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The Construction of History and Childhood in Literature and Film for Children in Ireland, 1990-2003

Pádraic Whyte

A thesis submitted to the School of Drama and the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2006

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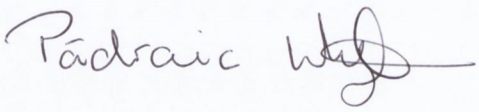
Signed: 

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For my parents
Paddy and Brighid Whyte

Summary

This thesis examines the construction of and relationship between childhood and history in Irish children's texts. The project takes a multi-disciplinary approach, focussing on the construction of history and of childhood in two main areas of Irish culture: children's literary fictions and children's film representing twentieth-century Irish history that were produced between 1990 and 2003. This analysis examines specific narratives as sites of interaction between the ideological constructions of Irish childhood and Irish history and their relation to cultural discourses of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Ireland.

My methodology is based upon the integration and adaptation of existing critical approaches to literature and film including theories related to children's texts and concepts of childhood. In particular I draw upon the following: the work of Peter Hollindale and his concept of 'childness': the problematisation of history, with specific reference to the theories of Michel Foucault: and the construction of history and historiographies in Irish culture. This approach expands and develops ideas of childness and creates a new inter-disciplinary methodology which allows for the simultaneous exploration of childhood and history. Each chapter examines particular texts in terms of the author or filmmaker's use of concepts of childhood and childness to represent ideas of Irish history from a contemporary perspective.

Rather than exploring film and literary texts concurrently, with the risk of oversimplifying the unique theoretical approaches to film and literature which engage with aspects specific to their discipline, this thesis is clearly divided into two distinct but related sections. The first three chapters focus on particular literary texts and writers. Chapter 1 examines Siobhán Parkinson's *Amelia* and *No Peace for Amelia*, arguing that the concepts of childhood are used to deconstruct the historical narratives surrounding the suffragette movement and the 1916 Rising: Chapter 2 explores Mark O'Sullivan's *Melody for Nora*, and suggests that the trauma of the Irish Civil War can be aligned with the trauma of the child protagonist: Joan O'Neill's *Daisy Chain War* is the focus of Chapter 3, in which I examine the fallibility of memory and of historiographies in the author's representation of Ireland during World War II. The final three chapters analyse particular films and filmmakers: Chapter 4 examines John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish*, and I argue that both Ireland and childhood are used to explore themes of origin and identity within a global culture: Chapter 5 focuses on

John Roberts' *War of the Buttons* and the production of both Ireland and childhood as sites of heritage: and Martin Duffy's *The Boy from Mercury* is examined in Chapter 6, as I demonstrate that Duffy uses a child perspective to deconstruct dominant ideologies of childhood and Irish culture.

These readings and the theoretical frameworks within which they are located allow for an original and illuminating investigation of both children's literature and film in Ireland, and provide an innovative commentary on contemporary cultural discourses such as postcolonialism, gender, memory, historiography, nationalism, child/adult relations, narrative voice, and globalisation. The thesis elucidates the complexities of both internal and external representations of the Irish nation and of Irish childhood at the turn of the twenty-first-century. Throughout this thesis it emerges that the representation of history in these novels and films is dependent upon the construction of concepts of childhood within the texts.

Tell me tell me smiling child
What the past is like to thee?

From 'Tell Me Tell Me Smiling Child' by Emily Brontë

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Introduction to Critical Contexts and Methodological Approaches

This thesis takes a multi-disciplinary approach, focussing on the construction of history and of childhood in two main areas of Irish culture: children's films and children's literary fictions that were produced between 1990 and 2003, and that represent twentieth-century Irish history. My analysis examines specific narratives as sites of interaction between ideological constructions of Irish childhood and Irish history and their relation to cultural discourses of late twentieth-century Ireland. This examination is situated within the period in Irish culture known as the 'Celtic Tiger', a term coined by Morgan Stanley stock brokers in 1994,[1] and which ended in approximately 2001 with a recession in the US leading to the first downturn in the Irish economy in many years.[2] The thesis takes the years 1990-2003 as its parameters allowing for an examination of children's texts[3] that were produced in the period immediately preceding the boom, during the Celtic Tiger era, and also the years immediately following the economic expansion. This timeframe then, allows for an exploration of the manner in which Irish childhood and the Irish past are represented for a child reader/viewer during Ireland's economic advancement.

Throughout this thesis I undertake a close textual analysis of specific films and novels released and published in Ireland for children during the period.[4] This reading of texts for children is conducted within the broader framework of critical theories surrounding the construction and interaction of history and childhood and relates the novels and films to the cultural contexts in which they were produced.[5] It provides a forum for the evaluation of the ideological construction of the child and the nation and allows for a broader exploration of these representations within children's culture as a whole. This thesis represents the first detailed analysis of history and of childhood in children's literature and children's film in Ireland.[6] Throughout the introduction I

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[1] See *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and Global Economy*, ed. by Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 17n 1.

[2] See Peter Clinch, Frank Convey, and Brendan Walsh, *After The Celtic Tiger: Challenges Ahead* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002), pp. 11-38.

[3] The term 'text' is used throughout to signify both literary and filmic texts.

[4] This analysis focuses on English language novels and feature films produced for children. For a discussion of children's literature in the Irish language see Máire Uí Mhaicín, 'Leabhar Gaeilge', in *The Big Guide to Irish Children's Books*, ed. by Valerie Coghlan and Celia Keenan (Dublin: The Irish Children's Book Trust, 1996), pp. 121-147. A detailed examination of poetry, drama, short stories, television and short films is also beyond the scope of this research. However, I do make reference to certain short films to illuminate and develop aspects of my argument.

[5] Corresponding to Jack Zipes' approach, the term 'children' is used to 'encompass the period of childhood up through late adolescence'. See Jack Zipes, 'Series Editor's Foreword', in Ian Wojcik-Andrews, *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy* (London: Garland, 2000), p. ix.

[6] My analysis is the first of its kind to examine in detail Irish-themed children's films. It is also significant to note that this is the first doctoral thesis conducted in Ireland that specifically examines

demonstrate that there is no existing methodological framework for the simultaneous exploration of history and childhood in texts for children. My research ameliorates this problem by merging and adapting established theoretical approaches to literature and film and then applying them to fiction for children. As a result, I present a methodology for future researchers of children's texts that engages with representations of the past and facilitates the simultaneous exploration of concepts of childhood and of history.

Context: Literature and Film for Children in Ireland

Amanda Piesse notes that during the 1990s there was a renaissance in Irish writing for children that was 'not unconnected to Ireland's financial boom, which saw the twentieth-century pattern of emigration begin to reverse, and Ireland's interactions with Europe, economically, politically and intellectually, begin to flourish'.[7] This period was marked by significant developments in the publishing and research of children's literature in Ireland with Celia Keenan and Valerie Coghlan remarking in 1996 that their publication, *The Big Guide to Irish Children's Books*, 'is a celebration of the recent dramatic growth in Irish publishing for children and young adults'.[8] As has been documented by various commentators, this development in the number of authors writing for children began in the 1980s and resulted in an increase in the number of publishers devoted to the publication of children's literature in the 1990s.[9]

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films for children. A limited number of doctoral theses deal with children's literature in Ireland such as Nancy Watson, 'The Politics and Poetics of Irish Children's Literature' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College Dublin, 2003) and Wendy M. Lake, 'Aspects of Ireland in Children's Fiction: An Historical outline and analysis of Children's Fiction set in Ireland (1850-1986)' (Unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of Ulster, 1989). Neither thesis examines the relationship of history and childhood.

[7] Amanda Piesse, 'Islands, Ireland and the Changing State of Writing for Children', in *Studies in Children's Literature: Treasure Islands*, ed. by Mary Shine Thompson and Celia Keenan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 153-161 (p. 153).

[8] *The Big Guide to Irish Children's Books*, p. 11.

[9] For a discussion of the history of children's literature in Ireland and also its position in Irish culture in the 1990s, see *Irish Guide to Children's Books, Decade 1980-1990*, ed. by Lesley Reece and Gabriel Rosenstock (Dublin: Irish Children's Book Foundation, 1990); Valerie Coghlan, 'Ireland', in *The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 695-698; Emer O'Sullivan, 'The Development of Modern Children's Literature in Late Twentieth-Century Ireland', *Signal*, 81 (1996), 189–211; 'Ireland and the World of Children's Books', Part 1 in *Children's Books in Ireland*, 16 (Summer 1997), pp. 6-7; and Part 2 in *Children's Books in Ireland*, 17 (Winter 1997), pp. 8-11; *Lion and the Unicorn*, 21.3 (September 1997), guest ed. by Celia Catlett Anderson and Robert Dunbar (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Robert Dunbar, 'Ireland and its Children's Literature', in *Children's Literature and National Identity*, ed. by Margaret Meek (Staffordshire: Trentham Books, 2001), pp. 79-88; *The Big Guide 2: Irish Children's Books*, ed. by Valerie Coghlan and Celia Keenan (Dublin: Children's Books Ireland, 2000);

It was also accompanied by a significant growth in academic research of the area in Ireland.[10]

During this period, while there was an expansion of the Irish film industry,[11] limited attention was given to the development of children's films reflecting the failure throughout the twentieth century to develop a children's film industry in Ireland. In 1946 several meetings took place between the National Film Institute of Ireland, the Department of Education, members of the government and the Department of External Affairs to discuss the possibility of creating children's cinema clubs in Ireland, similar to those that had been established by J. Arthur Rank in the United Kingdom. The Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, met with Rank in July 1946 to discuss the possibility of such a venture and stressed that the Church and State would have to play a dominant role in monitoring any films that Rank's organisation screened for young people.[12] Although Rank was due to meet with officials from the Department of Education later that year, there is no record of him having done so.[13] In

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Mary Shine Thompson, 'Introduction', in *Studies in Children's Literature 1500-2000*, ed. by Celia Keenan and Mary Shine Thompson (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 9-18.

[10] The publications mentioned above signify the growth in academic research in the area along with organisations such as The Children's Literature Association, Children's Books Ireland and The Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature. This was paralleled with the development of Children's Literature courses at third and fourth level across Trinity College Dublin, St Patrick's College Drumcondra (which also includes a module on children's film) and University College Dublin. For a discussion of the courses at Trinity and St Patrick's College, see Celia Keenan in *Children's Books in Ireland*, 26 (Summer 2001), pp. 6-7, and Amanda Piesse in *Children's Books in Ireland*, 28 (Winter 2001), pp. 8-9. Therefore, I make no attempt to justify the study of children's cultural texts in an academic context in Ireland and take the merits of such a discipline as given.

[11] For a discussion of the changes in Irish cinema in the 1990s, primarily as a result of government tax incentives, see Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 201. See also Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[12] See letter from M. O'Muimhneachtain, Secretary, Roinn na Taoisigh, to the Department of Education, 12 September 1946. In detailing de Valera's meeting with Rank, O'Muimhneachtain notes that it was highlighted that 'the system of education [in Ireland] is denominational and that conditions in this country differ from those elsewhere'. A memorandum for the government from Roinn na Taoisigh also indicates that the National Film Institute was concerned that films might contain propaganda and would clash with confessions, hurling, and football leagues which were also held on Saturday mornings. See Department of the Taoiseach File s 13555, National Archives of Ireland.

[13] See Department of the Taoiseach File s 13555, National Archives of Ireland. It should also be noted that the benefits of establishing film clubs for children were recognised in Ireland as early as 1946. An article titled 'Films for Children' appeared in the *Irish Press* and stated that 'A series of short historical films for instance, if competently made, would impress the story of our country more indelibly on the youthful mind than any number of formal history lessons'. See *Irish Press*, 24 April 1946 in File s 13555 (no page number given). This thesis is in part concerned with questioning what constitutes a 'competently made' representation of history. It should also be noted that the failure to nurture a children's film industry was part of a wider failure on the part of successive Irish governments to promote film in Ireland in general. Political and religious debates surrounding the impact of film production and reception in Ireland tended to focus on the moral and cultural impact of cinema, leading to stagnation and little progression in this area. For a further discussion of these aspects see Kevin Rockett, *Irish Film Censorship: A Cultural Journey from Silent Cinema to Internet Pornography*

contrast to the culture of children's films that was evident in Britain at the time, the failure to establish specialised children's cinema clubs in Ireland meant that there was little motivation to encourage the development of indigenous entertainment films for a child audience.[14] In 2003, the final year of the parameters of this thesis, steps were taken to address the issue and the Irish Film Institute hosted a seminar entitled 'Kaleidoscope', which explored many topics relating to children's films in Irish culture.[15] However, despite limited progress such as the Irish Film Institute's Education Programme,[16] in comparison with other countries, Ireland has failed to nurture an indigenous children's film culture.[17] Many critical texts have been

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(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004) and Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (1987) (London: Routledge, 1988).

[14] While some cinemas had dedicated screenings of films (mostly from Britain and the US) for children on Saturdays, they were not organised 'clubs' as was the case in Britain. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix. For an analysis of Children's Cinema Clubs in Britain see Terry Staples, *All Pals Together: The Story of Children's Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) and Sarah J Smith's chapter 'Matinees, Clubs and Children's Cinema Culture' in her book *Children's Cinema and Censorship: From 'Dracula' to the 'Dead End Kids'* (London: IB Tauris, 2005). For an overview of the history and developments of children's film criticism in Britain and the US, see Wojcik-Andrews, pp. 23-50. Although Wojcik-Andrews does note international films, there is no mention of Ireland, his study concentrates on US films and, in the area of children's film criticism, his primary focus is on Hollywood blockbusters and Disney productions.

[15] Irish Film Institute (IFI), Eustace Street, Dublin 2, 8 November 2003 (at the time, the IFI was known as the Irish Film Centre). Speakers included Klas Viklund, from the Swedish Film Institute and Cary Bazalgette, Education Department, British Film Institute. Panellists included Martin Duffy, director of *The Boy from Mercury* (Ireland, 1996); Dearbhla Walsh, who has worked in the Children's Department in RTE and who also directed *Custer's Last Stand-up* for RTE/BBC television (Ireland, 2001/2002); Rebecca Flanagan, Irish Film Board; Donald Taylor Black, Head of Film and Media, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology; Tony Tracy (Chair), Lecturer in Film at NUI Galway; Erik Fraad, The Ark Cultural Centre for Children; John Kelleher, Irish Film Censor; and Alicia McGivern, Head of Education at the IFI.

[16] This is mainly concerned with facilitating screenings for school groups. See 'IFI Education' at <http://www.ifi.ie/educ/index3.asp> [accessed 30 May 2006].

[17] For example, at 'Kaleidoscope' Klas Viklund noted that legislation in Sweden in the 1990s made provisions for the funding of films for children. The Swedish Film Institute has a separate budget for feature films and for children's films. For a discussion of children's films in Sweden and how they relate to an international context see Francesca Veglio, 'Developing the Cinema Audience of the Future: A Comparative Study of Film Education Initiatives for Children in Belgium, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom' (Unpublished MA thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2000) and Lisa Kölker and Corine Meijers, '"There are New Stories to be told": Swedish Children's Cinema and the Swedish Film Institute' (Unpublished PK-thesis, Stockholm University, 2001). As a result of the censorship laws in Ireland, films could be accessed by a general audience, and therefore it is also possible to argue that all films screened in Ireland from the 1920s to the 1960s were suitable for a child audience. In a sense the general population were constructed as 'childlike'. As Kevin Rockett suggests, 'the *infantilising* of the Irish people by both the colonial and post-colonial authorities was done [...] by way of theological, social and cultural protectionist arguments and supported by notions of decency and reticence' (my emphasis). See Rockett, *Irish Film Censorship*, p. 295. A similar approach was taken in the US. Anne Morey notes that 'one of the functions of the production code that regulated American film content from 1934 until the 1950s was precisely to render much of mainstream American filmmaking suitable for children. Certainly that doesn't mean that American children relished all of Hollywood's products during this period; nor should that statement suggest that there was no attempt to serve the child audience as a separate market segment, whether in terms of content [...] or exhibition'. See Anne Morey, 'Save the Children?: Children's Cinema in the Corporate Grip',

published on Irish film, but no author specifically investigates the construction of an Irish childhood for children, although Martin McLoone has begun such a project in his commentary on the representation of Ireland through the figure of the child in adult fiction.[18]

Of the limited number of children's films produced in Ireland in the 1990s, many are set in the past. Ruth Barton's 'From History to Heritage: Representations of the Past in Irish Cinema 1970-2000' discusses the large number of Irish films produced during this period and reveals that the majority of films for both adults and children were set in the past.[19] Such a trend is also apparent in the publication of children's literature. Celia Keenan noted in 1997 that 'approximately one quarter of all Irish books for children consists of those of predominantly historical interest'.[20] Similarly, Bridget Donald writes that in Irish children's literature 'there is a pattern of coming to grips with the past in order to loosen its hold on the present'.[21] Therefore, as a result of Irish culture's apparent obsession with historical representation, this thesis explores the construction of the Irish past within the context of the significant changes that occurred in Irish society at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Critical Contexts and Methodological Approaches

As discussed in detail below, this analysis of history is coupled with an examination of the construction of childhood in specific texts of the period, a methodological approach that allows for the exploration of the interrelation of concepts of childhood

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in *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association* 31 (2003), 186-191. Available online at <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R03644515&divLevel=0&area=abell&forward=critref_ft> , no page number available [accessed 30 May 2006].

[18] See McLoone, *Irish Film*, pp. 213-223.

[19] Ruth Barton, 'From History to Heritage: Representations of the Past in Irish Cinema 1970-2000' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University College Dublin, 2000). See also Barton, *Irish National Cinema*.

[20] Celia Keenan, 'Reflecting a New Confidence: Irish Historical Fiction for Children', *Lion and the Unicorn*, 21. 3 (1997), 367-378 (p. 369). In 'Looking Forward, Looking Back' Valerie Coghlan claims that 'historical fiction accounts for approximately one-third of fiction published for young people in Ireland, and historical novels are consistently good sellers'. See Coghlan in *Childhood Remembered: Proceedings from the 4th NCRCL/IBBY Conference*, ed. by Kimberley Reynolds (1997) (Staffordshire: Pied Piper Publishing, 2003), pp. 156-166 (p. 156). See also Celia Keenan, 'Telling Lies to the Children is Wrong', in *Inis*, 12 (Summer 2005) for a discussion of Irish historical fiction. Although some of the citations from primary sources are inaccurate, Keenan provides a broad overview of many of the themes found in historical fiction in Ireland.

[21] Bridget Donald, 'Circling Back on the Road to Independence: Models of History and National Identity in Irish Children's Literature', in *Text, Culture and National Identity in Children's Literature*, ed. by Jean Webb (Helsinki: Nordinfo Publications, 2000), pp. 24-33.

and representations of the past. My research into children's literature and film in Ireland reveals that there is no existing methodology for the simultaneous exploration of childhood and history in children's texts. By combining and adapting various modes of critical and cultural analysis and applying them to selected texts, I have created an original methodological framework, which future researchers can utilise in the exploration of the complexities of literature and film for children. The major critical approaches that I draw upon in the construction of this methodology include theories relating to the concept of 'childhood'; the problematisation of history; and the construction of history and historiography in Irish culture, aspects that are discussed in detail throughout this introduction. I also demonstrate that the application of these approaches to particular texts results in the formation of a new methodology for the examination of children's novels and children's films in Ireland, where ideas of childhood and history can be explored simultaneously.

The following novels and films are discussed in detail: Siobhán Parkinson's *Amelia* (1993) and *No Peace for Amelia* (1994), Mark O'Sullivan's *Melody for Nora* (1994), and Joan O'Neill's *Daisy Chain War* (1990); the films under examination are John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), John Roberts' *War of The Buttons* (1994), and Martin Duffy's *The Boy From Mercury* (1996).[22] I will argue that theories of 'childhood' can be used as a mode of analysis to unravel the complexities of historical discourse, while representations of 'history' can conversely reflect debates surrounding concepts of childhood. In this way, by drawing upon critical theories relating to history and to children's fiction my methodological approach allows for the examination of the modes of production and methods of perception of both history and childhood within the cultural context of Celtic Tiger Ireland. As is noted below, I propose that is it also possible for future researchers to draw upon this methodology in order to examine other texts outside of the Celtic Tiger context.

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[22] The reasons for choosing these particular texts are discussed at the end of this Introduction. *Amelia* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1993), *No Peace for Amelia* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1994), *Melody for Nora* (1994) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2000), *Daisy Chain War* (1990) (London: Hodder Children's Books, 2002), *The Secret of Roan Inish* (USA, 1994), *War of The Buttons* (France/UK, 1994), *The Boy from Mercury* (Ireland, 1996). See Appendix for interviews that I conducted with Siobhán Parkinson, Mark O'Sullivan, Joan O'Neill, and Martin Duffy. While the last text in this list was produced in 1996, I extend my analysis to the year 2003 to allow for the referencing and citation of other texts that illuminate my discussion of history and childhood within these specific novels and films.

Theories of Childhood

My theoretical approach is greatly influenced by the work of Peter Hollindale and his theories of 'childness' as explored in *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*.[23] Although somewhat broad in its theoretical approach, Hollindale's work offers an interesting methodology for understanding the multiple manifestations of 'childhood' in children's texts. Hollindale argues that there are several basic constructions of childhood involved in texts produced for children: the adult's idea of childhood created through writing, the child's construction of childhood while reading, and the cultural understanding of 'childhood' as a concept, stating that

> many kinds of interest in childhood meet in children's literature: the child's concern with the presentness of her own childhood, and interest in its possibilities; the adult's recall of childhood and desire to refresh the roots and keep a sense of continuous identity; and the adult's hopes and beliefs and desires about childhood, what it is and what it ought to be. Child characters are only a part of this.[24]

Hollindale argues that childhood in the text is created through a negotiation or exchange between author and reader, the text functioning as a site of this interaction as a writer brings her/his own understanding of childhood to the novels while the implied reader brings his/her childhood identity.

In attempting to formulate a workable vocabulary for his analysis, Hollindale rejects the use of words such as 'childish' and 'childlike' because of the predominantly negative cultural connotations inherent in such terms, and settles on the idea of 'childness', which he takes from Shakespeare's use of the word in *The Winter's Tale*.[25] Hollindale argues that childness is 'the quality of being a child – dynamic, imaginative, experimental, interactive and unstable' and is present in differing forms in texts for children.[26] When produced in the text, childness becomes a 'shared ground, though differently experienced and understood between the child and adult'.[27] In this sense, he refers to childness as that distinguishing property of a

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[23] Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Gloucester: The Thimble Press, 1997).
[24] Ibid., p. 42.
[25] Polixenes: 'He makes a July's day short as December,/ And with his varying childness cures in me/ Thoughts that would thick my blood'. William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Act 1, Scene II, Line 170-171, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 1105.
[26] Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, p. 46.
[27] Ibid., p. 47.

book for children that sets it apart from other books. He also proposes that the composition of childness varies depending on the perspective of the reader. For the child, it is comprised of an interaction of childhood self-identity with constructions of childhood in society such as standards of behaviour, social expectations and taboos. For the adult spectator, childness is a combination of adult memories of childhood, the idea of continuity between child-self and adult-self, as well as expected social norms about behavioural standards, goals and hopes invested in the idea of the child.[28] It is this concept of childness, with its various components, that is used throughout my thesis as a methodological framework for the exploration of the various aspects of childhood in children's texts.

