rambling” and “discursive nonsense” are not enough for Joey; he is angered by the material’s lack of order, lack of chronology, lack of sense. While some sections have ridiculously specific dates (“3.10 am June 19, 1976”), others have none (“No Date???”) (5, 57). As he puts it, “Some of the scrappier bits of foolscap have no dates at all. This one I’m not sure of, but it looks like it comes from early June 1976” (6). Joey continually seems frustrated by the limitations of his material, calling the debris of his life scrappy bits of foolscap and insulting his abilities as a writer. The main reason he seems to be so derogatory toward his material is its inability to offer verisimilitude; the gaps and fissures, papers without dates, get in the way of the reader approaching the work

as a coherent, narrative vision of the past. Joey then sees this novel as another failure. We cannot, however, take these comments from Joey seriously.

Joey never seems to realize that this book, his manuscript which comes to us as *Call Me the Breeze*, might be the best attempt to represent truth of all the myriad attempts shown within the novel. As it gives up “realistic” style for the presentation of the real debris—scrappy foolscap and all—of his past, it offers a necessarily limited and partial history of Joey’s life. For all its gaps, its self-conscious failures, and its authorial asides, it offers Joey’s narrative of himself—and offers a way to *understand* Joey without finding him only hilarious. Though Joey does not clearly find a way out of his trauma (at least until the end of the book, as we’ll discuss below), his narrative, perhaps, “adjudicates between memory and forgetting” for the reading audience, or implicitly for a national audience (Whelan 92). Perhaps it is only through the presentation of gaps and failures that our attempts to reconstruct the past can be meaningful; those who seek to represent history put it together out of scraps and debris, out of which a picture will emerge—a picture that cannot possibly be complete—and they must recognize that history cannot then be narrated in a self-assured, totalizing voice. As Koselleck writes, “what occurs interpersonally or socially and what is said during that event or about it gives rise to a constantly changing difference that renders any *histoire totale* impossible. History takes place in the anticipation of incompleteness; any interpretation that is adequate to it must dispense with totality” (23). Perhaps this text, which Joey never recognizes as a real accomplishment (unlike all his films and his first novel), is the proper way forward. By attempting to engage with and represent the past as faithfully as possible—which is necessarily limited—Joey makes an argument for his absolution. Though

his name may be a heavy-handed joke, Joseph Mary Tallon gives birth to this novel, and we are encouraged to consider the novel as his creation and his redeemer.

However, this still leaves us with the big question of the end of the novel. In the final pages of *Call Me the Breeze*, Joey announces his intent to kill himself, and then presents his “*final penned masterpiece... prophetically entitled: ‘THE CRASH!’*” (334). The final pages of the book thus apparently relate Joey’s suicide and his emergence in Mona’s “Precious Harbour,” but given that everything that has proceeded this has been written down by Joey, it is hard to know what to make of this. There seem to be two options—the first being that the final pages are authorial, and thus perhaps an accurate representation of Joey’s death and his afterlife, the second being that Joey, alive and well, created this story as, somehow, a fitting end for his “failed narrative” in *Call Me the Breeze*. I think, for both technical and thematic reasons, that the second option seems more defensible, and that the destabilization of the reader produced in these pages (as he/ she questions the “reality” of the text’s representation) further underscores the importance of the questions about art and “truth” discussed above. The first option—that the pages are authorial and therefore “true”—seems less attractive as it operates counter to the text’s general distrust of any clear equation between the fictional and the “real”: either style or the limitations of the material always get in the way.

First, technically, Joey presents the end of the novel as his “final penned masterpiece,” and it is thus clear that at least the first section, in which he narrates the car crash, is written by Joey. More serious questions emerge in the transition between ‘THE CRASH!’ and the next section:

[The Big Fellow is] Staring out across the verdant valley, with its light, drifting mists and eerie evanescent stillness, powerfully evocative of both ‘The End’ and . . .

The Beginning . . .