In this sense, I use childness as a term to describe the multiple manifestations of childhood and child-related elements of a text. Childness is employed as an all-encompassing concept that refers to a number of themes and issues within a novel or film, from child-adult power relations and child-development to the adult author's memory of childhood and the position of the child reader/viewer. It is important to note that this thesis does not merely demonstrate an application of Hollindale's theories to particular texts. Specifically, my analysis uses childness as a methodology for exploration of both the construction of childhood and of history in children's texts in Ireland. Certain elements of childness and their association with various forms of childhood, when explored in detail, can inform particular readings of the texts under examination.

As a result, my analysis draws upon many theories relating to the historical and cultural construction of childhood and examines the multiple ideologies that intersect in ideas of childhood. 'Childhood' as a cultural construct is well-documented and debated in childhood studies and in the research of children's culture, as is evident in the influential, and highly contested work of critics such as Philippe Ariès and Lloyd de Mause.[29] Peter Hunt discusses the problems associated with defining childhood in the following terms:

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[28] Ibid., p. 49.

[29] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family* Life (New York: Random House, 1962) and Lloyd de Mause, ed., *The History of Childhood* (1974) (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1995). For a detailed analysis of concepts of childhood in culture and in children's fiction, see Peter Hollindale, *Ideology and the Children's Book* (Gloucester: Thimble Press, 1988) and *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*; Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, revised edn (London: Macmillan Press, 1994); Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), and *Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992);

> childhood has been conceived by societies as a state that can be manipulated [...] or by romantics as a pure state, or by psychologists as a series of developmental states. In so far as it can be generally defined at all, it might be as a period of life without responsibility, in which case it is likely to be defined not by age, but by class or social circumstances.[30]

Therefore, he identifies some of the more significant approaches to viewing childhood in terms of a period of instruction, romanticism, developmentalism, or by class and social status.

Drawing upon the theories of Louis Althusser in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', childhood in the novels and films can be understood as an ideological construction.[31] Particular ideological constructions of childhood recur in many of the texts such as the representation of the child as a universal point of identification for the reader/viewer where the concept of childhood is given priority over the individual and complex experiences of children, corresponding to Jacqueline Rose's argument that childhood often 'serves as a term of universal social reference'.[32] The stereotypical image of the 'innocent child' close to nature, animals and myth is also to the fore of many of the texts and can be understood in terms of

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Valerie Krips, *The Presence of The Past: Memory, Heritage, and Childhood in Postwar Britain* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Kimberley Reynolds, *Children's Literature in the 1890s and the 1990s* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994); Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood: How TV is Changing Children's Lives* (1983) (London: WH Allen and Co, 1985); Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from 'Slovenly Peter' to 'Harry Potter'* (London: Routledge, 2002); Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), and 'Childhood and Textuality: Culture, History, Literature', in *Children in Culture*, ed. by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Nicholas Tucker, *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Roni Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2003); Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996); Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Jyotsna Kapur, *Coining for Capital: Movies, Marketing, and the Transformation of Childhood* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005); 'Childhood Studies', *Lion and the Unicorn,* 25.2 (April 2001).

[30] Hunt, *Children's Literature*, p. 6.

[31] The use of 'ideology' in the thesis is based on the theories of Louis Althusser in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', where 'ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' as a 'system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group'. See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation) (January-April 1969)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), pp. 123-73 (pp. 153 and 149). John Fiske's definition of ideology is also useful in this context as he states that 'ideology is not [...] a static set of ideas through which we view the world but a dynamic social practice, constantly in process, constantly reproducing itself in the ordinary workings of these apparatuses'. See John Fiske, 'British Cultural Studies and Television', in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Robert C. Allen, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 284-326 (pp. 287-288).

[32] Rose, p. 10.

Marina Warner's claim that 'the nagging, yearning desire to work back to a pristine state of goodness, an Eden of lost innocence, has focussed on children', as she identifies one of the dominant representations of childhood in culture.[33] I argue that all of these representations of childhood fit within Hollindale's definition of childness. Consequently, by examining childness in the form of the ideological construction of childhood within children's texts, I explore elements such as adult-child power dynamics, childhood memories, child perspective, child characters, relationships between past and present, the creation of nostalgia and sentiment, and the alignment of personal and cultural identity. In particular, it is this merging of ideas of the 'personal' and the 'cultural' that provides for a simultaneous exploration of childhood and Irish history.

It is possible to understand concepts of childhood as representative of the 'past of self' where, as Carolyn Steedman notes, 'the child-figure becomes a central vehicle for expressing ideas about the self and its history'.[34] Such concepts can then be used for the simultaneous exploration of a personal past and a cultural past. I will argue that through their representation of the past and of childhood, the authors and directors of these children's texts conflate ideas of Ireland and childhood. This alignment of the child and the nation corresponds to Valerie Krips' view that 'the child is in fact the ultimate conduit to the past, representing not only the most intimate past of self, but the past of culture as well'.[35]

This association of childhood with the Irish nation is also explored in the work of Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland*.[36] In his chapter on 'Childhood and Ireland', Kiberd observes that at the beginning of the twentieth century, anti-colonial writers such as WB Yeats and Padraic Pearse 'had only one precedent to which to turn for inspiration; the invention of the American Republic by Washington and Jefferson, and of its democratic culture by Whitman and Emerson'.[37] Kiberd argues that both Ireland

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[33] Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of our Time* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 41. The theories of Rose and Warner are discussed throughout this thesis.

[34] Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (London: Virago Press, 1995), p. 5.

[35] Krips, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 24. See also Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood*, p. 4.

[36] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (London: Cape, 1995).

[37] Ibid., p. 100. Similarly, Kathy Merlock Jackson notes that 'like the child [...] America [of the late 19th century] lacked history and experience. Marked by innocence and optimism, it set its sights on the future'. See Kathy Merlock Jackson, *Images of Children in American Film: A Sociocultural Analysis* (London: The Secretary Press, Inc., 1986), p. 17.

and America constructed ideas of the nation by using metaphors of childhood innocence:

> As with Americans of the same period, the Irish were not so much born as made, gathered around a few simple symbols, a flag, an anthem, and a handful of evocative phrases. In the process, childhood – like Ireland itself – had to be reinvented as a zone of innocence, unsullied and intense, from which would emerge the free Irish protagonist.[38]

By adopting such approaches to writing about the Irish nation, writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not only created views of Ireland, but also constructed ideas of childhood innocence that dominated Irish culture throughout the twentieth century. Echoing writing in America, writing about childhood in Ireland became a symbol of hope and of future possibilities. This version of childhood as a sign of origin and also of potential is evident in much of the poetry of WB Yeats, as is discussed later in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 in relation to the work of Joan O'Neill and John Roberts.

Yeats' poetry reveals the conflation of ideas of childhood and nation but also the adult author's deliberate use and manipulation of concepts of childhood within literary texts. In his analysis of the work of Yeats, Declan Kiberd notes that in the

> landscape of early Yeatsian desire, where childhood is surrounded by a *cordon sanitaire* of nostalgia and escape [...] [w]hat the child actually *is* or *wants* means nothing in such literature, for this is the landscape of the adult heart's desire [...] [as] the child is reduced to an expendable cultural object [...]. Childhood is recommended as the zone in which the older forms of culture now jeopardized by modernity are preserved in oral tradition'.[39]

There are obvious similarities here with Jacqueline Rose's claim that *Peter Pan* shows 'innocence not as a property of childhood but as a portion of adult desire'.[40] Kiberd's work indicates that childhood as a concept functions as a site for the interaction of cultural discourses and is representative of a number of factors such as nostalgia, adult desire, and the preservation of traditional forms of culture, all of which can be understood as aspects of childness. More significantly, the alignment of childhood

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[38] Kiberd, pp. 101-102.
[39] Kiberd, p. 104.
[40] Rose, p. xii. Although not directly acknowledged in *Inventing Ireland*, it is evident from Kiberd's turn of phrase that Rose's arguments are closely reflected in Kiberd's theories.

and Ireland signifies the possibility for the simultaneous exploration of both a personal and a national past in the texts under analysis.

Subsequently, I combine theories of childness with the work of Michel Foucault as he also aligns the search for origins of culture with the search for origins of self, and states that 'genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is [...] situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body'.[41] In attempting to analyse the past from a contemporary standpoint, he employs a genealogical approach to the study of history, as discussed below.[42] In this way, I demonstrate that understanding the various components of childness and constructions of childhood in the narratives allows for a means of accessing ideological debates surrounding the construction of history from a contemporary perspective.

Problematising History

Central to this methodology is the idea of the deconstruction of a metanarrative of history from a present-day perspective and the exposition of the political and cultural forces at work in such constructions. This section outlines the questioning of hegemonic forms of traditional patriarchal historiographies which often fail to acknowledge the complex and contradictory nature of history or the selective processes involved in the construction of historiographies. As is noted below, such conservative historiographies often exclude the alternative perspectives of marginalized groups such as women or colonised subjects and correspond to what Herbert Butterfield terms 'the Whig interpretation of history'; the tendency to 'emphasise certain principles of the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present'.[43] These homogenised and simplistic linear accounts of the past often serve to reinforce dominant ideologies and to maintain the *status quo* of the ruling social order in the present. Thus, it is evident that contemporary cultural circumstances can influence the version of history that is constructed within a text.

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[41] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971), in *The Foucault* Reader, ed. by Paul Rabinow (England: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 83. Originally published in *Homage à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 145-72. Source cited in Rabinow, p. 76, note.
[42] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', pp. 80-83.
[43] Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 9.

Analysing the context in which versions of the past are written provides a forum for the exploration of the nature of that historical representation. In this way, I analyse the impact of current ideologies on the individual writer's construction of history in the text and explore the complexity of past-present relations. As is discussed throughout, the writing of Michel Foucault is central to this methodology as he provides a mode of analysing and problematising history by examining its relationship with the contemporary perspective from which it is written. In particular, this approach can be related to Foucault's concept of 'History of the Present', a term first used in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975).[44]

This concept can be traced back to Foucault's earlier writings, primarily his essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971). In 'Le Souci de la vérité', first published in 1984 in *Magazine Littéraire*, Foucault discusses the problematisation of representation stating that, 'I start with a problem in the terms in which it is currently posed and attempt to establish its genealogy; genealogy means that I conduct the analysis starting from the present situation'.[45] This concept is also expressed in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' where genealogy is used to deconstruct and explore historical narratives. Foucault begins his analysis of history from a contemporary perspective; traditional history is characterised by its constants and its aim to dissolve 'the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a teleological movement or a natural process'.[46] However, drawing upon Nietzsche's idea of *Wirkliche Historie*, Foucault believes that by dismantling these modes of historical tradition, an 'effective' history can be created, introducing 'discontinuity into our very being' as it 'deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature' constantly disrupting 'its pretended continuity', thus revealing the complexity of historical discourse.[47] In this sense, Foucault's theories are used in my analysis to reveal that history is not simply an eruption of an event followed by an ideal continuity, but is a series of conflicting

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[44] Foucault states, 'I would like to write the history of the prison with all the political investments of the body it gathers together in its closed architecture. Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.' See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, Vintage/Random House, 1979), p. 31. For a discussion of these aspects of Foucault's work, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), pp. 104-125, and Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 70-94.

[45] Michel Foucault, 'Le Souci de la vérité', *Magazine Littéraire*, 207 (1984), p. 18, cited in Robert Castel, '"Problematization" as a mode of reading History', in *Foucault and the Writing of History*, ed. by Jan Goldstein, trans. by Paula Wissing (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), pp. 237-252 (p. 238).

[46] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 88.

[47] Ibid., p. 88.

discourses of power, a play of dominations. The events of Irish history in the twentieth century can be read in Foucault's terms as 'place[s] of confrontation'.[48] I argue that children's texts are sites for the exploration of such power-relationships, which are inherent in documenting and representing events of the past, where traditional forms of history can either be reinforced – perpetuating the notion of 'pretended continuity' – or subverted and undermined by the manipulation of both narrative content and narrative structure.

In examining the representation of Irish history in texts for children it is also useful to apply Foucault's understanding of genealogy in relation to 'descent'[49] and the accidents of history that inform our understanding of the past in the present. He argues that

> to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.[50]

For Foucault, it is the haphazard conflicts of history rather than a coherent and linear historiography[51] that shape contemporary culture. Fundamental to his interrogation is the idea of the problematisation of historical narratives in formulating a 'history of the present'. Shortly before his death, Foucault defined problematisation as 'not the representation of a pre-existing object, or the creation through discourse of an object that does not exist. It is the totality of discursive and non-discursive practices that brings something into the play of truth and falsehood and sets it up as an object for the mind'.[52] It is this production of truth and falsehood that lies at the centre of Foucault's historical debate and is applicable to the children's texts under analysis.

In elucidating the complexities of Foucault's approach to understanding history, it is useful to examine some of the criticism of his theories. In his essay, '"Problematization" as a mode of Reading History', Robert Castel wonders how one

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[48] Ibid., p. 84.
[49] Ibid., p. 81.
[50] Ibid., p. 81.
[51] I use the term 'history' to describe the totality of the past, and 'historiography' to signify the written or other attempt, usually by an historian, to document coherently the incommensurable totality of history.
[52] Foucault, 'Le Souci de la vérité', p. 18, cited in Castel, p. 238.

can write a 'history of the present' that does not automatically rewrite history on the basis of contemporary interests.[53] Castel warns of the 'need to be wary' of such temptations but fails to acknowledge that earlier historiographies may have distorted history in legitimising previous interests. Contrary to Castel's belief, Foucault's work is not an endless attempt to write new histories, but to draw upon past historiographical writings in the project of problematisation. Castel asks how is it possible 'to avoid making an arbitrary selection'[54] in such a situation, inadvertently exposing elements at the core of Foucault's work. Foucault not only calls for an analysis of already established narratives of history, but also those histories that have been rewritten. Consequently, problematised versions of history in turn become revised, leading to multiple historical readings and replacing the idea of 'History' with 'histories' in the postmodernist sense, a concept which I apply to my reading of historical fiction for children.[55]

Therefore, elements of postmodern theory are also central to my examination of the construction of history in children's fiction. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon debates the complexities of the term postmodernism, and the diverse and varied approaches to and understandings of the concept.[56] Hutcheon acknowledges the debt that postmodern theorists owe to the work of Foucault and the 'deconstructing impulse of what we have labelled postructuralist theory',[57] and illustrates the processes of 'de-naturalizing' and problematising at the core of post-structuralism and postmodernism.[58] The confusion around the definition of the term is also central to Hutcheon's discussion as she notes that 'no one seems to be able to agree, not only on the interpretation, but often on what cultural phenomena are to be interpreted',[59] and argues that every critic constructs 'postmodernism in his or her own way from different perspectives':[60] For instance Fredric Jameson's postmodernism and cultural logic of late capitalism, Jean Baudrillard's postmodernism and simulacrum, and Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernism as a

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[53] Castel, p. 239.
[54] Ibid., p. 239.
[55] 'Fiction' refers to both fictional literature and fictional film.
[56] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).
[57] Ibid., p. 4.
[58] Ibid, p. 3.
[59] Ibid., p. 16.
[60] Ibid., p. 11.

condition of knowledge.[61] Lyotard's work is particularly influential in my analysis of history in children's texts.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Lyotard discusses the 'crisis of narratives' in postmodern culture and problematises the legitimation of grand narratives.[62] He defines postmodernism as 'the incredulity toward metanarratives',[63] including that of history. Although extremely different in their approaches, it is the idea of problematisation which is at the core of Foucault and Lyotard's work. Combining the theories of Foucault and Lyotard allows for an epistemological rather than an ontological reading of history and the production of knowledge in contemporary culture. In this sense, my focus is on historiography and the manner in which history is represented rather than the nature of history itself.

Literature and film which use elements of postmodernism in the representation of history are not concerned with a search for a fundamental truth or origin of knowledge, but an acceptance of what Lyotard terms 'the heterogeneity of language games' as 'Postmodern Knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable'.[64] This suggests that the narrative of history does not act as its own source of validation, but is a site of knowledge that is open to contestation. Narrative form, including historical narrative, is fundamental to the formulation of traditional knowledge[65] but within postmodernism, this credibility of grand narratives is lost 'regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation'.[66] Knowledge is no longer principally located in the final project of the narrative, but meaning lies in the sources of production of such narratives. What results is a process of delegitimation, but as Lyotard notes it is 'a process of delegitimation fuelled by the demand for legitimation itself'.[67]

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[61] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), Baudrillard, Jean, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), and Jean–François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
[62] Lyotard, p. xxiii.
[63] Ibid., p., xxiv.
[64] Ibid., p., xxv.
[65] Ibid., p. 19.
[66] Ibid., p. 37.
[67] Ibid., p. 39. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late* Capitalism, Jameson notes the contradictions of such postmodern processes where 'the disappearance of master narratives has itself to be couched in narrative form' (p. xi).

In a way similar to Lyotard, Hutcheon also discusses the position of the historical novel within postmodernism noting 'the self-consciousness of the fictionality and the lack of familiar pretence of transparency, as well as the calling into question of the factual grounding of history-writing'.[68] Many of the novels and films examined here operate in a similar fashion as they draw attention to their own status as fiction, exposing the processes of production of the narrative, thus emphasising the means rather than the end. In her discussion of postmodern historiographic metafiction Hutcheon argues that while texts which she describes as 'postmodern' may not necessarily engage with a "repudiation of representation" in Fredric Jameson's terms, they do problematise the idea of representation.[69] Similarly, throughout this thesis, I use Hutcehon's postmodern framework to analyse texts which may not necessarily be defined as 'postmodern' in the Jamesonian context. However, approaching the texts using postmodern theory allows for a reading of the texts in postmodern terms and for an identification of postmodern elements within the novels and films.

Therefore, postmodern theory is employed in a variety of ways throughout this analysis in order to answer 'that important postmodern question: how exactly is it that we come to know the past?'.[70] As is explored below, many writers of children's texts demonstrate an awareness of writing history from a contemporary adult perspective and reveal a conscious attempt to problematise and challenge the nature of representation in dominant historiographies that draw upon present ideologies in rewriting the past. The application of postmodern theory to such texts reveals several approaches to the writing of history in postmodern terms which have much in common with Hutcheon's discussions of postmodern representations of the past. In general terms this is evident in the work of Siobhán Parkinson and the plurality of histories; Mark O'Sullivan and foregrounding the constructed nature of representation; Joan O'Neill and the plurality of histories in public and private terms; and Martin Duffy's subversion of reality through a child's perspective. In differing ways, both John Sayles' and John Roberts' films can be read in terms of postmodernity, consumerism and globalisation. This is not an attempt to define the texts as postmodern but to acknowledge the manner in which aspects of postmodern

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[68] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 35.
[69] See Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 50, citing Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate', *New German Critique 33*: 53-65 (p. 54).
[70] Hutcheon, p. 92.

theory have informed my reading of history within the novels and films under analysis, and elucidated certain themes and issues regarding the construction of the past.

As is discussed below, in many of these cases writing about history becomes a political act particularly in relation to contemporary Irish culture, as alternative narratives are created that contest the seamless linear narrative of Irish history that is promoted by dominant historiographies and ideologies. Therefore, many of the texts invite readers to question their own ideological positionings and understandings of history in contemporary culture, to consider processes of representation by which they construct themselves and the world and to recognise the fictitious elements of the narrative of history, distinguishing *events* of the past from the *facts* that are formulated from these events. As Hutcheon notes, 'facts are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives therefore derive different facts from the same events'.[71] In this way, the perspective from which history is viewed and written is central to understanding the construction of the past in the present, particularly in establishing either public or private histories for a child reader.

Several of the novels and films provide alternative private histories through descriptions of the lived experience of the period as opposed to focusing on public events which are heavily documented in dominant or 'official' historiographies. As a result, it is possible to relate many of the texts, such as *Amelia*, *No Peace for Amelia*, *Melody for Nora*, *Daisy Chain War*, and *The Boy From Mercury*, to theories of 'Popular Memory'. Coined by Michel Foucault in 1977, the term popular memory refers to an attempt to deconstruct the forces at work in the production of empirical or 'official' history and recognise the validity of those predominantly undocumented histories of marginalized groups.[72] 'The Popular Memory Group' defines popular memory as 'an *object of study*' and 'as a *dimension of political practice*'.[73] They argue for both an interrogation of the content of historical narratives as well as the modes of gathering historical detail, acknowledging that certain marginalized groups,

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[71] Ibid., p. 57.

[72] Michel Foucault, 'Michel Foucault: Interview', *Edinburgh '77 Magazine*, p. 24.

[73] The Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method', in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics / Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*, ed. by Richard Johnson and others of the Popular Memory Group (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre, 1982), 205-52 (p. 205). Emphasis in original. The Popular Memory Group are based at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and explore alternatives to official historiographies such as community-based histories and oral histories.

such as women and the working classes, may not have had the means to produce historiographies.[74] Keith Tribe similarly describes this process as giving 'popular struggles a heritage that is suppressed and distorted in the history that is given to them' because the deployment of popular struggles from the past highlights similar injustices in present day culture.[75] This is particularly relevant to my analysis of the representation of the criticism of Church and State policies in Ireland and to the depiction of gender issues in the narratives examined here. As a result, both personal and cultural memories are foregrounded as legitimate modes of accessing the past and constructing history.

In this sense, it is possible to read several of the texts as producing previously undocumented social histories. According to the Popular Memory Group, this social production of memory and history is a collective process 'where everyone in this sense is an historian'.[76] However, this is not suggesting a call for the endless discovery of 'new struggles' from the past, but indicates the manner in which the memories of events can play a role in current cultural discourse. In discussing the work of Foucault and the idea of popular memory, Tribe examines the title of the film event at Edinburgh in 1977: *History/Production/Memory*. Tribe's analysis illustrates the complexities involved in using memory to write history as he notes that if the title is read from left to right, history is given dominance as 'truth', where the veracity of the writings of the past are validated by their direct involvement with the past. The second approach is to read the title from right to left, which may be termed as an anti-historicist approach, 'denying that the past through its existence and transcription is a principle of validity in itself'.[77] Drawing upon such theories throughout my analysis, I explore the complex relationships between history and memory, and past and present. This allows for an investigation into the contrasting methods employed by authors and filmmakers in documenting the past for an implied child reader/viewer.[78]

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[74] The Popular Memory Group, pp. 205-252.
[75] Keith Tribe, 'History and The Production of Memories', *Screen*, 18.4 (Winter 1977-78), p. 9.
[76] The Popular Memory Group, p. 207.
[77] Tribe, p. 12.
[78] Throughout this thesis I use terms such as 'adult reader' and 'child reader' to denote the implied reader of a text who is a subject within dominant ideological discourses of child/adult relations. In this sense, I mean that if a text is aimed at a child reader, I have drawn upon the theories of Barbara Wall and taken into account the various modes of address that may be used by an adult author in attempting to engage a child reader. However, this simplistic binary of child/adult reader is extremely problematic and in many cases these terms obscure more than they reveal. Consequently, I also use the term 'informed' reader and 'uninformed' reader. This highlights that issues surrounding knowledge of events in the narratives and modes of understanding the texts cannot be reduced to simplistic ideologies

It is also useful to relate my approach to the work of Pierre Nora who understands memory and history as distinct entities, positing that history is 'the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer', a concept that signals a very definite break between past and present.[79] Memory, on the other hand, is 'always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution' and provides a link between the past and present from a contemporary standpoint.[80] Therefore, memory, a process that reconstructs and reimagines the past,[81] occurs in the present moment and thus bridges the gap between past and present, or as Valerie Krips notes, 'memory operates to heal the rupture installed by history'.[82] As a mode of accessing the past, memory presents an alternative to what The Popular Memory Group recognise as the 'limits and contradictions of academic history'.[83] These theories are particularly relevant to my discussion of authors and filmmakers who draw upon their own memories of childhood in constructing versions of an Irish past and the manner in which memory is used to bridge a gap between past and present. I argue that in constructing the past, the writers and directors are greatly influenced by the cultural ideologies of the present moment in which they are writing. Consequently, I position my analysis of these texts within the cultural debates of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Ireland, particularly those concerned with Irish history.

The Problematisation of History in Contemporary Irish Culture

My analysis examines specific narratives as sites of interaction between the ideological constructions of Irish childhood and twentieth-century Irish history and their relation to cultural discourses of late twentieth-century Ireland. The majority of the texts under examination were produced in the 1990s, a period in which historical

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of the 'adult reader as informed' and the 'child reader as uninformed'. The same can be understood in relation to film texts when 'reader' is replaced with 'viewer'.

[79] See Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* Vol. 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman and trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 3. See also *Realms of Memory*, Vol. 2: *Traditions* (1997) and Vol. 3: *Symbols* (1998). For a further discussion of these concepts see Krips, *The Presence of the Past*; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); and Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory,* Vol. 1*: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994).

[80] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, Vol. 1, p. 3.

[81] See Krips, p. 15. This also corresponds to the past-present dynamics of engaging with history that are explored by Foucault.

[82] Ibid., p. 18.

[83] The Popular Memory Group, p. 207.

revisionism had become a popular topical debate in Irish culture as discussed by MAG O'Tuathaigh. He notes that in 1991 there was great controversy in Ireland surrounding approaches to the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Easter Rising that included a questioning of versions of Irish nationalist historiographies.[84] Such historiographies included the work of Mary Hayden, Dorothy McArdle and PS O' Hegarty, which offered a somewhat homogenised version of nationalist historical processes.[85] O'Tuathaigh claims that throughout the twentieth century these hegemonic accounts of the revolutionary period (1912-23) had become enshrined by the state as 'official history'.[86] My examination draws upon these debates and analyses how the texts conform to or deviate from hegemonic accounts of the past. I argue that many of the authors and filmmakers 'revise' these conservative nationalist histories.

The modern revisionist debate, which challenged such homogeneous accounts of the past, became prominent as a result of the Ford Lectures of FSL Lyons at Oxford University in 1978.[87] However, it was not until the early 1990s that such debates made a significant move into the popular public domain having previously been limited to academia.[88] Lyons' lectures were later published as *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (1979), a work that provided opposing views of Irish identity in the early twentieth century, questioned nationalist myths of independence and consequently provoked a controversial reception.[89] This revisionist work was supported by RF Foster culminating in his contestation of traditional nationalist historiography in *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (1988).[90] The work of Lyons and Foster adheres to the idea of problematising history and challenges the apparently linear

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[84] MAG O' Tuathaigh, 'Irish Historical "Revisionism": State of the Art or Ideological Project?', in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, ed. by Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 306-26.

[85] Mary Hayden, *A Short History of the Irish People* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927); Dorothy McArdle, with a preface by Eamon De Valera, *The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a Detailed Account of the Period 1916-1923* (London: V. Gollancz, 1937); PS O'Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union, 1801 to 1922: With an Epilogue Carrying the Story Down to the Acceptance in 1927 by de Valéra of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (London: Methuen, 1952).

[86] O'Tuathaigh, p. 310.

[87] For a fuller discussion of the development of Irish Revisionism, see Brian Murphy, 'The Canon of Irish Cultural History: Some Questions regarding Roy Foster's Modern Ireland', in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, pp. 222-233.

[88] See *Today Tonight Special*, TX Ireland, RTE, 31 March 1991.

[89] FSL Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). For a discussion of Lyons, see Ciaran Brady 'Constructive and Instrumental: The Dilemma of Ireland's First 'New Historians', in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*.

[90] RF Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988).

narrative of Irish nationalist history. Many revisionists wish to bring elements of discontinuity to the fore and subsequently challenge ideas of seamlessness. However, this revisionism and its treatment of nationalist history has also been criticised as it too resulted in homogeneous accounts of Irish history.[91]

In the writing of Irish history in the 1970s there was also a significant shift from politically-focused to socio-economic historiographies, a change that paralleled the eruption of violence in Northern Ireland. Ronan Fanning questions this coincidence asking 'whether there is any causal connection between the contemporary crisis in Northern Ireland and the enthusiasm for the socio-economic, at the expense of political history'.[92] The change in perspective in Irish historiographies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which tended to occlude references to Ireland's violent past, also occurred in conjunction with Ireland's entrance into the European Economic Community (EEC), and the advancement of the nation into a supposedly neo-liberal world order. These debates regarding Northern Ireland and also Ireland's position in the European Union are particularly relevant in my analysis of the representation of violence in children's fiction, most notably in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in relation to the work of Siobhán Parkinson and Mark O'Sullivan and the challenges of addressing Ireland's violent history within the 'Peace Process Politics' of 1990s Ireland.

I position the primary texts within the context of Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin's claim that such revisionism fashions Irish nationalist history into a 'distant past' that 'massages conflict out of representation'[93] and that such liberalising was an attempt to distance the Irish State from extra-parliamentary nationalism in Northern Ireland.[94] They suggest that Irish history is framed as an ideological force that is manipulated by the governing state in order to legitimise its own authority.[95] As a result, it is possible

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[91] This is evident in Luke Gibbons' discussion of revisionism and his criticism of Lyons in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press in Association with Field Day, 1996), p. 16.

[92] Ronan Fanning, '"The Great Enchantment": Uses and Abuses of Modern Irish History', in *Ireland and the Contemporary World: Essays in Honour of Garret Fitzgerald*, ed. by James Dooge (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), reprinted in *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, p. 153.

[93] Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Introduction', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 1-20 (p. 7).

[94] Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin question the revisionists' rewriting of Irish history, noting that 'the shift in historical sympathies was not only inevitable with the arrival of a younger group of scholars on the Irish university scene but also complemented the aggressive commitment of the state to integration into the international neo-liberal system and a desire on the part of the new elites to repudiate a now discredited and devalued Nationalist reading of history'. Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[95] Bernard Lewis notes that 'those who are in power control to a very large extent the presentation of the past and seek to make sure that it is presented in such a way as to buttress and legitimise their own

to argue that the Irish State in the 1990s promoted a conservative reading of history by simultaneously distancing itself from the conflict in Northern Ireland while also providing an acceptable cultural commodity in the heritage industry.[96] However, although Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin criticise the work of revisionists such as Foster, particularly in terms of the latter's treatment of nationalist history, many aspects of their argument in relation to the 'commodification' of Irish history can also be found in the work of Foster.

This 'commodification' of the past is a central component of my analysis, particularly in relation to the work of Joan O'Neill and John Roberts. RF Foster's *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (2001)[97] also proposes that Irish history has been manipulated in such a manner for current political and economic ends, which Foster claims has resulted in the creation of fixed versions of Irish history; he writes,

> [O]ne of the themes of this book is Irish self-validation; the Existence of Ireland. But also its creation: and, particularly, the re-creation of Ireland by communal acts of remembering and celebration. This brings us at once to self-presentation, particularly abroad. But the Irish self-image also relies upon a domesticated popularisation of history: 'making history' in a second sense, which has more to do with packaging and marketing.[98]

Supporting his argument, Foster quotes from a document issued by the Irish Tourist Board entitled 'Heritage Attractions Development: A Strategy to Interpret Ireland's History and Culture for Tourism':

> Irish history, due to the influence of many peoples, cultures and conflicts, is not easily understood by visitors ... Visitors' time is also limited ... so it is important to help increase visitors' understanding by creating interpretative 'gateways' into our heritage. This will heighten their experience, increase satisfaction levels, and help in awareness and appreciation of individual sites. The end result will be more repeat business, better word of mouth

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authority, and affirm the rights and merits of the group which they lead', in *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 53.

[96] Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Introduction', p. 7.

[97] RF Foster, (London: Penguin, 2001).

[98] Foster, *The Irish Story*, p. 24.

> publicity, and the creation of a strong brand image of Ireland as quality heritage destination, with unique heritage attractions.[99]

The crux of the argument lies in 'the creation of a strong brand image of Ireland', which suggests that history can be packaged and interpreted for a general global audience, eliminating the antagonistic and fragmentary forces of the Irish past. I discuss in detail throughout that many of the children's texts addressed here are constructed in an attempt to create a 'marketable' Irish past within a global economic framework.

Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin propose that Ireland, faced with the dilemma of acknowledging its rebellious nationalist foundation while simultaneously attempting to validate a pedigree and promote an image of a tolerant and welcoming nation, produced a distinct and 'packaged' view of history in the 1990s. It is this contradictory image of the Irish past – the desire to market Irish history and heritage within a global culture while simultaneously attempting to distance modern Ireland from the negative elements of this history – which is particularly significant in my analysis of *Daisy Chain War* and *War of the Buttons*.

Tracing developments in Irish culture and history is at the core of the work of Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, David Lloyd, and Richard Kearney as they question and problematise ideas of past-present relations in contemporary culture and challenge the legitimation of present cultural forms and ideologies that promote selective versions of Irish history.[100] Such critical work suggests that there is a need to interrogate and revise Irish history and, in David Lloyd's terms, 'to shatter and displace the common sense of historicism, the sedimented layer of concepts and assumptions on which its self-certainty rests'.[101] My analysis of the varying approaches to representing history for child viewers and readers in children's texts is positioned within these complex cultural discourses surrounding the nature and function of history in modern Ireland.

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[99] First cited in Fintan O'Toole, *Black Hole, Green Card: The Disappearance of Ireland* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994), pp. 39-40. Cited in Foster, *The Irish Story*, p. 24.
[100] David Lloyd, *Ireland After History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999) and Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge 1997).
[101] Lloyd, p. 1.

Primary Texts

Elements of these existing critical approaches that relate issues of childness and the construction of history are combined and adapted, and then applied to primary texts. Founded on the merging and revision of already established critical and cultural theories, the close textual analysis of particular films and novels offers a new methodological approach to the study of children's fiction. Rather than limiting my analysis simply to literature or to film, this multi-disciplinary approach allows for an exploration of the differing methods of constructing childhood and history across children's texts, and consequently evaluates the broader field of children's culture in Ireland. Throughout this thesis I clearly acknowledge the unique theoretical approaches to the study of literature and to the study of film. While the two disciplines may share particular methodologies, literary theory and film theory engage with aspects specifically related to either the written word or to audio-visual media. Therefore, in order to recognise and elucidate fully the complexities of individual texts within their own discipline, I have divided this thesis into two distinct – but related – sections: three chapters focus on specific literary texts and writers, and three chapters on particular films and filmmakers. The sections are linked thematically through ideas of childhood and history, and my inter-disciplinary methodology allows for an analysis that engages with theoretical approaches unique to each discipline.

Each chapter will interrogate the unique manner in which the author/ filmmaker explores Irish history and childhood from a contemporary perspective within the broader context of literature and film produced during the period. While the novels and *The Boy from Mercury* are written by Irish authors and therefore can be understood as 'Irish texts', *War of the Buttons* and *The Secret of Roan Inish* are more problematic and are not necessarily definable as 'Irish'.[102] However, they both deal with aspects of Irish childhood and Irish history and are therefore included in this analysis.

The novels that receive close critical examination in this thesis illustrate the most interesting and complex approaches to writing about Irish childhood and history that I have encountered in my research of Irish children's literature. In general terms

[102] David Puttnam notes the complexity of issues of definition surrounding *War of the Buttons* in 'Creativity and Commercialism: Film-making in Europe', in *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe*, ed. by John Hill, Martin McLoone and Paul Hainsworth (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University, 1994), pp. 81-87 (p. 81). See Chapter 5 of this thesis for a discussion of *War of the Buttons*.

they represent three significant moments in twentieth-century Irish history, both culturally and politically, that still dominate contemporary cultural debates.[103] In *Amelia* and *No Peace for Amelia* Siobhán Parkinson explores the complex ideologies competing for a position in Irish culture during the birth of the state from 1914 to 1916; *Melody for Nora* engages with the politics of the Irish Civil War in 1922; Joan O'Neill's *Daisy Chain War* documents the period during and immediately after World War II. The obvious omissions from this study of novels that deal with Ireland's revolutionary period (1916-1922) include Gerard Whelan's *Guns of Easter* and *A Winter of Spies*, Colin Vard's *Blood Beyond the Keyhole*, Elizabeth Lutzier's *Crying for the Enemy*, and Aubrey Flegg's *Katie's War*.[104] While reference is made to many of these texts, I will argue that the work of Parkinson and O'Sullivan is far more intricate and complex in its engagement with historical discourses, in terms of both writing style and narrative content.[105] *Daisy Chain War* is also particularly significant as it is the only Irish novel for children at present that explores in detail the experience of living in Ireland during World War II and therefore represents a period of the Irish past previously undocumented in fiction for children.[106]

The films chosen are the only films produced during the period that are set in the past and are directly aimed at a child or family audience.[107] I use the term

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[103] This thesis focuses on the representation of twentieth-century Irish history, therefore Marita Conlon McKenna's popular 'Famine Trilogy' – *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1990), *Wildflower Girl* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1992), and *Fields of Home* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1996) – is excluded from this research. For an analysis of Conlon McKenna's work see Watson, 'The Politics and Poetics of Irish Children's Literature'. *Under the Hawthorn Tree* was also adapted for Channel 4 Television (Dirs: Siobhán Lyons and Bronagh Murphy, UK, 1998).

[104] *The Guns of Easter* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1996); *A Winter of Spies* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998); *Blood Beyond the Keyhole* (Wicklow: Celtpress, 1993); *Crying for the Enemy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and *Katie's War* (1997) (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998). *Crying for the Enemy* also falls outside the 1990-2003 framework of this thesis.

[105] For a detailed comparison of the texts of Gerard Whelan and Siobhán Parkinson, see my essay 'Wars of Independence: The Construction of Irish Histories in the Novels of Gerard Whelan and Siobhán Parkinson', in *Studies in Children's Literature, 1500-2000*, pp. 120-129.

[106] Both Bill Wall's *The Boy Who Met Hitler* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1999) and Mark O'Sullivan's *More Than a Match* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996) make reference to World War II and its aftermath, but in contrast to O'Neill's work do not detail the cultural and political impact that it had on Irish society.

[107] Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples distinguish between a family film and a children's film noting that 'children's film can be defined as offering mainly or entirely a child's point of view. They deal with the interests, fears, misapprehensions and concerns of children in their own terms. They foreground the problems of coping with adults, or of coping without them. [...] Children's film is always low budget compared to a family film, and this has become part of its aesthetic'. See Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids: Children's Cinema and the Family Film', in *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*, ed. by Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 92-108 (p. 96). Defining both children's literature and children's film is extremely problematic, and as Peter Hunt notes, 'there can be no single definition of children's literature' (Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*, p. 42). For a

'children's film' to encompass films that, in some capacity, are targeted at a child viewer. This decision is usually made at the production stage when the writers and producers deicide that the narrative should contain themes and issues that they believe will appeal to a young viewer, as is the case with all three films analysed in this thesis.[108] As noted earlier, there are a small number of films that were made in Ireland or that deal with aspects of Ireland and are targeted at children and young people. These include *Shamus* (UK, 1959), *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (USA, 1959), *The Fighting Prince of Donegal* (UK, 1966), *Guns in the Heather* (UK, 1968), *Flight of the Doves* (UK/USA, 1971), *The Johnstown Monster* (UK, 1971), *The End of The World Man* (Ireland, 1986), *Into The West* (Ireland/UK, 1992), *My Friend Joe* (Ireland/Germany, 1996), and *The Crooked Mile* (Ireland, 2001).[109] I have chosen three films that represent contrasting images of Ireland and childhood from an American, a European, and an Irish perspective. *The Secret of Roan Inish* is an American production set in early 1950s Donegal; *War of the Buttons* is a UK/France co-production set between 1950 and 1980 in rural Cork; and *The Boy from Mercury* is an Irish production set in early 1960s Dublin.[110] As a result, the close textual analysis of these novels and films offers an insight into six contrasting and varied approaches to the representation of Irish history and childhood in children's texts.

Chapter 1 examines elements of childness and their relation to the construction of postmodern histories in Siobhán Parkinson's *Amelia* and its sequel *No Peace for*

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discussion of these issues see Wojcik-Andrews, pp. 1-3 and Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*, pp. 42-64.

[108] See John Sayles, in John Sayles and Gavin Smith, *Sayles on Sayles* (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 211; *War of the Buttons*, Productions Notes, IFI Archives; and *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.

[109] In my referencing of films, the first name in the parenthesis is that of the director. *Shamus* (Eric Marquis, UK, 1959); *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (Robert Stevenson, USA, 1959); *The Fighting Prince of Donegal* (Michael O'Herlihy, UK, 1966); *Guns in the Heather* (Robert Butler, UK, 1968); *Flight of the Doves* (Ralph Nelson, UK/USA, 1971); *The Johnstown Monster* (Olaf Pooley, UK, 1971); *The End of the World Man* (Bill Miskelly, Ireland, 1986); *Into The West* (Mike Newell, Ireland/UK, 1992); *My Friend Joe* (Chris Bould, Ireland/Germany, 1996); and *The Crooked Mile* (Stephen Kane, Ireland, 2001). While many other films are also set in the past and feature child or youth protagonists, they are not aimed directly at a child audience. These include *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (Barry Devlin, Ireland, 1994); *Frankie Starlight* (Michael Lindsay-Hogg, France/ UK/Ireland/USA, 1995); *Last of the High Kings* (David Keating, Ireland, 1996); *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, Ireland, 1997); *How to Cheat in the Leaving Certificate* (Graham Jones, Ireland, 1997); *The Tale of Sweety Barrett* (Stephen Bradley, Ireland, 1998); *Pete's Meteor* (Joe O'Byrne, Ireland, 1998); *Country* (Kevin Liddy, Ireland, 2000); *Evelyn* (Bruce Beresford, Ger/Irl/USA/Netherlands/UK, 2002); *Song for a Raggy Boy* (Aisling Walsh, Ireland/UK/Denmark/Spain, 2003); and *In America* (Jim Sheridan, Ireland, 2004), which is not set in Ireland but features Irish child protagonists and is set in the past.

[110] It is significant to note that the Irish film is the only one of the three that is located within an urban setting. In the conclusion to this thesis I discuss this topic in relation to local and global representations of the nation.

Amelia. In particular, a form of childness identified is the representation of the psychological development of the child character. This chapter proposes that Parkinson's narrative provides the child reader with a myriad of viewpoints on several narratives of Irish history, inviting the readers to draw their own conclusions based upon their exposure to conflicting voices and opinions from the characters in the text, and subsequently encouraging them to question the dominance of certain versions of history within their own culture. Although the main focus of my argument is on *Amelia* and *No Peace for Amelia*, I also discuss these texts in relation to Parkinson's other writing, including *Kathleen: The Celtic Knot.*[111] I argue that in these novels, concepts of childness can act as a narrative device in the deconstruction of historical narratives for the child reader. In this sense, childness functions as a methodological apparatus in which the ideological forces of history are dismantled, exposing for the child reader the impossibility of constructing Irish history as a continuous linear narrative. Adopting such an approach requires an investigation into the various constructions of childhood in the texts and the subsequent relation of such concepts to the production of historical narratives within contemporary Irish culture.

The second chapter focuses on Mark O'Sullivan's *Melody for Nora* and the childness present in the construction of the child character as a metonym for the Irish nation. Drawing upon the work of Dominick La Capra and Cathy Caruth, I argue that Nora's traumatic experiences can be read as representative of a moment of trauma in Irish history in the form of the Civil War, and contend that the child character's inability to articulate coherently the disjointed and fractured nature of her personal past mirrors the inability of Irish culture to represent the Civil War.[112] As a result, this chapter develops the ideas of postmodern histories from the previous chapter and explores O'Sullivan's use of the chaos of trauma to parallel the representation of the disorganised and fragmented nature of the past. The significant contribution that children's texts can make to contemporary cultural discourses in Ireland is also discussed as O'Sullivan's novel is one of a limited number of texts in Irish culture that engages directly with this aspect of Ireland's past.

Chapter 3 examines the 'memoir' approach that Joan O'Neill employs in writing *Daisy Chain War* and explores the elements of childness present in the

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[111] *Kathleen: The Celtic Knot* (Wisconsin: Pleasant Company, 2003).

[112] Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

author's use of memory to represent the past through a linear narrative of childhood. This chapter draws upon an idea of childness discussed in detail in chapter 4 of Hollindale's *Signs of Childness* titled 'Memory and Narrative: The Children's Book as Autobiography'.[113] By focussing on O'Neill's manipulation of narrative voice,[114] the relationship between private and public accounts of history is analysed and I posit that the text functions in terms of popular memory by revealing the everyday experiences of growing up in Dublin during the period.[115] However, the fallibility of the author is also examined, as many historical inaccuracies are evident in the text, exposing for the child reader the complexities of writing about history through memory. By identifying the various forms of childness in the text, I argue that the novel contains nostalgic and sentimental constructions of childhood, concepts that are similar to those found in John Roberts' *War of the Buttons*.

The international perspective of the Irish past is discussed in Chapter 4 in my analysis of John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish*. This study of the film draws upon the work of Roland Robertson and theories of globalisation, focussing on the construction of both history and myth in the text and examining the use of ideas of Ireland and ideas of childhood in a search for origins in a global culture.[116] It is argued that childness is evident in the representation of the child as an icon, having access to myth and nature, and symbolising ideas of origin. Placing the film within the context of representations of Ireland in film and employing the theories of Martin McLoone, Luke Gibbons, Kevin Rockett and Ruth Barton, I argue that Sayles manipulates traditional images of Ireland on screen by first establishing and then immediately subverting stereotypical portrayals of the nation.[117] Throughout this analysis I propose that both childhood and Ireland are used as sites of origin in the exploration of a loss of personal and of cultural identity within global culture.

Chapter 5 centres on *War of the Buttons* as I position it within the tradition of the heritage industry and investigate the film's construction of Ireland and childhood

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[113] Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, pp. 62-75.
[114] This analysis of narrative voice is influenced by Barbara Wall's *The Narrator's Voice*.
[115] The theories of Pierre Nora and Valerie Krips are central to this exploration.
[116] *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. by Roland Robertson and Kathleen E. White (London: Routledge, 2003); Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity', in *Global Modernities*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: Sage Publications, 1995); and Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992).
[117] McLoone, *Irish Film*; Rockett, Gibbons, and Hill, *Cinema and Ireland*; and Barton, *Irish National Cinema*.

as sites of heritage and nostalgia for a global audience.[118] Drawing upon theories of childness, globalisation, and nostalgia, I explore the relationship between personal and cultural memory in the text, placing the film within the context of British heritage films, and deliberate the function of such a representation of the Irish past within a global economic framework. My discussion of the portrayal of childhood innocence in the film also identifies elements of the narrative that deviate from stereotypical sentimental representations of Ireland and childhood, and are therefore inconsistent with the dominant tone of the text.[119] It is also argued that various elements of childness such as memory, a personal past, and the image of the child's body, serve to reinforce certain representations of Ireland's past in terms of innocence, heritage, and nostalgia.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines Martin Duffy's *The Boy from* Mercury, identifies the forms of childness in the text, and discusses the representation of Irish childhood and history from an Irish perspective. I argue that the child's point of view in the narrative is central to understanding Duffy's complex construction of the Irish past as he merges elements of postmodernism with aspects of the fantasy genre.[120] This blurring of fact and fiction in the film allows for a simultaneous representation of and subversive commentary on Irish society of the 1960s, particularly in relation to adult-child power dynamics, popular culture and the dominance of the Catholic Church. This concluding chapter suggests that Duffy's film, like many of the texts discussed, problematises the very idea of writing 'truthful' accounts of the past and invites the viewer to question and challenge the construction of dominant cultural ideologies.