. . . where Joey opened his eyes to see that yet another fine day had dawned in the Place of Wonders, the wondrous place. (334)

It is here, where Joey moves into the afterlife, that it seems McCabe might be stepping in as the direct narrator of Joey's arrival at the Precious Harbour. I think, however, that it is hard to draw a firm line between these sections, despite the new section title 'The Beginning,' as the sentence continues from the previous section, through the new section title, into the new section without a stopping point. It is all clearly part of one continuing sentence, and it thus would be difficult to assert where Joey ceases his role as narrator. It seems much simpler, and also more accurate, to take Joey as narrator of both sections, and to thus see these sections as Joey's projection (or dystopic, pessimistic vision) of the afterlife.

We must then consider *why* Joey narrates this version of his death and arrival at the Precious Harbour. The end he imagines for himself is certainly an unhappy one—he arrives at the “Precious Harbour,” where he is met by all of his family and friends, all the figures from his past who died young or lived miserably, all now happy in the corrected time of the Precious Harbor. Mona, Mrs. Tallon, and Mr. Tallon act like one big happy family. The evils of how-things-actually-happened have been corrected, and enemies emerge as friends. Everyone participates in the “Picnic of Dreams” together, but Joey refuses to come—instead repeating: “his self-styled ‘meditations’ which were little more than vainglorious gibberings, endless repetitions, including: ‘*I’m in the wrong place!*’, ‘*I can’t stay here, don’t you understand?*’ and ‘*I have to go to America, you see!*’” (336). Joey is stuck in “endless repetitions” in the Precious Harbor, where history is repeated and corrected. When he ends up at the Precious Harbour, he hates it, because it is not as good as the road trip through

California and Iowa that he imagined with Jacy. He lapses into fantasy, imagining that particular heaven:

To the United States of America, where the surf of Big Sur would crash on Californian sand, the blue sky of Iowa rise over patchwork fields and white wooden chapels. And the woman he loved more than anything in the world put on her shades and shake her blonde hair free, standing by the side of the Pontiac, smiling, as she said: 'It's the end, you know that, Joey, don't you? The end of the beginning and the beginning of the end. It's beautiful, Breeze.' . . . He could see it all clearly, like some secret mini-movie in lush and sumptuous Technicolor. 'It's like . . . total *belonging*, Breeze. You know what I mean?' she whispered. 'It's like *home* or something.' 'I know,' he replied. 'I know what you mean. I've been searching for it all my life,' her hair in that huge but inconceivably easeful silence blowing as though before some ancient wind, the golden corn all about them swaying, as it might in a child's golden Paradise vision. (336-337)

The book thus ends with Joey's vision of an Iowanian Paradise—an empty landscape holding only himself and Jacy, which had already been clearly opposed to Mona's Precious Harbour earlier in the book. The future that Joey then presents for himself is quite bleak—an afterlife of disappointment and displacement, in which the heaven you're in isn't the right one, and the heaven you want cannot be reached. Why would Joey end his novel with this story?

He has certainly been depressed for some time, viewing his new novel as a disorganized failure. Well before his eventual (fictional) suicide, Joey wrote: "there is only one kind of movie in store for the likes of Joey Tallon when it comes to 'Forever' or 'Eternity'. A low-rent, straight-to-video disaster flick in which the author goes out in a blaze of glory, still dreaming, incongruously, in flames!" (248). Joey thus sees his (fictional) death in a car accident as "low-rent," and thus appropriate for a failed writer. Notably, he describes himself as "still dreaming" through his death, though this dreaming is "incongruous" somehow. That he is "still dreaming"—still longing after an ideal, hoping and desiring—is, as he says, incongruous. Notably, Joey provides this description of his death well before the story located in the final pages; it thus seems that Joey has come to see himself as someone

who dreams inappropriately—for something he cannot have. This maps quite clearly onto the story offered in the final pages of the novel, in which Joey incongruously dreams of an impossible heaven even while the heaven he's actually in seems quite attractive. Nothing is good enough for Joey; he's always longing for the next thing, for the place he isn't, for a "new start." If Joey then narrates the story in the final pages, it seems to be a moment of remarkable self-awareness. The process of creating his failed novel, of piecing together and reviewing his life, has enabled him to understand himself and his history. It thus seems that he has, finally, used narrative to write himself out of the recycling repetitions of his traumatized past. The book's many scattered quotes from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* then become relevant; the book's epigraph, "What we call the beginning is often the end/ And to make an end is to make a beginning./ The end is where we start from," points out that endings are necessary for a new start—but more than that, that beginnings and endings often blend together thoroughly. If the "end is where we start from," then Joey's fictional suicide may be an end that enables a new beginning. The end of this novel may be the start of something new for Joey—of increased self awareness, of (dare we say it?) a rebirth based on an understanding of his own past. As the Seeker quotes, again from Eliot: "*We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time*" (4-5).