Conclusion

It is evident from the above outline that several methodologies and theoretical approaches are combined in the creation of an original methodology which allows for the simultaneous exploration of constructions of childhood and history within children's texts in Ireland at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-

[118] This chapter also draws upon the work of Nora and Krips.

[119] The writings of Perry Nodelman, Kerry Mallan and Anne Higonnet are central to this analysis. See Perry Nodelman, 'Making Boys Appear', in *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film*, ed. by John Stephens (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-14; Kerry Mallan, 'Picturing the Male; Representations of Masculinity in Picture Books', in *Ways of Being Male*, pp. 15-37; and Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*.

[120] In particular, I draw upon Colin Manlove's *The Fantasy Literature of England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999).

first century. In general terms, each chapter examines elements of childness in a specific text, the relationship of childness to the construction of the past in the novel or film, and the significance of such representations within the context of Irish culture during the period 1990-2003.

Drawing upon Hollindales theories of childness it is possible to identify forms of childness and manifestations of childhood within each text. Many of these forms are easily linked to ideas of the past and representations of history such as the adult author's memories of childhood, the construction of linear narratives of personal and cultural pasts, the child character as a symbol of origin, the child figure as representative of nostalgia and innocence. I also use aspects of childness which, initially, may not appear to have any direct relation to the portrayal of history, but when analysed within the context of constructions of the past can aid in the interpretation of specific representations. These include the use of child perspective, the psychological development of the child character, childhood as a commodity, and the child figure as a symbol of hope for the future. The identification of elements of childness also draws attention to the varied ideological constructions of childhood and children within children's texts in Ireland.

The central debate within each chapter is the manner in which these aspects of childness relate to the representation of history in specific texts and the possibilities that childness as a methodology can offer to the interrogation of history within children's texts. Through this basic framework and in conjunction with theories such as postmodernism, popular memory, and 'History of the Present', representations of the past and of childhood are explored and positioned within the context of contemporary cultural debates. As is demonstrated above, many of these discourses relate to ideas of revisionism, the re-writing of history from the perspective of those previously marginalised in traditional historiographies, nostalgia, innocence, and Irish identity and globalisation. Therefore, exploring the various elements of childness within the texts allows for an elucidation of the complex processes involved in constructing childhood and constructing an Irish past for a child viewer/reader.

Such an approach also reveals many of the intricacies of cultural debates in late twentieth-century Ireland. Issues of 'local' and 'global' perspectives of the nation and the production of internal and external representations of Irish identity are to the fore of these discussions. This thesis examines the manner in which Irish authors and filmmakers attempt to represent Irish history and identity within a global culture and

how this depiction may contradict many international representations of Irish identity. However, I demonstrate that while some Irish authors may challenge stereotypical received images of the nation, others use these stereotypes as a marketing strategy within a global economic framework. The multi-disciplinary approach also allows for an opportunity to compare and contrast the different modes of establishing childhood and history in literature and film, exploring themes such as rural and urban representations, gender, narrative voice, private and public memories, child/adult power dynamics, and child perspectives. Therefore, this analysis explores the changes and developments of many aspects of Irish culture throughout the twentieth century and debates the multiple formations of Irish identity at the beginning of the new millennium.

Although this methodology is particularly useful in analysing Irish children's texts that deal with aspects of the past, I propose that it can be transferred to historical fiction outside the Irish context. For instance, many of the chapters of this thesis discuss issues of colonialism and postcolonialism in children's fiction and how they can be related to debates regarding adult-child power dynamics. Thus it is possible to employ the methodology to the children's literature of other postcolonial nations. In order to do this, it would be necessary that the third element of my methodological approach in the form of contemporary Irish cultural debates, particularly in relation to historiography, be adapted to and positioned within the cultural discourses of the nation in question. This methodology is specifically designed to explore the interaction of childness and history, and as I have argued, certain elements of childness are particularly suited to analysing representations of the past. However, perhaps it is also possible to use Hollindale's work to explore the interaction of manifestations of childhood with the specifics of other genres.

I do not merely identify the aspects of childness using Hollindale's theories, but directly employ these as a framework to examine a certain component of narrative structure, content and form. As is the case with representations of the past, perhaps it is also possible to use childness to investigate the construction of other features of certain genres, such as fantasy: Can childness, in the form of the association of childhood imagination with fantasy, be used to explore an understanding of the construction of fantasy within a particular text? Can the child's perspective or the construction of the child character within the fantasy novel be used as a means of reinforcing the often-subversive nature of fantasy fiction? How do these texts then

relate to the context in which they are written in terms of perceptions of 'fantasy' or constructions of children and childhood? Can childness be used to explore the representation of horror in horror fiction? This thesis does not supply the answers to these questions, but perhaps future researchers can do so by challenging, expanding and adapting the methodology that is presented here.

This thesis makes a number of significant contributions to several research areas and disciplines including children's literature, children's film, Irish literature, Irish film, and Irish cultural studies. As is noted above, the academic research of children's literature in Ireland and of Irish children's literature, although developing, is limited and often centres on broad overviews of children's fiction in Ireland. This project represents the first close detailed textual analysis of *Amelia*, *No Peace for Amelia*, *Melody for Nora*, and *Daisy Chain War* and the representation of twentieth-century history in Irish children's literature, providing the basis for further examinations of historical texts, particularly those that engage with non-twentieth-century history. On an international scale, this thesis highlights and recognises the work of Irish authors and filmmakers within the broader context of children's literature and film and demonstrates the contribution made by Irish researchers in the field of children's cultural studies. Irish children's film is explored in detail for the first time in a doctoral thesis, thus positioning the analysis of children's films as an important aspect of Irish film studies. Indeed, the study of Irish film is often limited to overviews of films within broader discussions, and there is sometimes a failure to engage with close textual analysis of particular texts. This thesis serves to redress that imbalance and provides a detailed reading of specific films within the wider context of Irish film studies.

Many changes have occurred in Irish society in relation to how children are perceived and treated, from the Irish Government's ratification of the *UN Rights of the Child* in 1989 to the establishment of an *Ombudsman for Children* in 2003. This reflects attempts to take children and their experiences more seriously. It is also necessary to include children's culture in these developments. Significantly, my work treats children's literature and film as valuable categories that merit and withstand robust critical scrutiny. As part of this process, the framework used for my analysis incorporates critical and cultural theories that are usually applied to mainstream texts, and appropriates these theories for the study of children's literature and film. The unique nature of children's texts is not excluded by such an approach as the child

reader, and issues of childhood and children are continually emphasised by positioning the discussion of texts within the context of theories of childness. I argue throughout that it is necessary to value and develop the study of children's culture and to subject children's literature and film to the same rigorous analysis as that applied to mainstream texts, and thereby accord them the same status. Ultimately, this thesis illuminates both the manner in which children's texts engage with complex cultural discourses in contemporary Ireland and the significant contribution that these novels and films can make to broader debates concerning Irish identity during the Celtic Tiger period.

Chapter 1

The Age of Discontent: Siobhán Parkinson's *Amelia* and *No Peace for Amelia*

Siobhán Parkinson's construction of concepts of childhood in the texts *Amelia* and *No Peace for Amelia* provides the reader with a basis for the simultaneous exploration of multiple accounts of Irish history. As is argued throughout, childness is present in the act of reading the novels in several forms including the depiction of power relations between child and adult characters; the reader/writer dynamic of child reader and adult author in the process of reading children's literature; the portrayal of child characters as metaphors for the Irish nation; and the representation of the character Amelia's cognitive development processes.[1]

The manifestations of childhood encourage readings that interrogate both the historical events of the early part of the twentieth century and the methods of production of this history. In particular, the novels explore issues of class and gender in Ireland, as well as of nationalism and of the Easter Rising of 1916. These elements do not feature as separate and autonomous entities but are represented as cultural debates that both inform and often contradict each other, as an amalgamation of ideological viewpoints primarily voiced through the characters of Mama, Papa, Mary Ann and Amelia. The author provides the reader with accounts of historical events that are interpreted differently by characters depending upon their social, economic and political positioning, such as Mama's middle-class suffragette outlook or Mary Ann's working-class nationalist perspective. As is discussed in the following sections, childness acts a methodological tool that can be applied both to explore and to comprehend the complexities of these cultural debates. Childness as a concept can be used to understand the processes at work in Parkinson's use of the fictional form[2] to explore ideas of representing history, as well as the position of the child reader in attempting to construct meaning from this exploration. This approach emerges from

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[1] For an overview of Parkinson's work, up to and including *The Love Bean* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002), see Amanda Piesse in *Inis*, 3 (Winter 2002), pp. 20-23. Siobhán Parkinson's other texts for children include *Something Invisible* (London: Puffin, 2006); *Second Fiddle, or How to Tell a Blackbird from a Sausage* (London: Puffin, 2005); *Kathleen: The Celtic Knot*; *Animals Don't Have Ghosts* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002); *The Love Bean* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002); *Cows are Vegetarians* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2001); *Call of the Whales* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2000); *Breaking The Wishbone* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1999); *The Moon King* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998); *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe)* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1997); *Sisters ... No Way!* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1996); *'All Shining in the Spring': The Story of the Baby who Died* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1994); *The Leprechaun Who Wished He Wasn't* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1993); *Off We Go...: The Country Adventure* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1992); and *Off We Go...: The Dublin Adventure* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1992). Her adult novel *The Thirteenth Room* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press) was published in 2003.

[2] Parkinson notes that her novel is not supposed to be read as a historical textbook, but as fiction: 'it's a novel, it's an imaginative reconstruction. I hope it is not inaccurate historically, but it is not intended to be a historical source'. See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix.

an examination of *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, where Peter Hollindale attempts to identify the various forms of childhood present in a children's text, discussing cultural perceptions of childhood and their relation to children's literature. This chapter expands upon Hollindale's theories and explores the various ways in which Parkinson's children's novels function as sites for the interaction of multiple ideologies relating to childhood and adulthood.

The chapter is divided into three major sections. Section 1 examines the relationship between the multiple manifestations of childhood in texts for children and the cognitive processes of child developmental psychology, followed by an application of the findings to readings of childhood in Parkinson's work. The second section investigates Parkinson's depiction of Irish women's history as she uses the child character's developing social knowledge to deconstruct and explore the forces at work in the creation of versions of Irish history. I propose that Parkinson uncovers elements of history that are often ignored by traditional historiographies and relates their relevance to struggles in contemporary Ireland. In the final section, a similar approach is applied to a close reading of representations of nationalism in the novels. These are viewed in the context of political and cultural debates in 1990s Ireland, examining the multiple perspectives on the past that are produced for the child reader. When viewed in their entirety, all three sections provide a forum for the interrogation of the nature of historical representation as a political act, where the author manipulates history in order to problematise the very concept of historical construction. As a result, this chapter demonstrates the important contribution that children's texts can make to wider debates in contemporary Irish society, as Parkinson challenges simplistic notions of a linear history and reveals the complex natures of nationalism and the women's struggle.

Section 1. Childhood, Childness and Children

The examination of the child characters centres on Amelia Pim, her younger brother Edmund, and the family servant, Mary Ann, each character occupying a unique form of childhood in terms of their individual role and behaviour in the novel. For Amelia and Edmund, childhood contains a series of developmental stages that signal a progression toward adulthood, the child and adult worlds acting as distinct and

separate spheres.[3] In the opening pages of the novel, Edmund has progressed socially from his childhood world of the schoolroom to the relatively more adult sphere of the drawing room:

> Edmund sat up and drank his milk carefully. He had only just been promoted from nursery tea in the schoolroom to family tea in the drawing room, and he didn't want to be sent back, so for once he kept quiet and still, all except for his feet, which he couldn't resist swinging softly under his chair.[4]

This segment reflects many of the themes that recur throughout the novels.[5] The narratorial voice reveals that Edmund's surface appearance of confidence is at odds with his hidden anxiety as signified through the use of the word 'carefully', while also acknowledging that this is not a state with which Edmund is familiar, as 'for once' he managed to contain his child-like qualities. Within the broader context of power relations between children and adults, Edmund is under pressure to conform to established adult modes of behaviour in order to progress socially. Parkinson's use of the passive voice in 'just been promoted' emphasises Edmund's lack of power and control in an adult dominated society, thus positioning the child at the mercy of adult decisions. Yet, despite his determination to adhere to adult standards, Edmund is constructed as retaining childish qualities as his feet swing under the chair. This childish behaviour which he keeps hidden from view contradicts his outward appearance of conforming to adult norms.[6] It is evident that although he is allowed to make the transition from the schoolroom of childhood to the drawing room of the adult sphere, his behaviour still determines his child status, with power and authority resting firmly with the adult characters. Knowing that he could be sent back at any moment if he does not conform to expected standards of behaviour makes Edmund a subject of the dominant ideology of the adult world. This presents the reader with much wider cultural assumptions regarding the behaviour of children and adults, reinforcing the ideological status quo of the power dynamics of such a relationship.[7]

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[3] See Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, pp. 12-13.
[4] *Amelia*, p. 15.
[5] See below for discussion of the outward expression of confidence and interior doubt experienced by Amelia and Mary Ann.
[6] As discussed below, this echoes themes of 'interior' and 'exterior' that permeate the texts.
[7] Lesnik-Oberstein discusses traditional child/adult power dynamics and notes that 'this near total dominance of the adult world over children, established at its most fundamental level by chronology, creates an uneasy field of tensions relating to control, self-control, and the pressures, joys, and

Applying Jean Piaget's theory of stages of child development, Edmund now occupies the 'Pre-Operational Period', a category usually designated to children from the age of two until they are six or seven.[8] Richard Siegler notes that this is a period characterised by a growth in language, where children often fail to understand conversations in their totality as a result of 'centring on a single dimension rather than considering multiple variables simultaneously'.[9] This corresponds to Edmund's confusion over the term 'circulars' in *Amelia* and his subsequent disappointment with helping his mother; '"I thought you meant circles," he complained [...] "Making paper moons, I thought"'.[10] Mrs Pim's reaction to this statement also conforms to traditional views of the innocent child,[11] his confusion only leading to further endearment:

> 'Oh, the sweetie', whispered Mama with a foolish smile on her face as the door closed behind the little boy. 'Did you hear, Amelia? He thought we were cutting paper shapes. Oh, remind me to tell Papa. The little darling'.[12]

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uncertainties of power. It is a complex hierarchy'. See *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child*, p. 27. This offers a useful basis to investigate some of the power dynamics at play in Parkinson's texts. Also, see Chapter 5 for a discussion of child/adult power dynamics in *War of the Buttons*. Joseph Zornado also discusses child/adult power dynamics in society and relates them to wider social debates such as colonialism and postcolonialism. See *Inventing the Child: Culture, Ideology and the Story of Childhood* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001). He claims that 'from the cradle, the child learned that the world was divided between those who physically dominate and those who were dominated. Moreover, power – as in adult power – was always allied with moral authority. The child's power was allied with savagery, wilfulness, indolence, wickedness, and immorality. Resistance to moral authority was a sign of one's otherness, and therefore justifies even sterner "civilising" measures' (p. 103). Zornado's writing makes grand assertions relating to child/adult relations, which implies a universal reading of such relationships; it is also seriously flawed in its lack of documentation to substantiate such claims, he raises interesting debates surrounding the multiple forms of power dynamics present in society. For a review of Zornado's work, see Karen Coats, 'Venting the Child: The Limits of a Polemic', in *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association*, 31 (2003), 206-216.

[8] See Jean Piaget, *The Child's Concept of Number* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1952) and B. Inhelder and J. Piaget, *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (New York: Basic Books, 1958). Piaget proposes a total of four stages in child development: the Sensorimotor Period, is applied to children between zero and two years, and focuses on the development of reflexes; the Preoperational Period is applied to development in the two to six or seven year age group, where emphasis is placed on a growth in developing and understanding language. This is followed by the Concrete Operational Period which occupies the age range between six or seven and eleven or twelve, allowing them to grasp concepts they previously found difficult, but still failing to comprehend abstract thoughts. The fourth and final stage is the Formal Operational Period which Piaget proposes occurs from eleven or twelve onwards. For a summary of these stages, see Robert S. Siegler, *Children's Thinking*, 2nd edn, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1991), pp. 55-56.

[9] Siegler, p. 56.

[10] *Amelia*, pp. 25-26.

[11] For a discussion of traditional images of the child in literature as 'innocent', see Roni Natov and Introduction to this thesis.

[12] *Amelia*, p. 26.

Again, the power relations between the adult and child are revealed, but Parkinson's writing complicates the dynamic by placing the adult character in a position that encourages the reader to question the nature of adult authority and power. While Mama patronises Edmund by using the term 'sweetie' and 'darling', the narratorial voice ridicules this condescension by referring to Mama's smile as 'foolish'. It is apparent to the reader that these words are not only terms of endearment but also signify the power of the adult over the child. The narrator still acknowledges Edmund as a 'little boy', creating a sense that he is not to blame for the misunderstanding, that it is perhaps typical of his developmental process, while also questioning the supremacy felt by the character of Mama in finding such humour in the boy's behaviour and his subsequent disappointment. Mama clearly assumes an air of superiority over Edmund, which is quickly aligned with an adult world in her desire to share the experience with Papa. Amelia is allowed to share in the joke as Mama does not see her daughter as occupying the same childish level as that of Edmund. However, Amelia's misunderstanding of the term 'fallen women' later in the novel, reveals that she still occupies a child status which appears naïve to that of the adult.[13]

Applying Piaget' s theories, Amelia occupies the Formal Operational Period, a period where 'children who achieve it are said to reason on the basis of theoretical possibilities as well as concrete realities'[14] and where 'each one has his own ideas [...] which liberate him from childhood and allow him to place himself as the equal of adults'.[15] Indeed, as is discussed below, this stage is a period where young people are able to reason hypothetically, however the Formal Operational Period is not as stable as Piaget proposed. As Peter K. Smith, Helen Cowie and Mark Blades note in *Understanding Children's Development*, 'Piaget's claim has been modernized [...]. More recent researchers have found that the achievement of Formal Operational Period is more gradual and haphazard than Piaget assumed', and that the period from eleven to fifteen years only 'signals the start of the potential for formal operational thought, rather than its achievements'.[16] This 'haphazard' nature is apparent in the

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[13] *Amelia*, p. 146. A similar misunderstanding occurs in Parkinson's *Kathleen: The Celtic Knot* where the character Patsy declares that she 'didn't know Jesus had a sweetheart' when she hears the song 'Sweet Heart of Jesus' (pp. 39-40).

[14] Siegler, p. 21.

[15] Inhelder and Piaget, pp. 340-341.

[16] Peter K. Smith, Helen Cowie, Mark Blades, *Understanding Children's Development*, 4th edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). For a discussion of some of the limitations of Piaget's theories,

impossibility of assigning Amelia to a single stage of childhood development, as she misunderstands terms such as 'in the family way'[17] and yet is also capable of adopting adult responsibilities and roles as she assumes the running of the household.[18]

The instability and haphazard nature of childhood is evident in Parkinson's depiction of often-regressive childhood traits in the character of Amelia, whose behaviour becomes associated with the development of language in the preoperational stage of Edmund. The inability of the child to comprehend is mirrored by Amelia as she discusses Mary Ann's family life with Lucinda. Parkinson uses Amelia's limited understanding to reinforce the character's childlike qualities, in this case, lack of experience, through an alignment with Edmund. Amelia does not understand the term 'in the family way', but pretends to, leading to misunderstandings as the novel progresses.[19] The gaps in the knowledge of the child characters are also reflected in Amelia's inability to comprehend the term 'fallen women' in relation to those who work in the Magdalen Laundry, as she surmises 'Whatever fallen women were [...] they were certainly a dab hand with an iron'.[20] Amelia, because of her status as a child, is subsequently patronised and refused entry into the affairs of adults, generating a distinct gap between the child and adult sphere. However, Parkinson also creates a gap between the adult author and the uninformed child reader.[21] The reference to 'fallen women' as being a 'dab hand with an iron' places the informed reader in a superior position to that of the character Amelia, where humour can be derived from the irony of her ignorant comment.

However, as the divisions between child and adult world continue to be reasserted in the novel, Parkinson also encourages the reader to identify with Amelia. This is revealed as the character interrupts her parents' discussion of Mary Ann's predicament: 'Just then, the adults noticed that Amelia had joined them and was listening to every word they said, and in their tiresome way they immediately changed

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see Nicholas Tucker, 'Good Friends or just Acquaintances? The Relationship between Child Psychology and Children's Literature', in *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 166-167.

[17] *Amelia*, p. 32. See discussion below.

[18] Such as looking after Edmund. See *Amelia*, pp. 134-149.

[19] Ibid., p. 32.

[20] *Amelia*, p. 146. See below for further discussion on this representation of the Magdalen Laundries in relation to women's history in Ireland.

[21] For a discussion of the power relations between adult author and child reader, see Barbara Wall, p. 16.

the subject'.[22] Parkinson initially creates a clear division between the child and adult world by emphasising Amelia's concern with frivolity and her parent's decision to censor elements of their conversation. There is a further division within this passage as the author clearly invites the child reader to identify with the child character by reference to the 'tiresome way of the adults'.[23]

However, Amelia is approaching her thirteenth birthday and longs to be a 'Young Lady',[24] where growing up does not mean the added responsibility of adult life, but a chance to wear adult clothes: 'For soon Amelia would not be a little girl but a Young Lady, and that meant good frocks and fine stockings and putting her hair up'.[25] It is obvious that the character has a selective concept of what adulthood entails. This reflects Edmund's similar predicament, where his outward appearance of being 'grown up' in the drawing room is contradicted by his inner qualities of childishness. Parkinson constructs the character of Amelia as constantly wishing to adopt external attributes of adulthood, such as the outward appearance related to fashion. However, at this point in the novel, Amelia lacks the emotional and intellectual maturity that is associated with adulthood. Instead, Parkinson constructs the character's progression toward adulthood as an interior journey, where lived experience of adult responsibilities transforms the childish perspective of the character into a more mature outlook. As Amelia is forced into an adult role due to her family's decline in social circumstances, she no longer has the money to buy 'good frocks and fine stockings' to create an outward adult appearance, but it is her emotional maturity that signals growth and development, both to the adult characters in the novel and to the child reader. As she dresses in her green frock once again, Amelia realises her own transition:

> The old Amelia had simply disappeared [...]. The old Amelia had never felt hurt and angry because boys were considered more important than girls. The old Amelia would have been ashamed, not proud of Mama.[26]

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[22] *Amelia*, p. 30.
[23] As discussed below, this identification becomes central to the child readers understanding of Irish history.
[24] *Amelia*, p. 17.
[25] Ibid., p. 16.
[26] Ibid., p. 165.

These childhood experiences of Amelia Pim, a member of the upper-middle class, are depicted as significantly different to those of Mary Ann, particularly in terms of economic and emotional dependence upon their parents. The child/adult divide is not a stable entity in the representation of Mary Ann, as despite her mere fourteen years, she constantly adopts an adult role in her everyday life.[27] In the novel, Mary Ann's family background of poverty forces her to take on more advanced adult responsibilities (compared to those of Amelia) in order for herself and her family to survive. This is revealed in her admission to Amelia that

> When I first got this situation, Miss, it was the first time that they were able to pay the rent, arrears and all, and still have enough for both fuel and food. But now the money I send home every week has to go for medicines [...].[28]

As a result of their class differences, the girls have varying experiences of childhood. Their contrasting outlooks on life are exemplified in the following exchange:

> 'Oh, Mary Ann, let's go for a walk!'
> 'A walk Miss!' Mary Ann sounded utterly astonished. 'But I can't go for a walk, I have work to do. It's after four already, and I'll have to get the tea soon, and then there's the dinner to help Cook with, and the fire in Master Edmund's bedroom to see to, and the dining room fire to check on, now I come to think of it [...].'[29]

While Amelia is free to engage in leisure pursuits at will, Mary Ann is a member of the working world of adults and has responsibilities to attend to. However, despite being part of the adult sphere, Mary Ann does not have the power and authority of adults such as Mama and Papa. Her status as working class places her in a subservient role to that of Amelia as is evident in her use of terms such as 'Miss' and 'Master', thus complicating the child/adult power dynamic.[30] This is problematised further by the fact that Mary Ann is only one year older than Amelia.[31] However, their dissimilar

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[27] This can be related to Peter Hunt's idea that childhood may be understood in terms of class. See Introduction.
[28] *Amelia,* p. 37.
[29] Ibid., p. 36. For a discussion of working children in fiction for children, see Liz Thiel, 'Beyond Expectations: Historical Fiction and Working Children', in *Historical Fiction and Children: Capturing the Past*, ed. by Fiona M. Collins and Judith Graham (London: David Fulton, 2001), pp. 64-72.
[30] *Amelia*, p. 19.
[31] Jacqueline Rose claims that very often, 'childhood [...] serves as a term of universal social reference which conceals all the historical divisions and difficulties of which children, no less than ourselves,

experiences prompt Mary Ann to view herself as more educated in life experience than the naïve Amelia:

> Mary Ann smiled to herself as she smoothed the linen down. Young Amelia had a few things to learn. Life wasn't all tram-rides to Clery's and appointments with the dressmaker. But no doubt she would find that out soon enough.[32]

Once again, the interior voice allows Mary Ann to express a confidence and authority that she cannot express outwardly to Amelia because of their difference in social status. Despite Mary Ann's outward childlike physical appearance, her interior voice reveals a greater sense of maturity and aligns her with the world of adults.[33] Such thoughts from Mary Ann function as a prophecy within Parkinson's novel, the narrative device of the interior voice thus placing the reader in a privileged position where they have more information about events than the characters themselves, and hence are not confined to a single point of view about a character.

This development of characters is sustained through to the second novel, *No Peace for Amelia*. At fifteen years old, Amelia has abandoned many of the characteristics of childhood during this period of adolescence. She is allowed to adopt visible signs of adulthood by wearing her hair up and going for walks with boys,[34] but she longs to leave this transitional phase between childhood and adulthood as is evident in her desire to be eighteen: 'Well, of course, Frederick was eighteen now, which very nearly was grown up. Amelia longed to be as grown up as that'.[35] In this reading of the qualities of childhood inherent in the child characters, childhood is documented in terms of biological development, as each character is assigned the status of childhood in terms of *age*, with Mary Ann blurring the boundaries through her *behaviour* that often contradicts defining her as a child.

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form a part' (p. 10). Indeed, Parkinson exposes the impossibility of universalising childhood experience. She also notes the differing childhood experience of Mary Ann: 'She's had to face reality much earlier than Amelia. Even with these things that have happened to Amelia, she's still pretty protected from real life, whereas Mary Ann hasn't that'. See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix. This approach is in stark contrast to the attempts to universalise childhood experience in *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *War of the Buttons*, as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

[32] *Amelia*, p. 51.

[33] The idea of the 'interior voice' is further discussed below in relation to issues of the individual self-doubt of characters.

[34] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 22.

[35] Ibid., p. 30.

Conversely, child-like behaviour or actions usually associated with childhood are also manifested as traits in the adult characters, particularly Mama. At a very basic level, the roles of adult and child are often reversed when Mama and Amelia are interacting, with Amelia's interior monologue once again encouraging the child reader to side with the child character based on the double standards offered by adults. As Mama enters the room, Amelia's interior voice adopts the role of adult in criticising her mother's behaviour and reduces her to the status of a child: 'She [Mama] tossed her hat onto the ottoman in a way that Amelia would never have got away with, and alternately blew on her fingers and held them out to the fire, as if she didn't know perfectly well that that was a sure way to get chilblains'.[36] Amelia's criticism of her mother's actions shifts the power dynamic of the child/adult relationship, recognising that her mother's age and position may define her as an adult, yet her actions are often viewed by Amelia as subordinate to those of a child. This leads to frustration on her part as, despite acknowledging that her age confines her to the realm of childhood, she continues to yearn for elevation to the position of 'Young Lady'. In further criticism of her mother, Amelia notes that the power structures in the household will have to change as she grows older, but for now she is resigned to the lack of authority offered in her position as a child:

> Amelia was cross with Mama [...] expecting Amelia to be her serving girl and run errands for her. Well, all this would have to change when Amelia became a Young Lady. But in the meantime, little girls had to be seen and not heard, and Amelia would simply have to put up with it.[37]

Parkinson confines such criticisms to Amelia's interior voice as Amelia adopts a subordinate subject position within a world controlled by adults. The reference to being 'seen and not heard' acknowledges the child character's submission to dominant ideological constructs of the position and behaviour of the child within society, once again maintaining the status quo of child/adult power dynamics.[38]

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[36] *Amelia*, p. 16
[37] Ibid., p. 17
[38] Positioning the child as subordinate to the adult is also broached in *Kathleen*, again by using the term 'seen and not heard': '"children should be seen and not heard," said my mother. This was the sentence I hated most in the world. I liked to be heard. I had questions bubbling inside me all the time, and I wanted answers to them. [...]. I was never sure whether she didn't know the answers or she didn't want to tell' (pp. 4-5). In this extract, the power dynamics are revealed as the authority of the adult is questioned. Such thoughts from the child character can also be related to Zornado's discussion of

However, this portrayal of Amelia as trapped in the world of childhood is countered as the narrative develops with Amelia finally playing a role in the adult world, although her experiences prove contrary to her expectations. Her entrance into the adult domain is coupled with her family's descent from the realms of the upper class. Through her experiences of managing the Pim household, she gains the characteristics associated with the adult world, becoming increasingly self-aware, responsible and independent. The character's heightened independence gains further significance when her mother is imprisoned and Amelia is left to console her family and gather her mother's possessions as revealed in her exchange with her father: '"I'll get her things," Amelia said at last, standing up. "What things?" Papa looked stupidly at his daughter. He must be quite worn out, thought Amelia',[39] signifying a reversal of roles where the child must organise items for her mother and be compassionate toward the needs of her father. Amelia can no longer depend on her parents for support and protection and must also adopt the role of surrogate mother to her younger brother: '"whatever shall I say to Edmund?" Papa looked back at her, a long weary look. [...] "I don't know Amelia. Whatever you think. I leave it up to you. Say whatever you think best,"' forcing Amelia to draw her own conclusions and make her own decisions.[40] She no longer looks to her parents for advice and guidance, as her independence offers greater responsibility and earns her increased respect in the family home. It is as a result of this growth and maturation that Amelia begins to question and understand the wider political debates and the effects they have on her life as she is constantly presented with conflicting viewpoints and forced to reach her own conclusions. As is discussed below, through the application of theories related to childness and childhood, it is also possible to interpret Amelia's journey as a metaphor for the Irish nation in gaining a state of independence as a result of changing circumstances and responsibilities.[41]

This growth in awareness and understanding reflects the discussion of Piaget's theories in *Understanding Children's Development*, the authors noting that 'at the

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ideology. Amelia's position gradually changes throughout the novel as she begins to comprehend and voice her own views. This mirrors the process of uncovering alternative versions of history in the novel, as Parkinson grants a voice to varying perspectives of Ireland's past which are often omitted from dominant historiographies. See below.

[39] *Amelia*, p. 126.

[40] Ibid., p. 129.

[41] This is particularly evident in her visit to the GPO and can be related to Zornado's discussion of child/adult relationships in terms of colonised and coloniser (see below).

heart of this child-centred approach to education lies the idea of active learning. From the Piagetian standpoint, children learn from actions rather than passive observations',[42] which when applied to the text, reinforces the concept that Amelia has learned through her experiences. It is also through an interaction with peers that Smith (et al) suggest that

> a child can move out of an egocentric viewpoint [...]. This occurs through cooperation with others' arguments and discussions. By listening to other children's opinions, having one's own view challenged and experiencing through others' reactions the illogicality of certain concepts, a child can learn about perspectives other than her own. Communication of ideas to others also helps a child to sharpen concepts by finding the appropriate words.[43]

This device is central to Parkinson's narrative as the means to explore the wider ideological debates in Irish society. In the child's cognitive development, Siegler notes the process of 'Equilibration' 'as the keystone of developmental change within Piaget's system'.[44] This includes the assimilation and accommodation of new forms of knowledge in the process of interpretation. During this type of development, the child begins in a state of equilibrium, but encounters shortcomings in knowledge which leads to disequilibrium, and subsequently enters a more sophisticated stage of development that eliminates shortcomings until the child once again reaches a more stable state of equilibrium.[45]

This is not merely a case of Piaget's concepts adhering to the traditional narrative structure of equilibrium, disequilibrium, and a new equilibrium. It can be argued that Parkinson uses theories of child psychology as a mode of writing and as a method of analysis to explore both the development of a character and the cultural history of a nation. Amelia participates in such a developmental process as she interrogates her own value systems based upon her experiences and interactions with her peers, while the child reader identifies with the character and is also encouraged to question the construction of historical narratives and their position and power in contemporary culture. Through the complex representation of child/adult relations, both character and reader experience 'through others' reactions the illogicality of certain concepts'. The cognitive development of the child character acts as a mode of

[42] Smith, Cowie, and Blades, p. 413.
[43] Ibid., p. 414.
[44] Siegler, p. 23.
[45] Ibid., p. 23.

dismantling a grand narrative for the reader and allows the author to rebuild history in the form of multiple narratives and perspectives.

Section 2. Irish History, Suffragettes, and Amelia

Amelia's increased understanding of cultural debates comes primarily in relation to issues of suffrage and nationalism, where insight into the convoluted nature of cultural discourse is gained through the character's personal experience. Consequently, the complex representation of these movements through the eyes of multiple characters encourages the reader to parallel Amelia's growing awareness of the multifaceted nature of events and the impossibility of accepting simplistic homogenised accounts of events surrounding 1916. The structure of Parkinson's texts challenges the assumption of a linear historical narrative and provides the child reader with multitudinous viewpoints of several 'sub-narratives' of Irish history, inviting them to draw their own conclusions based on the oppositional and contradictory voices and opinions of the characters.

Placing the texts within this framework of childness and childhood allows for an analysis in terms of postmodern histories[46] as Parkinson's novels dismantle the grand narrative of Irish history. The possibility of a coherent narrative of 1916 is challenged and the heterogeneity of the various discourses and ideals that contributed to the Rising is exposed. This counters the reduction and simplification of Irish history found in many traditional historiographies which often undermine continued struggles in contemporary Irish culture through their lack of representation and marginalisation of certain groups and movements in Irish society.[47]

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[46] See Jean–François Lyotard, p. xxiii and p. xxiv. For a detailed discussion of the political and cultural theories that are used in this section, see Introduction to this thesis.

[47] In 1991, two years prior to the publication of *Amelia*, Margaret Ward noted the distinct absence of Irish historiographies that centred on the contribution of women in Irish political and cultural spheres. For Ward, FSL Lyons' much celebrated text *Ireland Since the Famine* represented a common example of the marginalisation of women in modern Irish revisionist writing, with only minor references to women's movements. Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland* offers a similar documentation with only one minor reference to the women's fight for the vote. See Margaret Ward, *The Missing Sex: Putting Women into Irish History* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991). The attempt to unearth the involvement of women in 1916 is evident in Sinéad McCoole's television documentary *Women of 1916: A Series of Five Short Films for RTE:* Maud Gonne MacBride, Countess Markievicz, Dr Kathleen Lynn, Grace Gifford Plunkett & Women of the Rank and File. TX Ireland, RTE, 27-31 August 1997 (researched and scripted by Siobhán McCoole). Repeat TX Ireland, RTE 2, 12 April 2006. It is possible to listen to Sinéad McCoole and Margaret McCurtin talk online about the role of women during 1916 at <http//www.rte.ie/news/2006/0402/this week> [accessed 26 April 2006].

The view of the public and private struggle of a suffragette, Mama, through the eyes of her daughter, Amelia, is weighted with increased significance when positioned within this theoretical framework. The women's movement functions as a site of Popular Memory in the novels as Parkinson uses the medium of children's literature to highlight the position of women in Irish history, not only in terms of the public figures such as Countess Markievicz, but also the private struggles of women of the period and the ability to link them to present day battles for equality.[48] This is manifested in the character of Mrs Pim who attempts to balance her actions in the public domain with her role in the private world of the Pim household. Arguably, such a dichotomy is problematic and Mrs Pim's struggle cannot simply be separated into private and public obligations, but the two are elements of a symbiotic relationship where her public life as a suffragette is influenced by her personal experiences as a woman in a private household, and vice-versa. This is also explored through Amelia's growing self-awareness and moments of epiphany where she begins to understand her mother's motives.[49] As Amelia is presented with contrasting viewpoints, so too is the child reader. As a result, Parkinson's text avoids representing a metanarrative of history, highlighting the divisions within the suffragette movement by deconstructing women's 'History' and creating women's 'histories'. Within this narrative, a myriad of perspectives are supplied for the child reader with issues of class, religion and attitudes toward militancy affecting the particular vantage point of each character. This political act of recovery of the women's struggle exposes moments of discontinuity within national historiographies and yet also displays continuity in the women's continued struggle for equality.[50]

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[48] For a further discussion of the changing representations of female characters in children's literature, see Pat Pinsent, 'Anti-Sexist and Emancipatory Books', in Pat Pinsent, *Children's Literature and the Politics of Equality* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1997), pp. 75-90.

[49] See the discussion below in relation to her father's outburst and her determination to become a doctor.

[50] As Gibbons notes, 'it is still time to give a belated hearing to voices or patterns of experience that have escaped the nets of official knowledge or have been muted by dominant ideologies of the day', emphasising the necessity to continue to explore the forces that have shaped contemporary society. See Gibbons, *Transformations*, p.16. The novels also unearth the role played by the Quaker religion in the women's movement. Cliona Murphy notes that this stemmed from the Quaker belief in equality of the sexes. Indeed, it was the Haslams, a Quaker couple, who founded the Dublin Suffrage Society in 1876, which later became the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association. See Cliona Murphy, *The Women's Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 17. For a discussion of this type of colonial and neo-colonial discourse see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 3-32. Luke Gibbons also discusses subaltern studies and Irish history (*Transformations*, pp. 78-79). See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix, where she

The suffragette movement is primarily explored through Amelia's growing awareness and understanding of her mother's struggle. In the opening pages Mrs Pim has the responsibility of managing the family home yet treats such a role as insignificant in comparison to the rest of her life, as is evident in her procrastination of completing household chores: 'She thought that if she spoke grimly enough to herself about the necessity of attending to little household tasks, they were as good as done, and then she was free to get on with her real life, as she called it'.[51] Parkinson's reference to everything outside the domestic as 'real life' immediately places the female within a much broader sphere than the confines of traditional domestic duties. However, there is an ambiguity in the comment 'as she called it' which suggests the existence of an alternative perspective to that of Mama and introducing the reader to the broader social context of Mama'a predicament. The reader is allowed to interpret the passage in multiple forms, such as identifying with Mama by recognising the social constraints she must experience as a woman. However, the reader can also align him/herself with the patriarchal discourse of identifying the home as the natural place for a woman, or alternatively, view the situation as a choice that women can make to either stay at home or work outside the domestic sphere. Another mode of interpretation arises through a combination of these readings, where oppression arises within a patriarchal order that is seen as historical, hence encouraging an understanding of Mama's situation within a broader historical context.

The patriarchal ideological position epitomised in Mr Pim's outburst on the occasion of his wife's imprisonment provides the reader with a chance to comprehend these wider social debates of the period through the personal viewpoint of a character; 'if they stayed at home and looked after their families they wouldn't need votes. They'd be happy doing the work God intended them to do'.[52] While Mr Pim blames

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notes her reasons for using Quaker characters. For debates and perspectives of the ninetieth commemoration of 1916 in 2006, which saw the first Easter military parade since 1970, see Stephen Collins, Paul Cullen, and Fiona Gartland in *The Irish Times*, 17 April 2006. See online at <http://www.ireland.com/cgi-bin/dialogserver?SAVEDB=all&QUERY00=Easter+Rising&STARTDATE0=17%2F04%2F2006&ENDDATE0=17%2F04%2F2006&DB=all&ORGANISE_CODED=R%3Adate0&THRESHOLD=90&Search.x=38&Search.y=10 >[accessed 2 June 2006].
See also Mark Hennessey and Christine Newman in *The Irish Times*, 18 April 2006 online at <http://www.ireland.com/cgi-bin/dialogserver?SAVEDB=all&QUERY00=Easter+Rising&STARTDATE0=18%2F04%2F2006&ENDDATE0=18%2F04%2F2006&DB=all&ORGANISE_CODED=R%3Adate0&THRESHOLD=90&Search.x=0&Search.y=0> [accessed 2 June 2006].

[51] *Amelia*, p. 13.

[52] Ibid., p. 127.

the family crisis on the suffragette activities of Mrs Pim, it is obvious that his opinions stem from the wider cultural assumptions regarding the role of women at the time, with 'God intended' acting as a reflection of the dominant ideological constructs of society.[53]

Similarly, Parkinson exposes the societal injustices toward women through the character of Mary Ann and her experiences within a patriarchal culture.[54] Mary Ann's failure to gain employment in a grocer's shop is placed within the context of gender discrimination, as she wonders 'who would blame the elderly grocer for preferring a strong lad willing to serve his time to a slip of a girl who didn't know a pennyweight from a bushel of oats and might be off getting married and having babies before she could write a receipt?'.[55] Parkinson does not explicitly condemn the grocer's actions but places the issue within a wider social context, with Mary Ann's self-deprecating interior voice accepting such reasoning as a fact of life, and the female character through her acceptance of this thus playing a role in perpetuating these oppressive forces. However, when read from a contemporary perspective, the informed reader, in drawing upon familiar cultural ideologies of the present, can interpret the events as discriminatory, yet placed within a historical context. Firstly, the child reader may dismiss the idea that 'getting married and having babies' is the natural course for all women. Secondly, the justification of excluding women from employment based on the possibility of pregnancy is problematised from a current standpoint and placed within a historical context. Alternatively, it is also possible for the naïve reader to embrace such discrimination and understand the treatment of Mary Ann as adhering to an established *status quo* in society. Implicit in this style of writing is the signalling of the continued struggle for women's rights, and the recognition that these patriarchal myths still exist, to a certain extent, in contemporary culture.

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[53] See Lissa Paul 'Feminist Criticism: From Sex-Role Stereotyping to Subjectivity', in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, pp. 101-112. See also Paul's 'Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature', *Signal*, 54 (September 1987), in *Children's Literature: The Development of Criticism*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 148-165.

[54] The continued oppression of women in Irish society is evident in the Irish constitution, most significantly in Article 41.2.1 which states that 'In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved' (*The Irish Constitution*, 1937). Yvonne Galligan notes that it was not until 1994 that one of the most important changes for women occurred in Ireland with the lifting of prohibitions on the sale and distribution of contraceptives an event which 'mirrored a silent revolution on the part of women, changing in a fundamental way the nature of women's relationship with society'. See *Women and Politics in Contemporary Ireland: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 1998), p. 24. Popular Memory can act as a means of highlighting these continued struggles against injustices.

[55] *Amelia*. P. 20.

In an exchange between Mary Ann, Amelia, and Mrs Pim, the contradictions of the women's struggle for equality are highlighted by Amelia's interrogation of her mother's reasoning. Mrs Pim opines that 'It's against natural justice',[56] while Amelia retorts that 'it's not fair either that we're ladies and some women aren't, is it?'[57]. Thus, the child character's development and inquisitive nature deconstructs the feminist movement for the child reader and exposes moments of discontinuity in the struggle for equality. The debate is further problematised by Amelia's questioning of Mary Ann's position, the servant laughing in response:

> 'The vote! [...]. What good would the vote be to the likes of me? Living in a country that's ruled by a foreign King that *nobody* voted for, who's going to land us all in a war if we don't look out, and me with a family of little brothers and sisters to worry about, with me da out of work and me ma in bad health and me only older brother in prison'.[58]

For both the child reader and Amelia, Mary Ann's monologue questions the merits of the suffrage movement by prioritising other cultural injustices such as British rule in Ireland and its undemocratic nature, unemployment, and health. This section also reflects the complex nature of the culture surrounding 1916 and the intersection of various movements.[59]

Subsequently, Parkinson avoids establishing any totalising narrative of history, but places the women's struggle within a social context presenting the ideals of the movement alongside their perceived limited relevance to the harsh reality of many people's lives, with Mary Ann's diatribe drawing attention to the conflicting views of the value of feminism during the period. It is in this manner that Parkinson reviews the privileged position of many of the campaigners who originated from upper and middle-class backgrounds. The division is further established in contrasting Mary Ann's servant duties with Amelia's free time and leisure pursuits, as she invites Mary Ann for a stroll. As outlined above, the reaction is one of disbelief as Mary Ann lists her chores, citing the duties she must undertake in order to get a wage and forward it

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[56] Ibid., p. 26.
[57] Ibid., p. 27.
[58] Ibid., p. 28.
[59] This passage also raises questions regarding class issues. It demonstrates that the apparently 'uneducated' lower classes have thought about and considered the multiple aspects of the struggle while the supposed 'educated' upper class fails to realise the complexities of the Rising.

to her starving family in the slums.[60] The suffrage movement was a predominantly middle-class organisation in Ireland made up of diverse and often opposing sections of society including Nationalists and Unionists, militants and pacifists. However, it was those who were granted the privilege of education and leisure time that had the opportunity to become involved in the movements. The diverse nature of female politics was reflected in the number of different suffrage groups that existed around the country; Cliona Murphy noting that as a result, 'controversy between them could hardly be avoided',[61] thus highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the movement and the various social and political backgrounds that the women came from.[62]

The presence of Countess Markievicz in the novel also increases the complexity of the feminist debate, the author noting that 'Everyone knew about the Countess and her political activities. She was always making speeches about women's rights and about Nationalism',[63] as Parkinson draws parallels in the fight for equality yet also presents the differences. From Amelia's viewpoint 'the Countess and Mama were not exactly friends, but they did serve on the same committees', signalling the common ground shared by the groups but also acknowledging their differences as conflicting approaches are set aside for the good of the entire movement.[64] It later transpires that Mrs Pim has become disillusioned with the Countess' activities, with Mama's hopes that Cumann na mBan 'might bring a fresh way of thinking to the whole Nationalist issue' now shattered, echoing a sentiment of many suffragettes during the period.[65] Parkinson's depiction of the women's struggle can be aligned to Murphy's discussion of the complexities of such a variegated movement, particularly in terms of Countess Markievicz's role in Cumann na mBan and her increasing militancy. Many women began to feel that nationalism was perhaps a greater priority and that to 'accept the franchise from a 'hostile parliament' would be humiliating'.[66]

Murphy concludes that 'the suffrage women rightly felt however that the Nationalist women were not, with one or two notable exceptions, spearheading the Nationalist movement and thus were creating a precedent for a new state where

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[60] *Amelia*, p. 36. See discussion on the adult responsibilities of Mary Ann.
[61] Cliona Murphy, p. 38.
[62] Rosemary Owens, however, notes that despite the internal conflicts, the suffragettes were all united in their aim – 'votes for women on the same terms as men', in Andreé D. Sheehy Skeffington and Rosemary Owens, *Irish Women's Struggle for the Vote* (Dublin: E. and T. O'Brien Ltd., 1975), p. 7
[63] *Amelia*, p. 52.
[64] Ibid., p. 52.
[65] Ibid., p. 112.
[66] Cliona Murphy, p. 44, a view that is also emphasised by Mary Ann.

women would continue to be supporters and helpers rather than leaders'.[67] The subsequent violence associated with the Nationalist movement is later criticised by Mrs Pim as she remarks that 'I shall never believe that you achieve peace through violence,' and her view that the Countess 'has high ideals and she really cares. But she has some wild and dangerous ideas too, and I can't go along with her when it comes to guns and armies. We were comrades once, not friends',[68] illustrating the increasing divisions between campaigners in both groups, while also revealing to Amelia and the reader the contrasting approaches to achieving similar goals. The above outline demonstrates Parkinson's intertwining of the public and private faces of feminism, eradicating any sense of stable dichotomy, the private experience creating ideological foundations for the public action and association with Markievicz.[69] However, it is toward the latter stages of *Amelia* that both the characters and subsequently the child reader can possess a full understanding of the significance of the struggle.