It thus seems that, in these last two novels, while McCabe does not provide an optimistic assessment of Ireland's future, he does offer a blueprint for how a better future might be achieved. The state must no longer rest its authority upon the imagined coherence of a heroic revolutionary past: a return to origins is impossible, and probably also undesirable. Any dependence upon the coherence of an "Irish national character" based on a

Gaelic Romantic construction should be eradicated. A monumental, heroic, progress-driven past must not be idealized. To ignore the results of the past—pretending that high rates of unemployment or socially repressive state policies *never happened*—is similarly irresponsible, however. To resist idealizing the past is not to suggest that we all live in a historyless world, in which the present is always already its own creation. The state does bear responsibility for its own past—for the illiberal and economically depressed Ireland produced by de Valera and his cabinets—and that should not be ignored either. Common ground must be found between acknowledging mistakes—and attempting to undo them—and a forward oriented perspective open to new starts and new beginnings. Bishai describes the best path through these obstacles as the adoption of Nietzsche's vision of critical history:

This is the necessary mode if humanity is to live fully, because mankind must "from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it." This sweeping away of the past is necessary to liberate mankind from the burden of history. Furthermore, importantly, no group is immune because "every past...is worthy to be condemned — for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them." But, Nietzsche warns, critical history is difficult and dangerous, since it is always hard to know when to stop — the complete denial of the past results in a denial of one's own participation in the chain of human history, and therefore also of the responsibility of being human. According to Nietzsche, the best we can do is maintain knowledge of our inheritance and try to combat it with the cultivation of a new instinct, a new habit. The logical outcome of critical history is in fact the downfall of nationalist identities, since a thoroughly scrupulous look into any nation's past will crumble its monumental and antiquarian pretensions. (10-11)

Somewhere between remembering and forgetting, people must discover an ethical memory, in Ricoeur's terms, that is "directed towards the future not the past" and that "is regulated by the horizon of justice, seeking a memory which is just to the victims as well as the victors, while it seeks to inaugurate new institutions which guard against recurrence" (Whelan 93). And it is through the hybridized monstrosity of characters like Patrick Pussy Braden—the child of clerical abuse, a homosexual transvestite—and Joseph Mary Tallon—the child of a

home broken by a repressive vision of the Irish family, the abjected victims of a nationalist history, that this future will be constructed. The nation's abject must become its subjects as it moves toward a different kind of identity: one untied to origins. Grounded in an acknowledgement of the slipperiness and dangers of investing in a national past, writers like McCabe attempt to present a path toward different identities, liberated from de Valerian ideals and from arbitrary boundaries, toward a more European and less nationalistic future.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

*"It wasn't a mare...It was a dream" – Ammu in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*⁸⁰

*"Thus the master signifiers of nationalist political rhetoric attempted to suture together a state built on a split, the violence of the civil war"—Patrick Hanafin, Constituting Identity*⁸¹

I have already discussed several ways in which the Irish state becomes inscribed as a monster, whether Pearse's image of the state as a revenant zombie springing from the graves of dead martyrs or Yeats's vision of the state as a vampiric woman draining the blood of the nation's men. It seems unlikely that Pearse and Yeats were aware of the monstrous subtext of these descriptions. However, these images certainly envision the nation specifically as a monstrous, predatory undead, feeding on the deaths of the nations' patriots. Such images definitely rely on violence and sacrifice: violence against an oppressive other and willing sacrifice of one's own life. Both of these visions of the nation require the presence of a colonial power—an oppressor who then necessitates the death of martyrs and young men, those who believe in an Irish nation, in the service of the creation of an Irish state. Such images depend upon the logic of abjection, of violence against a British "other," in order to work. They are ultimately images appropriate during the colonial or early postcolonial phase of a nation's self definition. When Ireland emerges in the nineties as an economic powerhouse, and England emerges as Ireland's partner in conceiving of possible frameworks for peace in the North, these kind of images should become less relevant. The oppressive

⁸⁰ Page 208.