As the Pim family lose their fortune,[70] they are no longer able to employ a servant, with the result that in their new home, 'most of the work fell on Mama's shoulders'.[71] The decline in status forces Mrs Pim into the traditional role of housewife, a position to which she is not well suited. However, rather than having limited free time to engage in suffrage activities, Parkinson depicts the character as becoming increasingly involved in the struggle, as Mrs Pim's new social position reveals the hardships that women of the lower classes must endure. Arguably, through personal experiences the character begins to understand the importance of equality.

Similarly, the reader is offered a greater opportunity to comprehend the issues as Amelia is provided with a new insight on her visit to the post office by noticing 'the gleaming brass rods': 'Funny – a few weeks ago she would probably not even have seen the brass; but now she knew just how much Brasso and elbow grease it took

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[67] Ibid., p. 45.
[68] *Amelia*, p. 113.
[69] Substantial documentation of the private experiences of the suffragettes in Ireland is extremely rare. However, 'The Public Face of Feminism: Early Twentieth-Century Writings on Women's Suffrage' provides an excellent account of the impact of suffrage activism on the private lives of British suffragettes. See Tricia Davis and others in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, pp. 302-324.
[70] The Pim's sudden loss of fortune may be an allusion to the unpredictable nature of the job market in 1990s Ireland a situation noted by Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin in 'Conclusion', in *Reinventing Ireland*; 'The affluent Irish city dweller can choose between 20 different kinds of cheese but has no idea whether his/her job will be there next week' (p. 204).
[71] *Amelia*, p. 96.

to keep brass bright and yellow like that and suddenly she appreciated it', demonstrating the character's continued growth through personal experience.[72] As the child reader identifies with these characters, he/she is positioned within a context that allows the personal experience of the characters to substantiate the public struggle in a broader cultural framework, leading to an increased comprehension of the ideology of both the feminist and the class struggle. This increased awareness reaches its climax in Amelia's epiphanic recognition during her father's tirade. It begins,

> They've done it before, you know, arrested these suffragettes with their chains and their stones and their ridiculous placards. Votes for women, indeed! If they stayed at home and looked after their families they wouldn't need votes. They'd be happy doing the work God intended them to do. They shouldn't be out on the street disrupting the natural order.[73]

Once again, Parkinson places the diatribe in the context of wider cultural assumptions about the position and behaviour of women. The reference to 'They've done it before, you know' implies that in Papa's view, Mama should have known better than to demonstrate, as she knew that she could be arrested for such activity. The use of the passive voice is also significant as 'they' are not actually identified, with the implication that being arrested is the logical consequence of such protests. This is coupled with Papa's opinion that granting women the vote is such a ludicrous notion as is reflected in the use of 'indeed!', again signalling the conservative view of the dominant patriarchal culture of the period, a society that promoted the exclusion of women from democracy as simply part of 'the natural order' or as the way 'God intended' life to be. The reader is subsequently encouraged to identify this treatment of women as oppressive as Amelia begins to understand the complexity of the situation. In response to this outburst, Amelia realises that his criticism of the suffragettes is not justified:

> Amelia gaped at Papa. She had never heard him express opinions like this ... Something happened inside Amelia's head, or perhaps it was inside her heart, when she heard Papa say these things [...]. All at once she understood that Mama's views must be worth fighting for

[72] Ibid., p. 117.
[73] Ibid., p. 127.

> [...] And if Papa didn't agree, then that was a shame – but it was a shame about Papa, not a shame about Mama.[74]

Amelia's father locates the hardships of the family with Mrs Pim's political activities. In his view, the family fabric has crumbled because the mother has devoted her time and energy to the suffragette movement rather than to her family. By locating Amelia within the context of increased responsibility in the home, Parkinson grants the character the ability to criticise her father's speech with the knowledge of experience, and consequently undergoes a revolutionary transition in viewpoint. The child reader can understand the text from a contemporary cultural context, a culture that grants votes for women, subsequently causing Mr Pim's speech to appear outdated and sexist in nature. This is further enhanced by 'shame about Papa' which encourages the reader to identify with Amelia's point of view which is understood through her own lived experience. The author does not reveal exactly what Amelia 'understands', only that the character has reached a conclusion in her own mind, and provides an opportunity for the reader to do the same.

The continued value of the suffragette movement is revealed to Amelia as she tends to her sick brother, prompting a developing growth in self-awareness. In Mr Pim's lamentation at the possible loss of his son he reveals that he places a greater value upon his son than upon his daughter; 'Ah, a daughter. Daughters are well and fine, but what is a man without his son?',[75] contradicting Amelia's earlier belief that while Mr Pim always referred to her as his 'favourite daughter', she 'knew he really meant that she was his favourite child, although he couldn't say so outright for fear of offending Edmund'[76]. Although shocked, she is not angry with her father or with Edmund, but with society as a whole, opining that 'he was only saying what was true. That boys were more important that girls. That was what made her angry, that bare fact'.[77] There is a sense of helplessness in this statement where the character cannot see that, rather than being 'bare fact', ideological forces have constructed such oppression to make it appear as fact.[78] It is not the individual male that is blamed for creating such myths, but the entirety of culture and society, including women who

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[74] Ibid., pp. 127-128.
[75] Ibid., p. 143.
[76] Ibid., p. 22.
[77] Ibid., p. 144.
[78] Once again, this can be related to Hutcheon's discussion of 'facts'.

subscribe to such ideologies. However, there is a possibility for the informed reader to understand that this is not 'fact' and to view the argument as historical, from a 1990's perspective, while also revealing the patriarchal dominance women in Ireland had to overcome.

Amelia continues to defy this value system in her determination to become a doctor, despite the character of Dr Mitchell asserting that 'it's just not the sort of thing that ladies are good at'.[79] Toward the novel's conclusion Amelia realises the importance of the public struggle for equality and the benefits it can have on her personal goals as she forces Dr Mitchell to revise his assumptions, as he writes in a letter that 'I see no reason why you shouldn't some day make a very fine doctor'.[80]

In documenting the women's struggle, the novel constantly subverts the past-present binary as it creates moments of continuity aligning the suffragette struggle with the continued fight for gender equality in 1990s Ireland, only to resist forming a linear narrative of history through moments of discontinuity. This is apparent as the suffragettes are linked to the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, as Amelia packs two books for her mother on her imprisonment, the Bible and Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.[81] This acknowledges the contribution of the English women's movement to Irish history and offers a heritage to the suffragette struggle for equality and also to the modern women's movement. However, this fleeting moment of historical continuity is problematised by Parkinson's use of the Magdalen Laundries in the narrative. This can be viewed in terms of Foucault's idea of the 'discontinuity' as it problematises the homogenised and linear versions of Irish history. As noted, when Amelia takes responsibility for managing the family home she sends the washing to the Magdalen Laundry.[82] As the narrative develops, Mrs Pim clarifies the misunderstanding of the term 'fallen women' and its use in relation to the Laundry, as she explains that 'sometimes poor girls in trouble got taken in by the nuns who ran the laundries, and were given jobs to do to earn their keep; Often these girls stay on and work in the laundries for the rest of their lives [...] it's a sad business'.[83] The Magdalen laundries that Parkinson refers to were laundries run by convents and staffed mainly by ostracised unmarried mothers, with the last of these institutions

[79] Ibid., p. 147. The use of the term 'ladies' as opposed to 'women' also suggests the class issues present in becoming a doctor.
[80] Ibid., p. 188.
[81] Ibid., p. 128.
[82] Ibid., p. 146.
[83] Ibid., p. 183.

closing in Ireland in the early 1990s.[84] The reference in the narrative is arguably used as a comic device for the informed reader, illustrating Amelia's misunderstanding but it also leads to a gross oversimplification of the history of the laundries in Ireland and their controversial place in Irish culture.[85] While its inclusion disrupts the continuity of a linear narrative of progress in the women's rights, the author does not grant it the same complex status as other representations of oppression in the novels. Replacing the euphemism of 'fallen women' with another euphemism of 'girls in trouble' and referring to the laundry as 'a sad business' does not reflect the repressive nature of the institution and its treatment of women in Irish culture.[86] The use of the phrase 'girls in trouble' is also problematic as the author leaves it unquestioned and thus perpetuates a culture of describing unmarried mothers in negative terms.

Interwoven in this narrative of the suffragette movement is the fight against social inequality, primarily in the representation of Mary Ann and her family, as discussed above. The character of Mary Ann acts as a foil to the Pim family lifestyle, even during their descent in social status, as Amelia's growing awareness of social inequality creates a forum for a similar comprehension by the child reader. Amelia is presented with multiple perspectives on the issue as her friend Lucinda Goodbody,[87] personifying the conservative opinions of the upper classes, claims that Mary Ann and the Kelly family are poor because 'they marry too young and have too many babies',[88] while Mrs Pim contradicts this idea by remarking that 'there's no such thing as too many children. There's only not enough food to feed them'.[89] While Lucinda's comments suggest that the poor inflict poverty upon themselves, Mrs Pim's argument lays blame upon the larger social structures that result in such conditions, each view presented to allow the reader and Amelia to formulate their own opinions. A greater understanding of social inequality is further advanced during Amelia's visit to the Maloney family home as she witnesses the stark reality of poverty rather than an

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[84] For a detailed account of the history of the Magdalen Laundries in Ireland see Francis Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (Kilkenny: Pilltown Publishing, 2002).

[85] In *Kathleen*, Kathleen does not view the nuns as caring and compassionate but as 'notorious snobs' (p. 24).

[86] It is possible to argue that Parkinson was unaware of the abuses of women within these institutions, many of the personal stories only entering public debate in the 1990s and later brought to international attention in Peter Mullan's film *The Magdalene Sisters* (UK, 2002). *See Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix, for the author's comments on her representation of Magdalen Laundries.

[87] The name 'Goodbody' may also align the conservative values of dominant culture with ideas of 'goodness', yet Lucinda's opinion and behaviour is often ridiculed and undermined by the other characters.

[88] *Amelia*, p. 33.

[89] Ibid., p. 53.

abstract debate within her own social circle.[90] While Amelia's personal experience of having to adopt domestic duties as a result of her family's decline in social standing has increased her knowledge of social inequality, her visit to the slums forces a realisation that her own family were not poor, but 'were rich, overfed, indulged and pampered in comparison to these children'.[91] The reality of sickly children and consumption causes a revision of previous assumptions, on both the part of Amelia and possibly the reader.

The private revelation is paralleled by an exploration of public debates as Parkinson mentions the 1913 Lockout and the resulting failure of the character of Mr Kelly to gain employment due to his participation in the strike.[92] The reader is provided with yet another factor of poverty, the wealthy businessmen exploiting workers, a concept that is contradicted by the unfriendly dressmaker who blames Dublin's problems on Larkin and Markievicz for importing 'foreign ideas'.[93] The portrayal of social history is left as a complex myriad of voices as Parkinson reveals the worthy ideals of Markievicz while concurrently representing the harsher social realities that accompanied the implementation of these ideals.

Throughout her novels, Parkinson refuses to adhere to any one perspective on history, as the process of questioning the nature and function of history perhaps overshadows the actual details of historiography. Within these texts, there is a deliberate manipulation of the development of the child character in the exploration of historical narratives and their relevance in the present, while Amelia's maturation and social awareness presents similar opportunities for the child reader. Thus, it is possible to read Parkinson's texts as functioning in terms of popular memory.[94] Parkinson uncovers many forgotten histories that have been suppressed by dominant versions of Irish history, most notably the suffragette movement and its contribution to the birth of the state, producing a series of postmodern histories in the narrative. However, as Parkinson's writing and publishing of the novels in the 1990s demonstrate, such movements are not merely arrested but 'they are, rather, occluded,

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[90] Ibid., pp. 156-160.
[91] Ibid., pp. 159-160.
[92] Ibid., p. 52. Many of the struggles documented have received limited acknowledgement for their contributions to the period. With the founding of the Free State in 1922, 'the dynamic of convergence was superseded almost entirely by the superordination of a narrow version of the nationalist project, by the establishment of a conservative national state, to the detriment of both the feminist and the labour movements'. See Lloyd, p. 39.
[93] *Amelia*, p. 52.
[94] Tribe, p. 9

and fall under the shadow of the new state, for we might say, a moment of hesitation within the struggle'.[95]

Parkinson's re-writing of history is extremely self-conscious as she uses the past to challenge received or 'official' history in order to highlight continued struggles for equality in 1990s Ireland. This style of writing is somewhat in contrast to many other children's writers that explore the cultural debates of 1916. As discussed elsewhere, texts such as Gerard Whelan's *Guns of Easter*[96] ultimately depict a linear public history that conforms to 'official' and established historiographies that reinforce rather than challenge historical stereotyping.[97] The novels of Parkinson thus adhere to Foucault's belief that 'the traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled',[98] as she explores an often marginalised public history through a private sphere, emphasising many forgotten ideals of the Rising for the contemporary reader.

Section 3. Nationalism, Violence and Understanding

This manipulation and dismantling of history is not limited to the exploration of the women's struggle as Parkinson also avoids conservative and unified representations of nationalist history, presenting the child reader with multifarious ideological positions. Many of the character viewpoints attempt to justify the nationalist movement's use of force, while others expose the harsh realities of such logic, allowing the reader to reach his/her own conclusion in relation to the ethics of violence. In using childhood cognitive development to deconstruct and reconstruct ideas of self and nation, Parkinson brings the reader on a journey with the protagonist Amelia. Through the process of identification, the child reader is forced to question assumptions regarding Irish history and culture, moving from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium and temporarily back to equilibrium as history is constantly dismantled, reshaped and reconstructed, always in a state of flux and never stable.

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[95] Lloyd, p. 39.
[96] See Pádraic Whyte, 'Wars of Independence'. A somewhat simplistic and inaccurate representation of 1916 is also found in *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* TV Series (USA, 1992-1993).
[97] For a discussion of Whelan's work, see Carole Redford in *Inis*, 6 (Autumn 2003), pp. 26-29.
[98] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 88.

Parkinson represents the events surrounding 1916 as a period of 'descent' where conflicting ideologies converge in an inseparable surge toward independence.[99]

The conflicting views of nationalism are investigated in relation to the effects of public ideological movements on the private sphere with the character of Mary Ann functioning as the focal point of such debates. The complex nature of Irish culture at the time is presented to the reader during an exchange between Mary Ann and Amelia. Mary Ann begins:

> 'We serve neither king nor Kaiser but Ireland'.
>
> 'Gosh!' breathed Amelia, not too sure what Mary Ann was on about, but impressed by the sound of it. 'Are you a Nationalist, Mary Ann?'
>
> 'And a Socialist,' nodded Mary Ann.
>
> 'Oh dear!'
>
> 'Don't sound so disapproving Miss Amelia. Your ma and da are Socialists too, or the next thing to it.'
>
> 'Oh no. We're Quakers.'
>
> 'That's what I mean. Friends of the prisoners and champions of the poor, that's what Quakers are, I've been told. You people are pacifists, of course, but I don't hold that against you'.[100]

From the outset, nationalism and the imprisonment of Mary Ann's brother, Patrick, are framed within broader cultural debates. While Mary Ann and Amelia attach themselves to particular groups, there is an acknowledgement that the boundaries between these cultural movements are somewhat blurred as their philosophies overlap.[101] However, although general ideals appear similar, this discourse recognises the conflicting outward manifestation of converting these philosophies into action as in Mary Ann's reference to pacifism. Once again, this demonstrates the cultural and ideological forces that have shaped the thoughts of both girls. While Amelia sees pacifism as a matter of common sense, Mary Ann views the use of force as part of the natural and logical mode of advancing the implementation of nationalist and socialist

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[99] In reading this representation of a moment in Irish history it is useful to apply Foucault's understanding of genealogy in relation to 'descent' and the accidents of history that inform our present understanding of the past.

[100] *Amelia*, p. 50.

[101] Lloyd discusses this complexity of ideological forces surrounding 1916, noting 'that each of these movements and others in fact 'converged' on 1916 and are only analytically separable from each other historically' (p. 39). Within each of these groups is a series of contrasting outlooks on the current political and social situation, dominant forces often suppressing other forms of discourse. See also Chapter 5 and references to 1916 in *War of the Buttons*.

ideologies. However, at this point, neither of the girls has interrogated the reasons behind adhering to such beliefs. It is not until they have been exposed to wider public debates and to each other's alternative viewpoints that they can understand the true meaning of their own philosophies as well as the motivation behind the ideals of others. While Amelia is impressed by the sound of Mary Ann's convictions, her interior voice reveals that she does not understand the motivation underpinning such principles. As is discussed below, toward the end of *No Peace for Amelia* the reader is presented with a transformation in both characters as Amelia gains a greater insight into and understanding of these ideologies, while Mary Ann becomes less convinced of her ideals.

Initially, Amelia is appalled by her parents' attitudes to the imprisonment of Mary Ann's brother Patrick, immediately viewing the revelation in simplistic terms as she 'wasn't too impressed to hear that they had the sister of a prisoner under their roof', while Mrs Pim in recognising the complexity of the situation states, 'we will be concerned about it certainly, but only because we don't like to think of somebody unjustly imprisoned'.[102] The character supports the principle of the cause in this instance, rather than the violent actions that may accompany it. The Pims cannot condone his behaviour, their pacifist beliefs preventing a demonstration of full support, but they do make a positive contribution to his family as a result of the situation and send food to the Maloney's home in the slums. The exploration of nationalist ideologies, particularly in terms of the justification of violence as a means of achieving liberation, occurs through Amelia's increased understanding of the complex cultural debates in Ireland. As a result of social interaction with her peers, Amelia gains new insights into the contradictory forces at play in her world, where ideals of liberation in the public sphere are contrasted with the harsh realities of the impact of such philosophies in the private sphere.

This psychological development of the child character corresponds to Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky's view that the human mind is inherently social and that children's cognitive development is dependent upon interaction with communities and cultures, as he states that 'social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and relationship'.[103] In a discussion of Vygotsky's

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[102] *Amelia*, p. 28.

[103] L.S. Vygotsky, 'The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions', in *The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology*, ed. by J. V. Wertsch, (New York: Sharpe, 1981), p. 163.

contribution to modern psychology, Smith (et al) note that as opposed to assuming that cognition is an individual characteristic, Vygotsky places emphasis on the influence of the child's specific culture on his/her development, and that 'it is a cooperative process of engaging in mutual activities with more expert others that the child becomes more knowledgeable' as is demonstrated by Amelia's interaction with Mary Ann and Frederick.[104] In this manner, the child character's increasing maturity provides a mechanism for the author for the deconstruction of dominant historical narratives and belief systems, preventing any sense of cohesion of philosophies or stability of ideologies, in constantly challenging perspectives on the conflict. Similar to the discussion of the suffragette movement, a parallel process of cognition occurs for the child reader approaching the text, as the homogeneity of nationalist history is dismantled and concepts that appear to have a stable basis are constantly forced into a state of disequilibrium, suggesting the complex heterogeneous nature of history. Applying Foucault's theory that the writing of history is greatly influenced by the surrounding cultural debates, Parkinson's representation of nationalism must also be read within the context of political debates in 1990s Ireland.

Parkinson explores the contradictory nature of Irish nationalist history as ideologies are problematised but not dismissed and are placed within the context of other violent conflicts. Such a deconstruction of a metanarrative of history from a present-day perspective can be read in terms of Michel Foucault's concept of 'History of the Present'. Parkinson agrees that such a process greatly informed her writing, as is revealed in an interview: 'what you say about coming from a *modern* vantage point is absolutely true. I was dealing with issues that are of concern today. I certainly didn't do that consciously, but when I read that, when I read your [essay], I said that is absolutely spot on'.[105] Consequently, it is useful to explore briefly some of the historical and cultural debates related to nationalism and violence that were prevalent in Ireland at the time of writing.

Parkinson has much in common with the revisionist approach to history, particularly the questioning of the nationalist violence in 1916 as a means of liberation, within the cultural climate of the continued violence in Northern Ireland. The novels were published in the early 1990s, a period in which historical revisionism

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[104] Smith, Cowie, and Blades, p. 493. For a development of these ideas, see L.S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, (1934) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962).

[105] She also notes that in writing the novel, 'well of course, then you have to deal with different points of view from the present when you are in the past'. See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix.

had become a popular topical debate in Irish culture as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.[106] During these debates, conservative nationalist historiographies which suggested that 'the Rising of 1916 was seen as the climax and culmination of the Irish nationalist historical process, as the proclamation itself had claimed' were problematised.[107] However, while this simplification of national historiographies was challenged, the work of the revisionists also proved problematic as it resulted in reductionist accounts of nationalism.[108]

In a challenge to such reductionism, the violence in Northern Ireland was also accompanied by a revival of many of the mythologies of 1916, linking the current nationalist struggle with the foundation of the state and acquiring 'an ideological importance of the highest political significance'.[109] In contrast to the challenge of excessively determinist ideologies there also appeared to be a revival of nationalist myths[110] to suit varying elements of Irish culture.[111] Parkinson incorporates many of these debates into her narrative, challenging both ideas of seamlessness while also exploring the current social order's legitimation of certain types of historiographies.