⁸¹ Page 19.

power has been excised, and the nation's young men no longer need to become martyrs in the cause of creating an Irish state. But without this baptism of blood, without abjection, war, and death, where could nationalism come from—if, indeed, nationalism is something that nations still want? Can we conceive of a nation that is not a bloodsucker?

Pearse's and Yeats's images of the undead nation are not the only cases in which the state has been rhetorically constituted as monstrous. Discussions of the relationship between the Republic and the North often use horrific imagery in order to present the emotional and cultural violence that occurs when a nation gets split into two states.⁸² This imagery is prevalent in critical and popular, as well as literary, discourse. To offer only a few examples, Hanafin calls the North a "severed limb," discusses attempts to "suture together a state," and calls the Republic an "amputee state" (83, 19, 16). As discussed in chapter four, discussions of Unionist and Republican politics in the North often invoke *Frankenstein*. What seems interesting about these invocations of the island of Ireland as a tortured, chopped up body is that they presume that fracture is negative. Monstrosity is invoked as an indictment of the state, as a sign of its illegitimacy. Bodies that are sutured, amputated, or severed are illegitimate bodies. To make rhetorical moves such as this is to skip a potential step in the argument: could fracture and hybridity be generative? Must everything that is severed be sutured together again, so no scars show, into a show of unity?

I have discussed some ways in which monstrosity could be paralleled with hybridity, and I have suggested that a nation's monsters are one place to look for revolutionary possibilities and identities. That is not to say that *all* images of monstrosity are positive: we should not all run out, don Freddy Krueger masks, and start slicing. Neither should we

⁸² Certainly whether the island of Ireland as a whole is a "nation" is controversial. Some certainly believe it is, and that belief continues to drive the Republican movement in the North.

assume that the subtext of the revenant undead in Pearse's and Yeats's comments on the nation is a fruitful rhetorical basis for nationhood. It *is* to say that those combinations that people process as monstrous are not, necessarily, evil. Patrick Pussy Braden's combination of genders has the possibility to be liberating. Indeed, if Patrick Pussy is a potential savior ("Into the village of Tyreelin (pop. 1500) on the southern side of the Irish border, a young boy is born"), then McCabe suggests that monstrous hybridity may be the answer to a state overly invested in an originary, pure, conservative Gaelic Romantic identity (ix). Stitched selves and monstrous, hybrid combinations are the way forward.

Many of these works suggest that the real enemy is the construction of Irish national identity put forward in the 1937 constitution; it must be killed off. It offers a totalizing myth, an imago of identity, that paints over the actual diversity of various lived experiences in Ireland. It expels those groups and individuals who cannot fit within a Gaelic Romantic paradigm; it has no place for, and no idea what to do with, a Francie Brady or a Pussy Braden. An articulation of unity based on common origins appears as a repressive screen over the citizenry's actual diverse hybridity. One could thus argue that the problem with this legislative version of nation is then not its monstrosity, but its *lack* of it. If monstrosity is the combination of diverse elements, a combination that undermines the duality of a self/ other binary, an essentially hybrid subject, then the Irish state—and all states—must become monstrous.

The demythologizing of Gaelic Romantic Irish identity has been ongoing for nearly a century, and authors have been investigating the excesses of the mid-century state for decades now. It was the TV show *The Riordans*, first aired in 1965, that "not only managed to steer clear of this romantic ideology, but, in divesting rural experience of many of the

myths which had surrounded it, made the first major break at a popular level with both the visual and the dramatic legacy of the Cultural Revival,” according to Luke Gibbons (57). The show “br[ought] to the surface with almost relentless zeal every possible transgression of the traditional Irish family enshrined in the 1937 Constitution” (61). Given that, why are contemporary authors *still* battling with the romantic ideology of the 1937 constitution?