As noted previously, militant nationalism may not be actively promoted in the novels but the ideologies are considered. Nationalist violence is placed within the context of other conflicts, primarily World War I, and Frederick's role in it. Underlying the narrative of *No Peace for Amelia* is the same pacifist ideology of the first novel, this time centring on the war in Europe and the rebellion in Ireland. Once again, Parkinson examines the impact of these events on the private sphere of Amelia, who is aware of World War I but is more concerned with creating outward visible signs of adulthood, as is evident in her obsession with the condition of her hair on a Sunday afternoon, than with investigating the complexities of war.[112] Although the war has not directly impinged upon Amelia, her peers offer stories of friends and

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[106] See O'Tuathaigh, 'Irish Historical "Revisionism"'. For a more comprehensive discussion of these debates see Brady, 'Constructive and Instrumental'.
[107] O'Tuathaigh, p. 310.
[108] Again, in Foucault's terms, there is a problematisation of the problematisation of history. See Castel, '"Problematization" as a mode of reading History', p. 239. See also Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[109] Fanning, p. 154.
[110] Similar to those of the character of Mary Ann.
[111] Central to this revival was the work of Brendan Bradshaw in his championing of Nationalist history and criticism of revisionist history. See Brendan Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland', in *Irish Historical Studies* (Nov. 1989), pp. 329-51.
[112] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 22.

distant relatives that have been affected.[113] As a pacifist, she does not engage with the ethics of war, but firmly maintains an anti-war opinion, that is until Frederick joins the British Army and Amelia has a conflict of loyalties, calling her anti-war stance into question. In a process of self-delusion she attempts to formulate a mythical view of the war, contriving a version of events that warrants Frederick's involvement in violence as acceptable:

> Amelia sat down and tried to assess her own reaction to this piece of news. [...] she had been confused and surprised by what Lucinda had said, but what ought she feel next? Anxiety would be appropriate. After all, Frederick might be wounded, shell-shocked, even killed [...]. What she felt, she now began to realise, was a sort of secret shameful elation. Frederick was taking a stand. He wasn't going to go on just living his life the way other people – his parents, his community – had ordained that he should [...]. Off to the trenches to defend the rights of small countries to rule themselves and resist invasion. Why, it was so gallant and adventurous![114]

This passage reveals many of the themes and debates that recur throughout *Amelia* and *No Peace for Amelia*. As Amelia examines her reaction to events, her interior voice manifests extreme self-awareness, wondering what she should feel, in order to correspond to dominant ideological values of her community as is reflected in terms such as 'what ought' and 'appropriate'. From this self-analysis, she reaches a state of 'shameful elation', yet this shame is somewhat ambiguous. The thoughts that follow offer the possible interpretation that by supporting Frederick she is ashamed of adopting a rebel stance in defiance of her parents' wishes and those of the Quaker community. However, the use of the word 'elation' also reflects her excitement at the prospect of Frederick participating in a mythical public history beyond the private concerns of family and community as he fights to 'defend the rights of small countries'. In rejecting Quaker values, Amelia adopts a more dominant set of cultural principles that deem participation in war as 'gallant and adventurous'.

Amelia's mythical account of war echoes many of the public histories that promote an image of brave young men fighting to protect those at home.[115] The

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[113] Ibid., p. 28.

[114] Ibid., p. 44. There is also an irony in Amelia's lack of awareness at this stage that the motivation behind Frederick's beliefs is similar to Mary Ann's justification of nationalism in terms of defending 'the rights of small countries to rule themselves'.

[115] This is evident in many songs of the period such as 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', a popular wartime song written in 1914 with music by Ivor Novello and words by Lena Ford. The song is also

mythologisation of war often acts as a justification of events and works to support the ruling order that follows. This is also similar to mythical views of the Rising that martyred the leaders of the rebellion.[116] Amelia's romanticisation of events reaches a climax as she waves to Frederick's ship. Her poetic language dominates as she comments 'Oh look, there's a definite glow in the east', mirroring many of the poetic histories of both Ireland and England.[117] The harsh realities of the private histories are transformed into public histories of valour and sacrifice. This romantic ideal is undercut by Mary Ann's response, reminding the implied reader of the brutality and suffering of war: '"Glow in the east, yer granny", said Mary Ann. "It's not a poem we're in"'.[118] Once again, the reader is presented with differing viewpoints of the war that emanate from the diverse cultural affiliations and backgrounds of the characters.

Subsequently, Parkinson contrasts the public mythologisation of war with the cruelty of war that is documented in Frederick's private letter to Amelia, where he 'sounded thoroughly miserable' and it was as if 'he was sorry he had ever joined up'.[119] His involvement in the conflict continues to make a significant impact on the psychological development of Amelia, as the character begins to question her initial glorification of Frederick's role and eventually leads to an analysis of her own Quaker beliefs. As a result, Amelia likens herself to her adult mother in approaching such an understanding:

> Then a thought occurred to her: It's war itself that is dishonourable. She turned this thought over in her mind. It was the first time she had been able to do what came naturally to Mama - make a clear distinction between the war and Frederick's part in it. Yes, it's war itself that is dishonourable, she thought again.[120]

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popularly known as 'Till The Boys Come Home'. For a discussion of literature and the Great War see Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (London: Constable, 1965) and Martin Stephen, *The Price of Pity: Poetry History and Myth in the Great War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996). It is also interesting to note that the song became popular once again with Joan Littlewood's version, 'Oh What a Lovely War', in 1969. In a postmodernist sense, a second generation thus became familiar with the war lyrics but in a very different cultural context.

[116] For a discussion of the rebellion and myth see Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Terror' in *Crane Bag*, 2.1 and 2.2 (Dublin: 1978), 273-287.

[117] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 62.

[118] Ibid., p. 62. This may also be a reference to the substantial body of poetry related to the mythologisation of those in battle, such as poems that depict the Great War and also Yeats' 'September 1913' (*Responsibilities*, 1914) and later 'Easter 1916' (*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921) reprinted in *W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems* (1962) (London: Pan Books, 1990). This statement by Mary Ann contradicts her romantic views later established by her reading of Patrick's letter (see below).

[119] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 103 and p. 104.

[120] Ibid., p. 172.

These moments of epiphany signify Amelia's developing self-awareness as she continues to contemplate the consequences of violence in her own life. They also represent a loss of childness, a continued growth toward adulthood through a process of mature reflection. Parkinson parallels this maturity with the exploration of a private history that is often overshadowed by the public and official histories, illustrating the horrific effects of violent conflict on the lives of friends and families of those involved.[121] Similarly, Amelia's exposure to the lives of Mary Ann and Patrick forces her to recognise the harsh consequences of war and to return to her pacifist ideology with a greater understanding of the principles in which they are rooted and the true meaning of being a pacifist: '"It means", she said firmly, "that you have to work for peace, not just have a distaste for war"'.[122] Although this is a philosophy that can be applied to any conflict, perhaps Parkinson is alluding to the Northern Ireland 'troubles' and the Peace Process that was developing at the time of her writing. Aware of the political climate and controversy over nationalist historiographies, Parkinson portrays the violence of World War I alongside a representation of nationalist violence and subsequently positions the debate within a broader global framework of war, where positive and negative attributes of the motivating ideologies are presented and contrasted. Therefore, in the representation of Amelia's journey, the responsibility of judgement is left with the reader, rather than the author. As a result, historical events are not firmly positioned within a distant past but are used to aid the understanding of contemporary issues.

The Irish nationalist struggle continues to manifest itself in Amelia's world through the ideologies and philosophies of Mary Ann and Patrick, with Mary Ann determined to participate in Irish history and become a heroine of sorts, aligning herself to Ireland's mythical heroes. Paralleling Amelia's romantic view of Frederick is Mary Ann's romantic desire to partake in the nationalist cause as she hopes to become

> a modern warrior-woman, like Queen Maeve or Granuaile. She'd be part of the ancient struggle against the English oppressor and vital to the uprising that would finally rid Ireland of

[121] This conforms to Foucault's ideas of popular memory as previously marginalised private struggles are foregrounded.
[122] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 176.

> English rule and allow Robert Emmet's epitaph be written when his country took her place amongst the nations of the earth.[123]

Mary Ann attempts to write a poetic history for Ireland, linking the current nationalist struggle to Ireland's female heroes of Maeve and Granuaile, as well as to the figure of Robert Emmet.[124] By intertwining reality and myth the complexities of Ireland's history with Britain are ignored as a linear narrative of continuity is created. For Mary Ann, a valid participation in the country's history can only occur in the public sphere of nationalist history, consequently negating the private history in which she is currently involved. However, it is to her own private sphere that she constantly returns. Following her romantic outbursts, the reality returns to her as she remembers Patrick and the life-threatening events of the public sphere. On reading Patrick's letter, Mary Ann can only comprehend elements of it as a result of his bad handwriting. She notes the 'confusion in its construction and tone' and that 'It was full of sentences repeated from things that Mr Pearse, the leader of the rebels, had said, and bits of a poem by somebody else all about blood and roses,[125] which was half like a prayer and half not'[126]. The messages of Pearse as only half-understood may epitomise the manner in which many of the goals and ideologies of the rebels were lost or ignored after the rebellion. The new leaders of the country did not bring the type of freedom promised by many of the rebels, but took the form of a conservative neo-colonialism. Many of the ideologies for which the rebels had died

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[123] Ibid., p. 36.

[124] The reference to Robert Emmet comes from his speech from the dock before his execution; 'Let no man write my epitaph: for as no man who knows my motives dare now vindicate them, let not prejudice or ignorance asperse them. Let them and me repose in obscurity and peace, and my tomb remain uninscribed, until other times, and other men, can do justice to my character; when my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written. I have done', in T.D. Sullivan *Speeches from the Dock, or Protests of Irish Patriotism* (Dublin: T.D. Sullivan, 1888), p. 54.

[125] This is possibly a reference to Joseph Plunkett's poem 'I see his Blood upon the Rose' (*Poems of Joseph Mary Plunkett* (1916), p. 50; cited in Peter Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature from Parnell to the Death of W. B. Yeats, 1891-1939* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan 1977), p. 82. Plunkett, a signatory of the Proclamation, was married to his wife, Grace, the night before his execution. He wrote this poem on the wall of his cell before being executed. This story has entered popular consciousness through the song 'Grace' written in 1985 by brothers Frank and Sean O'Meara. As a result, Parkinson plays with the fictional form of the historical novel by subtly referencing a popular story in the Irish past with which many informed readers may be familiar while simultaneously manipulating the chronology of events. It would be impossible for Mary Ann to have read such a poem prior to the Rising as it had not yet been written.

[126] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 35

were simply forgotten or ignored to suit the needs of the new ruling and social order.[127]

As noted, in representing these controversial historical debates of the position of nationalism in Irish culture, Parkinson does not simplify the philosophies by limiting the reader's viewpoint to these romantic imaginings of Mary Ann, but places the character's justification for the Rising alongside broader ethical issues that are also associated with World War I. Concurrently, the characters are never entirely certain of their convictions, consequently placing the reader within a similar questioning mode. This form of problematisation is illustrated as Mary Ann continues to believe in the cause, but with increased confusion, viewing both the positive and negative effects of the Rebellion, the public benefits and the private tragedies. As the Rising is advertised in the paper her thoughts of events are torn between extreme awe and extreme cynicism: 'Mary Ann felt powerless and confused. She knew it was going to happen this foolhardy, glorious, ill-advised and utterly splendid and passionate action, and there was nothing she could do about it, only hope and pray'.[128] Both Amelia and Mary Ann begin to doubt their convictions, as 'Mary Ann, just like Amelia, wasn't half as sure inside her head as she was when she spoke about it'.[129] Indeed, it is this outward confidence of conviction that contrasts with the doubt and confusion expressed by the interior voice, a process which mirrors the public ambition of the suffragette movement and nationalist rising conflicting with the private tragedy of families and friends. The romantic ideals of valour and sacrifice overshadow the reality of violence that accompanies these activities.

The physical violence of the Rising appears in the novel with the arrival of Patrick who brings the conflict of the public rebellion into the private sphere of Amelia. Witnessing the effects of the rebellion first hand leads to an epiphany as

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[127] For a further discussion of this topic, see Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, and Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, *Reinventing Ireland*. See also Seán Flynn, 'INTO Leader says 1916 ideal undermined in Schools' in *The Irish Times*, 18 April 2006. Available online at <http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2006/0418/2375891144HM7INTOPRES.html> [accessed 2 June 2006].

[128] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 115. There is also a sense that Mary Ann is justified in her pursuit of the nationalist cause after the depiction of a brutal raid on the Pim home as the Black and Tans search for guns (*No Peace for Amelia*, pp. 81-89). During the raid the reader is unaware that there are, in fact, no guns in the house, thus creating an atmosphere of suspense. Yet, with the realisation that Mary Ann is innocent, the reader is encouraged to view the raid as a violation of the character's private world.

[129] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 72.

> she hadn't given much thought to what it meant to be a pacifist recently. She felt somehow that it might be disloyal to Frederick. But the arrival of Patrick, ill and wounded in her own backyard, quite literally, had given her a new and less glamorous perspective on war,

as Amelia continues to develop her understanding of the cultural conflicts of the period.[130] Patrick has been shot by a soldier, but is afraid to retaliate for fear of killing him.[131] However, although an armed rebel, the retelling of his story which reveals his primary function as a messenger, lessens the extent of the violence to which the girls and the reader are exposed. In this sense, violence is 'distanced' and 'massaged out of representation' for the child reader as it only features in the re-telling of the conflict, rather than Amelia's first hand experience of it.[132] Similar to Frederick's experiences,[133] Patrick's presence also functions as a representation of the *effects* of violence. Rather than documenting the true brutality of the violent act for the child reader, the story of the conflict is narrated to the girls as the author places emphasis on the consequences of such actions rather than dwelling on the reality of the carnage. Similarly, when this occurs, the characters gain a greater understanding of events as they mature and grow in their outlook on life and accommodate alternative perspectives on war.

During this development, the differing views of Nationalist violence and European conflict are again investigated in an exchange between Mary Ann and

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[130] Ibid., p. 176.

[131] Parkinson notes her reasons for depicting the character in such a way: 'And of course, he is wounded, but he is still a heroic character. He's not real. They never have to deal with the actual engagement of the war. They hear the shooting and explosions in the distance, I think they do, and when somebody comes in from the front so to speak he's the hero, and he's her brother as well, so that's kind of nice, non-combative. And he's afraid to shoot in case he hurts somebody. Well, I think that was actually quite common at the time. A lot of people went to war or went to fight at that time. They had the ideology, they didn't have the military backup. And they were, they didn't want to be fighting, a lot of them didn't. I mean that's why Pearse called a halt to it in the end, in case people might get hurt'. See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix.

[132] Parkinson notes that 'Also because it's girls [...]. We are only getting the violence and the war and even the political ideas through secondary characters. That gives you a very different perspective as well, particularly, not so much on the Irish situation but on the European war. It's very much at a distance, happening somewhere else and this is the homefront. And here's this kid and she's sort of knitting socks. She's living a normal life, when all this stuff's going on, and yet every now and again it impinges on her rather selfish vain little consciousness that there is this other thing going on. So I think it is partly the Quaker perspective, but also partly the female perspective which gives you that kind of distance, from action I suppose; the action of the war'. See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix.

[133] See *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 170, as Mary Ann states 'Oh, Amelia, think if it were Frederick!', paralleling the experiences of the two boys. The battles of 1916 and of World War I are also paralleled by Kiberd as he notes that 'from this distance in time, the myths surrounding 1916 and the Somme seem almost identical. In Ireland it was soon put about that the most creative and promising intellects had been lost in the Rising by a small country that could ill afford such a reckless expenditure of young talent. See Kiberd, p. 247.

Amelia. Amelia describes the Rising as 'a skirmish in a post office,'[134] while Mary Ann counters with an image of Frederick in a 'muddy lousy trench', a dishonourable action that is merely 'to keep England powerful'[135]. The argument is clouded by the presence of the wounded Patrick who literally brings the horror of the conflict home to both girls, demonstrating once again that personal experience has given the character a new insight into the contradictory ideologies of the public sphere. Conflicting versions of the Rising are represented in the newspaper reports that indicate the public disgust over the damage caused, and later the change in public opinion and growth in support of the Rising as the rebels are executed.[136] Final proof of the harsh realities of war is evident in the arrival of the soldier who informs Amelia of Frederick's gruesome death. He tells her that 'there is no use pretending it's a pleasant death, but it is probably better than spending months in those awful rat-infested trenches, up to your ankles in muck and then getting your head blown off when you are ordered to go over the top'.[137] Through such a report violence is once again 'distanced' from Amelia and from the reader nonetheless, as Parkinson creates a version of war for the implied child reader that is far from 'gallant' and 'adventurous'.

As Amelia's psychological development allows her to accommodate alternative perspectives, the child reader is also encouraged to recognise the complexity of these debates, to avoid over-simplifying narratives of history and to understand the possibility of facilitating multiple viewpoints simultaneously. These nationalist debates are not confined to the *distant* past, as the reader is firmly encouraged to bring his/her own cultural knowledge to the text in order to interpret events in the narrative. In a postmodernist sense, and through the application of theories related to childness, the texts reveal that revisionist writers of history, influenced by the contemporary position in which they write, can only ever create further revisionism, a perpetual state of problematising the problematised.

The notion of childness continues to manifest itself in the novels as the character of Amelia can be read as emblematic of the Irish nation in multifarious forms through her independence, growth and understanding. The turning point for the character's move toward independence is represented through her visit to the GPO as

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[134] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 170.
[135] Ibid., p. 170.
[136] See *No Peace For Amelia*, pp. 194-197. For an overview of reactions to the Rising at the time see *The Irish Times* supplement to mark the Rising's 90th Anniversary, *The Irish Times*, 28 March 2006.
[137] *No Peace for Amelia*, p. 204.

she demonstrates her ability to overcome her childhood fears and to depend on her own capabilities.[138] Amelia's conquering of the GPO in order to gain independence can be understood as a metaphor for the Irish struggle as the rebels also conquered the GPO in 1916 in the fight for independence. It is also possible to apply Zornado's theories of children's literature and imperialism to gain an understanding of Amelia's advancement toward adulthood which can be read as a shift and renegotiation of child/adult power relations in terms of colonialism and postcolonialism.[139] Zornado notes that 'the relationship between the parent and child in Victorian England was precisely that of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, precisely that of the relationship between physically dominant and the physically dominated'.[140] As Amelia gains greater responsibilities and increased independence from her parents, her journey is mirrored by Ireland's development and its break from the British Empire. Despite such representations, as opposed to documenting traditional and stereotypical binary forces of the period such as viewing Ireland as the 'feminised object of English discourse,'[141] Parkinson transcends the English/Irish boundary and interrogates the marginalisation of groups and contested ideologies *within* Irish society.[142] Not only is Amelia a symbol of Ireland in 1916, but this metaphor can also be expanded to include her as an emblem of the Irish nation in the 1990s, in a state of constant analysis of self by interrogating value systems and established ideologies, by revising previous revisions,[143] never reaching a reductive resolution or conclusion, but simply an 'understanding' of events.

Conclusion

> 'And I'm the Queen of Sheba!' she added with another laugh. 'Oh!' said Amelia, not quite sure how to respond to this piece of information.

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[138] *Amelia*, pp. 116-122

[139] See Zornado, pp. 101-134.

[140] Zornado, p. 102. While not all parents in Victorian culture may have treated their children as colonial subjects, the analogy is useful in the context of Parkinson's novel and allows for the alignment of childhood and Ireland in postcolonial terms; child/Ireland as oppressed by adult/Britain.

[141] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), p. 6.

[142] See *Siobhán Parkinson Interview*, Appendix, where she discusses the use of Quaker characters as a narrative device in avoiding the English/Irish binary as well as appealing to a liberal mind.

[143] In 1999, Lloyd noted this shift in perspective stating that 'it is clear that the last fifteen years or so has seen the emergence of a large corpus of non-elite histories: histories of agrarian movements, local histories, social histories of the complex intersections of class and colonization in rural Ireland, women's history, in the form of both biographical work and, more recently, of studies of women's movements and social history' (p. 81).

> 'Only I'm in disguise, see? I'm running away from my father, the evil Tsar, who wants to lock me up in a nunnery, and I'm hiding here in Dublin. My name in exile is Mary Ann Maloney. Pleased to make your acquaintance.'
>
> 'I thought the Tsar was in Russia,' Amelia managed at last. 'Not Sheba.'
>
> 'Oh, you don't want to believe everything you hear,' said Mary Ann darkly.[144]

The art of storytelling at the centre of Parkinson's narrative reflects the wider historical and cultural debates in 1990s Ireland where the questioning of both the content and the means of production of historiographies leads to the conclusion that 'you don't want to believe everything you hear'.[145] The ideas of childness allow for an exploration of the story of Irish history, from the depiction of power relations to metaphors of nation and representations of growth and development. Told from a series of viewpoints, the novels reveal the process of questioning as more important than the details of historical depiction.[146] Traces of the past are transformed into a fictional historical novel where the child reader can explore perspectives on history through a process of identification with the child characters. Parkinson's construction of Amelia's self-growth and increased awareness corresponds to the dominant psychological theories of Piaget and Vytogsky, as her exposure to other accounts of reality leads to a reconstruction of her own views of the world. Consequently, both Amelia and the child reader are exposed to multiple versions of Irish history where various histories, both public and private, are produced in a postmodernist sense. As the characters narrate their stories of the public or 'official history', often elevating those involved to a mythical status, as demonstrated by Amelia's account of Frederick and Mary Ann's view of the rebels,[147] the impact of these histories upon the private sphere undermines the 'glorious' version of the events.

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[144] *Amelia*, pp. 18-19.

[145] Storytelling is a common theme throughout Parkinson's work, particularly in her novel *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe). The Love Bean* and *Sisters... No Way*! also use multiple perspectives in the exploration of a single event. For a discussion of storytelling in the work of Siobhán Parkinson, see Nancy Watson, 'The Politics and Poetics of Irish Children's Literature', pp. 156-182. See also Patricia Kennon, '(W)rites of Passage in Siobhán Parkinson's novel *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe)*', pp. 143-52, and Amanda Piesse, 'Islands, Ireland and the Changing State of Writing for Children', both in *Studies in Children's Literature: Treasure Islands*.

[146] This adheres to Anne Hutton's statement in terms of Popular Memory as 'a battle about the means to production for a voice'. See Anne Hutton, 'Australian Historical Film: The Production of Popular Memory', in *The First Australian History and Film Conference Papers*, ed. by Anne Hutton (North Ryde: Australian Film and TV School, 1983), pp. 207-23 (p. 208).

[147] In this instance, the teller of the stories 'constructs that truth and chooses those facts'. See Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (New York: Cornell University press, 1986), p. 67.

In applying the theories of Linda Hutcheon, it is possible to argue that Parkisnon adopts a postmodern approach to her novels as writing about history becomes a political act, particularly in relation to contemporary Irish culture and issues of nationalism and feminism, as alternative narratives are created that contest the seamless linear narrative of Irish history.[148] As a result, the texts invite readers to question their own ideological positioning and understanding of history in contemporary culture, to contest processes of representation by which they construct themselves and the world and to draw attention to the fictitious elements of the narrative of history.[149] The reader is presented with a multiplicity of narratives, none of which has a claim to absolute truth, and is consequently denied access to a totalising narrative of history. The reader is not placed within a singular position but rather there is a 'dis-positioning' of the reader in order for several conflicting ideologies to be viewed simultaneously.

The Irish past is used to scrutinise local issues and reclaims 'those lost narratives of the past which generate new solidarity in the present'.[150] There is a continued attempt to understand the cause and motivation for the women's struggle and for the use of violence as a means of achieving liberation. As Amelia explores the private and public debates surrounding women's rights in the early twentieth century, the child reader is invited to question these debates from a 1990s standpoint, to draw upon his/her own cultural knowledge in a process of interpretation, and to analyse the position of women and their continued struggle for equality within Irish society.[151] A similar mechanism is used in the exploration of nationalist violence from a contemporary viewpoint, as a series of multiple perspectives documents the positive ideals of overthrowing an oppressive force in achieving liberation, yet questions the violent means employed in the search for equality by exposing the effects of the public terror on the private sphere.[152]

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[148] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 50.
[149] Ibid., p. 57.
[150] Luke Gibbons, 'A Global Cure? History, Therapy and The Celtic Tiger', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 89-108 (p. 105).
[151] In March 2004, Paul Cullen noted in *The Irish Times* that Michael Mc Dowell, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, believed there 'was still a long way to go toward the attainment of full gender equality in Irish society'. See *The Irish Times*, 9 March 2004, p. 5.
[152] The notion of a totalising national historiography in which 'certainty is often achieved at the expense of complexity' is abandoned. See Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 22. There is a sense of the fragmentary and antagonistic nature of nationalism in Ireland as the positive elements of nationalism are brought to the fore.