The answer would seem to be that for these authors, that romantic ideology is ripe for exorcism: it has, itself, become an easily recognized stereotype—one that could be killed off not only with violence, but with laughter. Indeed, the very excesses of *The Butcher Boy*, with its alcoholic father (who dies), its mad, suicidal mother (who dies), its gossiping townspeople, and its abusive priest, seem to offer both a tribute to the bad-Irish-childhood genre and its deathknell. After *The Butcher Boy*, it’s hard to imagine anyone now writing a serious horrible-mid-century-Irish-childhood novel. As Judith Butler says in *Gender Trouble*, “there is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects” (146); through parodic repetition, those things we take as “original” or “authentic” may become recognized as constructions—constructions that might be open to intervention. A Gaelic Romantic basis for Irishness may not only be killed off through violence, but also through laughter—both of which subvert the idea of a natural, authentic Gaelic Romantic Irish self, and that then open up spaces for other kinds of national identification.

It is not possible to leave the past behind, or pretend it didn’t happen, but it may be possible, through brutal and parodic works, to put the zombie of mid-century Gaelic Romantic Ireland back in its grave: to remember, perhaps tend its grave with flowers, but not insist on continually exhuming it. And maybe, through this repetition and parodic subversion,

we have reached a point where this traditional ideal of Irishness no longer needs so much attention. Discussing McDonagh's work, Nicholas Grene writes:

What is extraordinary is just how long that demythologization [of the West] has gone on, how much of Irish literature has been devoted to this enterprise. Archaic Ireland is dead but it won't lie down: the fierceness of McDonagh's iconoclasm feels like an effort to kill it at last. (306)⁸³

Perhaps these works, especially McCabe's and McDonagh's, have thrown the last heaps of soil down on the grave of a Gaelic Romantic Ireland. Indeed, McDonagh's most recently published play, *The Pillowman*, moves outside Ireland. McCabe's most recent novel, *Call Me the Breeze*, moves into the twentieth century. Roddy Doyle's *Oh Play That Thing* takes Henry Smart out of Ireland and moves him to America, all the better for encountering American myths like Louis Armstrong and John Ford. Italian mob bosses are the enemies in *Oh Play That Thing*—not Irish republicans or a stinky de Valera. Perhaps it is no longer fashionable to engage with a demonized mid-century Ireland; perhaps these authors no longer really need to.

However, as I have previously suggested, these works do not offer a vision of a new, liberal, open nation striding confidently into the sunset, secure in its boundaries, no longer anxious about "identity." Certainly, one could interpret all the focus on a demonized, mid-century idea of Irishness as, in fact, a sign of anxiety over what a new Ireland might be or become. While readers aren't offered a happy ending for Irishness, these authors do point toward some goals for a new conception of nationhood: mainly, that it must not rely upon abjection for definition. Definition by negation produces hatred and violence; any national identity must be positively based, as well as broadly inclusive. Revisions to the constitution in the last twenty years have largely moved in this direction, as women's and other

⁸³ Note the image of the nation as zombie cropping up again.

minorities' rights gain ground. There are always steps back, however, as many critics have interpreted the results of the recent constitutional referendum on citizenship as revealing prevalent mistrust of Ireland's immigrant communities.

Could a nation move from an articulation of identity based on common origins and unity to something we might admit to be a *monstrous* identity, based on the suture of varied, disparate parts? This would not exactly be similar to the American concept of the "melting pot," in which varied backgrounds blend and homogenize; a monstrous, sutured identity retains, respects, and requires difference.⁸⁴ When Judith Butler describes the possibilities that parodic repetition makes available, the description could easily also apply to the monstrous: "The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible" (148). Monstrosity, the combination of diverse elements, undermines the binary inherent in most discourses of identity—self/other— and provides traces of alternative identities. The monstrous, that which was designated as "culturally unintelligible and impossible," can emerge as new possibilities, and in doing so, subvert a binary process of identity formation, whether individual or national.

These authors, then, have the opportunity, as their nation moves away from definitions imposed or suggested by the 1937 constitution, by de Valera, or by the Roman Catholic Church, to present new definitions for their nation. They do not always speak with one voice, or even speak clearly, about the direction that nation should take. In fact, they generally reveal no small amount of despair about the possibilities available for a livable future. The world of Patrick McCabe's fiction is never ready for its monsters (like Pussy Braden), never prepared to embrace them, to consider them as potential heroes or even full

⁸⁴ It would be similar to one new model for American citizenship that is gaining popularity: the salad bowl.

citizens. But it is clear in these works that the nation must make space for its abject—its neglected youth, its homosexuals, and its women, those that originary myths of nationalist identity leave out.

It is also clear that the horror genre, with its emphases on monstrosity's construction and its results, is uniquely equipped to make these arguments. Horror has historically been concerned with national identity formation, as its monsters are often representations of the community's abject. Horror allows for the consolidation of a "national self" through the literary or filmic expulsion of undesirable groups. However, as Luke Gibbons has pointed out, one's construction of monstrosity depends on one's milieu; if the majority can make the minority into a monstrous abject, minorities can also, in their own literary or artistic works, construct the majority as the monster. From either perspective, however, constructions of monstrosity prop up identity by defining it *against* an other. The monstrous abject, however, ultimately emerges as a challenge to this sort of binary thinking, as the monster undermines easy classification through its categorical ambiguities or combinations. Authors like McCabe and McDonagh incorporate the horror genre largely in order to expose this paradigm of identity formation as problematic and doomed to failure; monsters are always culturally constructed, and the combination of categories inherent in the monstrous is not terrible, but liberating. Judith Halberstam describes it thus:

Within postmodern Gothic we no longer attempt to identify the monster and fix the terms of his/ her deformity, rather postmodern Gothic warns us to be suspicious of monster hunters, monster makers, and above all, discourses invested in purity and innocence. The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities. (27)

The postmodern Gothic emphasizes that monsters are constructed, and, furthermore, that a monstrous identity could be liberating. And this point—the monsters are constructed, not

born—has long been implicit in some of the most famous tales of the horror genre.

Frankenstein, both as a novel and as a series of films, is the most familiar example.

Irish authors are certainly not the only writers using the horror genre for national critique. Indeed, it would be quite surprising if they were, given the genre's popularity and its relevance to contemporary debates about the nature and fate of nation-states. Perhaps the most famous example is Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*, a very grisly tour de force of horrific contemporary literature. Its main character, Patrick Bateman, labels himself as a "fucking evil psychopath" (20); readers are likely to agree, as Patrick graphically describes the brutal (and creative) torture and murder of many women, as well as a couple of incidental men. The book is the most graphic and disturbing work of literature I have ever read. Patrick conceives of himself as a serial killer in the tradition of Ed Gein or Ted Bundy; he obsessively rents horror videos, including *The Toolbox Murders* and *Bloodhungry*, but his favorite is *Body Double*, which he has rented thirty-seven times because "I like the part in *Body Double* where the woman . . . gets drilled by the . . . power drill in the movie . . . the best" (113). For Patrick, women become meat to be consumed: "I spend the afternoon smearing her meat all over the walls, chewing on strips of skin I ripped from her body . . . I decide to use whatever is left of her for a sausage of some kind" (345). As in *Carn*, allusions to horror film are used to underscore a world in which people become meat, mere objects for manipulation and consumption.

This use of horror then enables Ellis to present a painfully vivid critique of 1980's consumer culture, in which the logic of global capitalism is brought to its conclusion: people become the object of conspicuous consumption. Implicitly, this is a world in which people are just as consumable as the meals at the local fashionable restaurant, and everything can be

bought. It's ultimately an empty, brutal world, and the novel thus emerges as a powerful, brutal critique of American consumerism, and implicitly the whole American dream, in which upward economic mobility supposedly translates into happiness. Horror enables and drives this critique, based as it is on Patrick's descent from a long line of real and filmic serial killers. Patrick Bateman emerges as a representation of the evil of a global capitalist ideology which makes people into homogenous, undifferentiated machines for production and consumption. No one in *American Psycho* can tell people apart; even when Patrick tries to confess to his lawyer, the lawyer takes Patrick for someone named Davis. Ultimately, I think, all this violence and misery—the dystopic vision of the book—forces readers to hope for another world, in which people are not objectified or consumed, but are individuals, each of which possesses certain rights. *American Psycho* is thus, implicitly, a horror film; its offensive excesses force readers to consider that we are all the victims of a global neoliberal ideology that turns people into commodities, into flesh and parts.

In all of these cases, American or Irish, horror is finally used to indict something much larger than the individual, or even a particular group. McCabe's emphasis on the construction of monstrosity suggests that the responsibility may lie with the state; its institutions fail to help those in need, and its conservative policies (censorship, as well as repressive legislation surrounding women and homosexuals) serve to stunt the populace intellectually and culturally, creating "monsters" like Francie Brady and Pussy Braden. For Ellis, the responsibility lies in a global consumer culture.⁸⁵ And authors in the global south

⁸⁵ While Ellis's novel does invoke horror films as precedents, and he does use the genre in the service of national critique, his work does not demonstrate the sympathy toward the nation's monsters that we have traced through the Irish works. Patrick's evil is apparently not the result of being abjected by his community. His monstrosity is thus, in some ways, naturalized; the book suggests that some people, namely Patrick, are just evil.

are also using horrific material, though their use of the abject is less likely to be rooted in modern horror film. Judie Newman, in her article "Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Praver Jhabvala and the Sobhraj case," argues that "Gothic motifs are exceptionally prevalent in postcolonial fiction" (171). Many works use horror in the service of destabilizing conceptual categories.⁸⁶ The emphases on waste, filth, and detritus in novels like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* provide other examples.

Roy's book, indeed, emphasizes the possibilities inherent in a monstrous violation of categories. The novel focuses on the lives of the twins Rahel and Estha. Their family, from the start, is associated with categorical violations: "They all break the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory" (31). Many of the male characters demonstrate some feminine traits: Velutha's painted nails, Estha's nunlike voice, or Chacko's womanish legs. Though the Orangedrink Lemondrink man seems hyper-masculine with his open shirt and his chains, he's a homosexual pedophile (96). Rahel doesn't "know how to be a girl," and Ammu, the twins' mother, is an "unmixable mix" (17, 44). Images of mutilation and human monstrosity abound: the witless guard of the train crossing who lost his arms in a war, the leper, the man without eyelids, the man with a fake calf at the station—all of these provide a vision of "Society's circus," or rather its sideshow of monstrosity and freakery (285). Rahel repeatedly configures her brother as a potential lover and as a brother: "A sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin. She flew these several kites at once" (89). She doesn't need to choose; all options are open. This "both/and" move, the resistance of clean categorization, is the

⁸⁶ Joshua Esty argues that many postcolonial writers use excremental images in order to make similar critiques. He notes: "postcolonial writers in both Ireland and Africa use excremental terms to confront the problems inherent in building a new political culture from the institutional byproduct (Fanon's national bourgeoisie) and ideological residue (nationalism) of an alien regime" (135). Excrement, as an abject thing, troubles boundaries: it is both "authentic and inauthentic, both local and alien, both 'self' and 'other'" (135). It thus operates quite similarly to the monstrous abject of horror: it troubles boundaries, and such imagery emerges in times of "disillusionment or ambivalence about nationalist excess" (135).

move of horror. Estha is also fascinated with the word "neither," repeating it over and over, unable to spell it, confused by the e and the i, which again shows Roy's interest in things and people that resist easy classification (150). Indeed, such examples proliferate in *The God of Small Things*—examples of improper mixture, of things that either combine or fall outside our conceptual categories.

Roy violates our expectations for categories and resists allowing the re-establishment of those categories. If you take the example of the categorical divide between the Touchables and the Untouchables, the stability of those categories becomes an enemy that must be attacked. For the most obvious, and most important, rebellion of the book is Ammu's sexual affair with an Untouchable man, Velutha. Violating those categories is a political necessity; this monster MUST walk and make it to the end. There's something liberating in all these mixtures: a suggestion of escape. Readers may hope that the book's final word, "Tomorrow"—spoken by two lovers who readers know will never meet again—could, in some world and time, come to fruition.

Near the end of the novel, Ammu has a dream filled with images that most people would interpret as monstrous. However, in her dream, union with a one-armed man is the object of joy and hope. This one-armed man, who Ammu interprets as her lover Velutha, leaves "no image in mirrors"; he's vampiric, inhuman (206). When she awakes, the children ask her if she was having an "afternoon-mare" (208). Ammu, however, insists that that it wasn't a nightmare. Still thinking about her utopian vision of a nightmare landscape of mixture, of impurity, and of categorical violations, she says, "It wasn't a mare...It was a dream" (208).

For Roy, the monstrous becomes the location of political change; conceptual categories must be undermined in order to provide a livable future in India. This becomes especially important in the divide between Touchable and Untouchable. She thus argues for a monstrous future, as, ultimately, do all these works. I, however, do not mean to suggest that we should (or can) do away with all categories, especially that of the nation. While a monstrous diversity must be encouraged and respected, it is possible to go overboard. As Stephen Howe writes:

Alongside the recognition of multiple, perhaps fragmentary and often highly individualized identities, then, we cannot ignore the continued strength of more totalising, overarching ones. We cannot hope to supplant them only through a 'postmodernist' kind of celebration of diversity and plurality; nor (in Finlayson's style) by a poststructuralist faith in the political potentialities of deconstructing identity. As Arthur Aughey responded to Finlayson's argument, unity for its own sake might not be a very attractive political model, but there is little merit in advocating pluralist dissent for its own sake either. We must also seek kinds of societal bonding with an encompassing range and universalising intent which enable them effectively to rival the appeal of national, religious, 'ethnic' or 'racial' claims. They must, that is, be *political* identities (in the classical republican sense of that term), appealing both to shared interests and to universalist moral codes. (242)

Thus, while tossing out a repressive vision of a unitary ethnic and moral nation, we must take care not to throw the baby out with that bathwater. Another kind of citizenship must take precedence—one based on civic and political participation rather than essentialist stereotypes. Clare Carroll similarly acknowledges that an emphasis on pluralism can, itself, become “authoritarian if it does not allow for self-defining, culturally disparate groups which agree to respect each other's rights and live in peaceful, mutual coexistence” (9).

Kristeva herself, in *Nations without Nationalism*, notes that “the cult of origins is a hate reaction” likely to lead to a “persecuting hatred” (2-3); such realizations have led critics to “question the vitality as well as the therapeutic, economic, political, and cultural value of the *nation*” (13). She is interested, however, in “a critique of the national tradition without

selling off its assets” (46). She writes “within the realm of national identities, which cannot be transcended for today or in a long time, I would choose Montesquieu’s *esprit général* over Herder’s *Volkgeist*” (33). *Volkgeist* “expresses itself through the same laudatory phrases [as Nazi rhetoric] such as eternal memory, linguistic genius, ethnic purity, and an identifying superego, all the more aggressive as these people [the increasingly nationalist countries of Eastern Europe] were humiliated” (54). The *esprit général*, on the other hand, reformulates the nation as, first, a “*historical identity*,” second, a “*layering of very concrete and very diverse causalities (climate, religions, past, laws, customs, manners, and so forth,*” and third, a “*possibility of going beyond the political groups thus conceived as sharing an esprit général and into higher entities set forth by a spirit of concord and economic development*” (55). Though she admits that this ideal is difficult to “actualize and even more difficult to administer,” it is how she sees the path toward creating a “polyphonic community” (57,63). Such a community “requires a disparity, the welcoming of a radical otherness, the acknowledging of a foreignness that one would at first end to consider the most degraded” (24). For, as she puts it, “only a thorough investigation of our remarkable relationship with both the *other* and *strangeness within ourselves* can lead people to give up hunting for the scapegoat outside their group” (51).

We are all made of bits and pieces of histories and identities. We are all sutured, and our stitches show. We are all monstrous. And the acknowledgement of that monstrosity, especially within the state, is a political necessity. If we acknowledge our monstrosity, then the monstrosity of other people is less likely to lead to hatred and hostility. Coexistence without violence must be possible, but we must be willing to rewrite our most powerful horror myth. When the creature of the new nation—sutured together out of diverse identities,

with its stitches showing—approaches, we must not approach it with revulsion, but, instead, with love.

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