In the creation of Amelia and her childhood environment, Parkinson constructs an ideological space that is 'distanced' from the present in that it is located within an Irish past, yet conflates this past-present binary by consciously encouraging the reader to draw upon contemporary cultural knowledge in order to interpret events in the novel and analyse current political debates. Consequently, the narrative that emerges explores simultaneously the story of nation at both the beginning and the close of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2

Teenage Tantrums and Territorial Traumas: Mark O'Sullivan's *Melody for Nora*

In many of his novels, Mark O'Sullivan explores the fractured nature of historical events from several vantage points and avoids representing a unitary view of the past for the child reader. This is evident in most of his texts including *Silent Stones* (1999), *Angels Without Wings* (1997), *White Lies* (1997), *More than a Match* (1996), and *Melody for Nora* (1994).[1] The characters' personal viewpoints are used to present a variety of perspectives on public events in history thus creating multiple 'histories' for the implied child reader. In *Melody for Nora* O'Sullivan employs a postmodern approach to the writing of history as he uses the idea of 'fragmentation' as a narrative technique to communicate concepts of trauma in both personal and cultural terms. Throughout the narrative, the childhood trauma of the central character, Nora, is used to illustrate the period of the Irish Civil War, 1922–1923, as a moment of trauma in Irish cultural history.[2] In this sense, childness in the form of childhood trauma is used to explore the trauma of the nation.

The novel is set in 1922 and follows the story of a young girl, Nora Canavan, whose family life changes dramatically after the death of her mother. Nora is sent to live with her aunt and uncle in Tipperary while her younger brothers move to the US to live with their uncle. The move from Dublin to Tipperary has a profound effect upon Nora who must cope with the Civil War activities in the town, which are tearing families and Ireland apart.[3] While adjusting to her new life, she begins to acknowledge that she has prejudged her Aunt Molly, Uncle Peter, Jack (the Irregular who was once in love with Nora's mother), and Alec (a former member of the British

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[1] O'Sullivan's texts include *Silent Stones* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1999); *Angels Without Wings* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997); *White Lies* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997); *More Than a Match* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996); *Wash Basin Street Blues: Nora In New York* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1995); and his novel for adults, *Enright* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005). *Enright* also deals with aspects of the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. In 1995 *Melody for Nora* won the Bisto Book of the Year Eilís Dillon Memorial Award. For an interview with Mark O'Sullivan see *Children's Books in Ireland,* 24 (Autumn 2000), pp. 32-34.

[2] While the thematic content and narrative style of *Melody for Nora* are extremely complex in many respects, the novel is also flawed on some levels, particularly in relation to the lack of interiority in the central character and the tendency of the author to repeat and over-write certain passages. As Amanda Piesse notes, 'both *Melody for Nora* and its sequel, *Wash Basin Street Blues*, are essentially flawed by the mismatch between robust, realistic language of their characters and the paraphernalia that attaches to the mise-en-scène of that language. Rather than trusting the dialogue to work for itself, [...] O'Sullivan seems compelled to explain himself as he goes along'. See Amanda Piesse, in *Children's Books in Ireland,* 29 (Spring 2002), p. 25. See also an interview with Mark O'Sullivan in *Children's Books in Ireland,* 24 (Autumn 2000), pp. 32-34.

[3] Anne Dolan notes that during the Irish Civil War 'even within families, the most basic unit of community, brothers and sisters, parents and children took different sides'. See Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory, 1923-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

army and an alcoholic).[4] However, by playing the piano she overcomes her own trauma and finds a means of understanding and surviving her current circumstances. Throughout the text, O'Sullivan uses the varying perspectives of the characters to illustrate the conflicting views of the Irish Civil War and the contradictory ideologies of debates that surrounded the event.[5]

As a result, it is possible to read *Melody for Nora* in postmodern terms as an attempt to 'dismantle the grand narrative' of history by providing multiple accounts and perspectives of the same event. Corresponding to Linda Hutcheon's view of the construction of 'facts', O'Sullivan's account of the Civil War is based on ideas of the perspective of the event, or as the character Nora asserts, 'it's not the past that matters, it's the way you see it'.[6] Section One of this chapter examines the different approaches to writing about history that are established at the beginning of the novel and explores the problems and challenges associated with documenting the past in a coherent narrative form. Isolated approaches to using both memory and 'objective' historiography as modes of documenting events of the past are presented to the reader. However, the limitations of such approaches are revealed and the author subsequently combines both memory and historiography with a postmodern narrative that attempts to access and understand the complexity and contradictions of the Civil War. As Richard Kearney notes, this 'postmodern turn seeks to deconstruct the Official Story (which presents itself as Official History) into the open plurality of stories that make it up'.[7] Drawing attention to his own use of childness by referring to his own childhood memories, O'Sullivan informs his postmodern approach to writing about the past with this idea of childness and thereby provides a narrative form that represents the fragmentary nature of history. Section 2 explores the manner in which this chaotic quality of history is then paralleled with the chaotic nature of the characters' identities that are in turn represented in a disjointed form through their experiences of trauma. I will argue that the lack of coherence in narrative *form* reflects the *theme* of fragmentation and trauma within the novel.

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[4] In 1922 the War of Independence with Britain ended when 'General Michael Collins had signed a peace treaty'. Those who were not in favour of the terms of the treaty 'took up arms against the new government and its Regular army, forming a force known as the Irregulars'. See *Melody for Nora*, p. 6.

[5] Robert Dunbar similarly notes that it 'brings out clearly the possibility of equally decent men and women arguing strongly for opposing viewpoints'. Dunbar, review of *Melody for Nora*, in *Children's Books in Ireland*, 11 (November 1994), p. 9.

[6] *Melody for Nora*, p. 152. This analysis of the novel in postmodern terms is based on readings of Lyotard, Hutcheon, and Jameson, as discussed in the Introduction.

[7] Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, p. 64.

Trauma is central to O'Sullivan's text as he uses it to explore the fracturing of identity in personal terms, primarily through the traumatic experiences of Nora's childhood which are aligned with Alec's wartime history and Jack's current struggle. The term 'trauma' carries multiple connotations. Kirby Farrell notes in *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (1998) that 'the variety of post-traumatic suffering makes clear how capacious a concept trauma can be. Symptoms may range from paralysis to frantic, disorganized action [...]. To bring some order to this array of symptoms, theories of trauma have had to be elastic'.[8] A traumatic experience can be understood as a wound to either mind or body, an internal or an external trauma that can cause a wide range of symptoms, as is the case with Nora. Central to an understanding of such experience is the sense of chaos and 'disorganized action' that results.

Similarly, Cathy Caruth argues that, while it may be impossible to reach a precise definition of trauma, most descriptions conform to the idea that in post-traumatic stress disorder there is a response

> to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.[9]

This 'response to events' implies the central position of the history of the individual in the production of trauma and, as Caruth goes on to say, the traumatized 'carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess'.[10] In her discussion of the 'crisis of truth' Caruth claims that 'a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence' and suggests that trauma can be used as a structure to understand a narrative of personal history in a fragmented form, but simultaneously acknowledges the impossibility of gaining direct access to the event of the past.[11] Similarly, this chapter explores O'Sullivan's depiction of Nora's trauma which centres on her inability to articulate coherently the disjointed and 'disorganized' nature of her personal past.

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[8] Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 6.
[9] Caruth, p. 4.
[10] Ibid., p. 5.
[11] Ibid., p. 6 and p. 8.

This section also examines the character of Nora as representative of Ireland, both past and present. Firstly, Nora can be understood as a metonym for Irish culture during the Civil War as her experiences parallel those of the nation throughout 1922 and 1923. As a result, in Carolyn Steedman's terms, the child signifies both the history of self and the history of culture, as the origins of the state are aligned with the child character.[12] Secondly, it is also possible to view Nora as a metaphor for contemporary Irish culture as both Ireland and Nora are reluctant to work through the traumatic memories of the past. Drawing upon Caruth's theories, it is possible to read both Nora's personal trauma and Ireland's cultural trauma as the inability to access directly and articulate coherently the contradictory and disjointed nature of the past.[13] As a result, 'childness' is present in the text in multiple forms. In developing Peter Hollindale's theories which discuss the varying ideologies that meet in children's literature, it is possible to argue that within O'Sullivan's text the child as metonym and the child as metaphor can also be viewed as forms of childness that are employed to explore simultaneously the conflicting and contradictory ideological forces of the nation.

The Civil War is identified as a moment of trauma as a result of its violence but also because of the difficulty of representing and articulating this event within contemporary Irish culture, and specifically in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Bill Kissane sees the war as a natural progression following the War of Independence, and claims that 'eight decades or more after the end of the Irish Civil War there is little sense in which an agreed interpretation of the conflict has emerged among historians, their readers or the general public'.[14] Anne Dolan also acknowledges the controversial position that the war occupies in Irish cultural memory noting that 'the memory of the Irish Civil War has been assumed, distorted, misunderstood. It has been manipulated, underestimated, but most of all ignored' and suggests that 'in the aftermath of the Civil War, memory is a contested thing. In Ireland, despite the occasional newspaper headline that attests smugly to the end of

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[12] Coupling such concepts of an Irish past with childhood aligns Irish history and Irish childhood, an idea that Kiberd develops in *Inventing Ireland* (pp. 101-102). This also corresponds to Valerie Krips' view that the child represents the past of self and of culture (Krips, p. 24).

[13] Geraldine Moane also identifies the Irish Civil War as a form of trauma in Irish culture. See 'Colonialism and the Celtic Tiger: Legacies of History and the Quest for Vision', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 109-23 (p. 116).

[14] Bill Kissane, *The Politics of The Irish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 231. See also Frances M. Blake, *The Irish Civil War and What it Still Means For the Irish People* (London: Information on Ireland, 1986).

bitterness, the race is far from run'.[15] A limited number of cultural texts have attempted to represent the Civil War, such as Aubrey Flegg's novel, *Katie's War*, and the films *The Treaty* (TV), *Broken Harvest*, *Korea*, and the recent award-winning *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*.[16] Also, the controversy that surrounded the release of Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* signifies the reluctance of contemporary Irish culture to engage with these traumatic cultural memories of the Civil War.[17] However, O'Sullivan's representation of the war is particularly significant in that it attempts to avoid such controversy by including the multiple perspectives and conflicting ideologies of the period rather than subscribing to simplistic binaries of Regular and Irregular.[18]

Section 3 of this chapter examines the survival of Alec and Nora and the use of music to articulate their internal conflicts externally. While Section 1 reveals that language is often inaccurate in documenting the past, this final section explores the manner in which verbal language also seems inadequate in expressing the crisis of trauma. Guided by Alec, Nora finds a way to express her concerns and contradictions through the music of Chopin and Beethoven, composers whose revolutionary backgrounds function as intertextual references within the narrative. The theories of Christopher Ballantine and Daniel Barenboim are applied to the text and provide a means of exploring the representation of the relationship between music and society in the novel.[19]

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[15] Dolan, p. 2 and p. 202.

[16] *The Treaty* (Jonathan Lewis, Ireland, 1991); *Broken Harvest* (Maurice O'Callaghan, Ireland, 1994); *Korea* (Cathal Black, Ireland, 1995); and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (Ken Loach, France/Ireland/UK, 2006). For a review of *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, see Shane Coleman, 'Civil War of Words', in the *Sunday Tribune*, Review Section, 4 June 2006, pp. 1-2.

[17] *Michael Collins* (Neil Jordan, Ireland, 1996). For a discussion of these aspects see Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, pp. 140-147.

[18] Valerie Coghlan notes that 'until very recent times, many historical events, particularly those in Ireland's recent past, were too emotionally loaded and too controversial to make appropriate reading for young people' and that 'events such as the Civil War of the early 1920s, which quite literally tore families asunder, and which still has resonance in modern Irish politics, have [now...] been presented by Mark O'Sullivan in *Melody for Nora* (1994) and Aubrey Flegg in *Katie's War* (1997).' See Coghlan, 'Looking Forward, Looking Back' pp. 156 and 157. The version of Irish history in Flegg's novel is extremely detailed, but at times is overly simplistic. His writing of history does not contain the same degree of complexity in narrative structure and content as is evident in O'Sullivan's work. However, it is interesting to note that the idea of perspective is introduced into Flegg's work as he draws attention to the different versions of the shootings in Nenagh (p. 80).

[19] Christopher Ballantine, *Music and its Social Meaning* (New York and London: Gordon and Breach, 1984) and Daniel Barenboim, in an interview in *Parallels and Paradoxes - Explorations in Music and Society: Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said*, ed. by Ara Guzelimian (London: Bloomsbury, 2002). As music is also used to accompany the screening of films in the novel, this process can be read as an analogy of writing about the past and draws upon Christian Metz's psychoanalytic theories of the 'presence of an absence' and relations between past and present. See Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis*

In continuing to read Nora's personal trauma as representative of Ireland's cultural trauma, Nora's articulation of her crisis through music suggests the need for contemporary Irish culture to engage with this moment of the past and to find modes of expression which can similarly communicate a fractured and disjointed past in a coherent form. As is argued below, music is a form of expression that avoids constructing a 'grand narrative' by accommodating contradictory forces within a single artistic medium. Consequently, it will be argued that O'Sullivan is suggesting the need for a similar mode of expression in contemporary cultural texts that engage with the crisis of Ireland's Civil War, a history that is rarely represented in Irish literature and Irish film. This chapter reveals the complex manner in which children's texts can interrogate historical discourses. More significantly, it acknowledges the ability of children's literature to become politicised and to lead the way in engaging with controversial moments in Ireland's past and present.

Section 1. Memory, History and Multiple Perspectives

In problematising the notion of a totalised objective history, O'Sullivan introduces the reader to both personal and public understandings of the past by using a personal dedication which is closely followed by an explanatory note on the public history of the period. In the dedication that precedes the story of Nora, the author addresses the reader directly and acknowledges his personal links to the narrative that follows:

> When we dream
> we make fantastic stories
> from the little details of our lives.
>
> In these pages I've done the same
> with some of the details of
> my grandmother's and my grandaunt's early lives.
>
> I thank them for having lived
> and given me the chance to dream.[20]

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and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier, trans. by Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), pp. 61-64.

[20] *Melody for Nora*, p. 5.

The references to 'dream' pre-empt themes of dreaming and nightmares which Nora experiences in the narrative, a component that is associated with processes of trauma. It also aligns the framework of the novel with ideas of dreaming, possibly paralleling the fractured structure of dreams with O'Sullivan's own fragmented accounts of history, and also the integration of fact and fiction which forms the basis for the text. In thanking his grandmother and grandaunt for 'having lived' and providing him with details of their lives, he informs the reader that many of the events in the narrative are based on stories from his own family history. In an interview O'Sullivan admits that

> the main character is based on this woman who [...] was really a distant cousin of my grandmother's [...] but we called her our grandaunt [...]. What I was doing was reconstructing a life and [...] rekindling her spirit and my grandmother's, and the other side of that was that I wanted to tell my kids about that, about the kind of stuff that did actually happen, her playing the piano and all that stuff like that and relating the family history to my kids.[21]

For the child reader, O'Sullivan establishes access to the past first in terms of personal family history, as individual genealogy is employed as a means of understanding the concept of temporal distance between past and present.[22] This personal link to the past that is evident in the dedication implies the continued presence of memories of the Civil War in contemporary Ireland where the personal memories inform a wider social memory: or as Peter Middleton and Tim Woods note, 'the dominant models of individual memory help shape the self-understanding of social memory'.[23] Individual and social memory are further linked by O'Sullivan's writing of *Melody for Nora* in order to pass the stories on to his daughters, signifying an attempt to represent personal memories and experiences of the Civil War for a younger generation. As

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[21] This approach establishes the text as a form of popular memory, as O'Sullivan admits that he also wished to document some of the incidents in Irish history which receive little analysis in Irish historiographies. This is detailed in his interview. See Appendix. In particular he refers to his examination of newspapers of the period and the incident at Soloheadbeg that instigated the outbreak of the War of Independence. Throughout this chapter, it is also argued that O'Sullivan uncovers local and personal histories with the result that the text functions in terms of popular memory which is concerned with 'the relation between these public discourses in their contemporary state of play and the more privatized sense of the past which is generated within a lived culture'. See The Popular Memory Group, p. 211.

[22] This can also be related to Foucault's theories of genealogy and the construction of 'history of the present'.

[23] Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 85. See Chapter 6 of this thesis for a discussion of the intersection of individual and social memory in *The Boy from Mercury*.

Andreas Huyssen argues in terms of cultural memory, 'the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory' and with the publication of *Melody for Nora*, the private memories no longer remain part of family history but are articulated to become part of a wider social memory for the Irish nation.[24]

As a result, memory in the narrative is established on multiple levels. O'Sullivan draws upon his own memories of the stories that his grandmother and grandaunt have told him. These stories were themselves memories, personal and collective experiences of the Civil War, which have been reconstructed in the narrative which centres on Nora. Therefore, O'Sullivan draws upon a memory of memories, a distancing from original events which influences the reconstruction of events in the text and complicates a reading of the novel when viewed in terms of engaging with the 'truth' of the past. Laurence Kirmayer notes the unreliability of memory in making such truth claims, believing that 'memory is anything but a photographic record of experience; it is a roadway full of potholes, badly in need of repair, worked on day and night by revisionist crews'.[25] While the personal link to the past may authenticate episodes in the novel, the degrees of separation from events question the validity of the narrative content if read in terms of truth claims and, as Hutcheon notes, expose the centrality of perspective in establishing the 'facts' of an event. However, in accessing the past, O'Sullivan does not rely on personal memories alone but also presents the reader with a public historiographical account of events and attempts to frame the narrative within the supposed 'facts' of dominant historical discourse.

The private dedication is followed by a historical footnote that contextualises the events of the narrative that will follow. The account of public events of history mentions the outbreak of the Civil War in Ireland, following the War of Independence with Britain which had ended when '*General Michael Collins had signed a peace treaty the previous year* [1921]'.[26] Those who were not in favour of the terms of the treaty '*took up arms against the new government and its Regular army, forming a force known as the Irregulars*'.[27] This introduces the reader to a different means of

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[24] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.
[25] Laurence J. Kirmayer, 'Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation', in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. by Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 173-98 (p. 176).
[26] *Melody for Nora*, p. 6. Emphasis in original.
[27] Ibid., p. 6.

accessing the past by presenting a linear form of history, with references to official dates and battles found in traditional historiographies.[28]

In contextualising Irish history, O'Sullivan employs a linear concept of the past and mentions relations with Britain, noting the withdrawal of the British Secret Service from Dublin Castle and the creation of the Irish army that replaced the '*hated Black and Tans, who were said to have been drawn from the ranks of criminals and thugs*', a sentence which encourages the reader to side with the Irish struggle against the colonial power and firmly establishes the War of Independence as a necessary component in achieving Irish 'freedom'.[29] However, the presence of British/Irish relations in the narrative is limited as O'Sullivan's text highlights a moment in Irish history which avoids the traditional mode of establishing Irish identity solely in opposition to Britain.[30] Unlike many narratives that deal with the Irish past, the novel offers a site of cultural representation where Ireland is not defined primarily in relation to Britain and, while it may allude to such a colonial history, the text focuses instead on *internal* conflict.

The use of the historical note also exposes the impossibility of writing a completely objective view of the past, and can be read in two contrasting ways. Firstly, within this simple contextualisation, the language chosen explicitly and consciously reveals inherent ideologies in the author's approach. He notes that 'Ireland was at last free – but at the cost of being divided'.[31] When read in the context of reader-response and reception theories, this statement becomes extremely problematic. The phrasing of the sentence prioritises an idea of Ireland, after a long struggle, finally being 'free', and meaning depends on the concept of 'freedom' employed by the reader, along with ideas of what constitutes 'Ireland'. The twenty-six counties that would later form a Republic (in 1949) were indeed in the process of becoming a Free State between 1922 and 1923; however, the six counties of Northern Ireland were not 'free' but remained - and remain - part of the United Kingdom. 'Ireland' implies the island of Ireland, yet the issue of freedom only refers to the twenty-six counties. However, perhaps O'Sullivan's 'Ireland' simply comprises of the

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[28] For a discussion of the Treaty and its aftermath see Oonagh Walsh, *Ireland's Independence, 1880-1923* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 74-88.
[29] *Melody for Nora*, p. 6.
[30] Kiberd notes that 'if England had never existed, the Irish would have been rather lonely. Each nation badly needed the other, for the purpose of defining itself' (p. 2). For a similar argument see also Butler Cullingford, p. 6.
[31] *Melody for Nora*, p. 6.

twenty-six counties, which would exclude Northern Ireland's participation in the struggle. In this context, the reference to 'being divided' may not denote the geographical landmass but the political ideology of those within the twenty-six counties, thus becoming an allusion to the internal conflict of the Civil War in the narrative that follows. This corresponds to Frank Ankersmit's claim that 'saying *true* things about the past is easy – anybody can do that – but saying *right* things about the past is difficult. That truly requires historical insight and originality'.[32] While the events noted in O'Sullivan's brief historiography may be understood as 'true', their accuracy may be questioned.[33] While the emotional association of memories proves unsatisfactory, the historical note equally demonstrates the limitations of historiographical approaches despite attempts to document linear and seemingly logical progressions of history.

Consequently, in representing the past, the novel implies that isolated approaches of both memory and historiography as modes of representing the past prove unsatisfactory as a result of their unreliability. The author merges both methods within a postmodern narrative. Combining the two modes in the creation of a fictional narrative does not foreground issues of 'truth' but provides a version of the past that adopts documentary *and* constructivist styles in the conflation of a fact/fiction binary. Such a reading of the text corresponds to Dominick LaCapra's theories of writing history as he compares what he describes as the extreme positivist documentary approach of historiographies with the radical constructivist style which does not place any great emphasis on what might be termed established fact.[34] LaCapra alludes to the destruction of simplistic binaries when approaching an understanding of the past when he suggests that

> the interaction or mutually interrogative relation between historiography and art (including fiction) is more complicated than is suggested by either an identity or a binary opposition between the two, a point that is becoming increasingly forceful in recent attempts to reconceptualize the study of art and culture.[35]

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[32] Frank Ankersmit, 'Reply to Professor Zagorin', in *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings*, ed. by Brian Fay, Philip Pomper, and Richard T.Vann (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 206-222 (p. 209). Emphasis in original.

[33] Kissane debates the problematisation of historiographies of the Civil War in *The Politics of the Irish Civil War*, pp. 202-230.

[34] See La Capra, pp. 1-5.

[35] Ibid., p. 15.

It is this reconceptualisation that forms a basis for the integration of memories, historiographies and fiction in O'Sullivan's novel. This results in the creation of a narrative framework that can accommodate multiple perspectives and perhaps gain a greater insight into events of the past.

The story of Nora is written using the third-person narrative, a device which presents the action from the observations of an omniscient narrator.[36] Drawing a distinction between 'field memory' and 'observer memory', Peter Middleton and Tim Woods note that the type of narrative voice employed to articulate memory affects the reader's understanding of the past in the narrative: 'A field memory occurs when the rememberer witnesses the scene of a memory from the standpoint in which it was lived, whereas in an observer memory the memory shows oneself within the scene which is then witnessed as a whole'.[37] They continue to suggest that 'realist fiction makes extensive use of this duality, presenting events in the third person as if they were observer memories for various characters, and using the first person for the field memories' and that the use of third person creates 'the sense of closely rendered observer memories'.[38] In this context, O'Sullivan does not write a first-person narrative which may limit the memory of the past to a single viewpoint, but creates an omniscient narrator which observes the multiple perspectives and contradictions of the past.

In a manner similar to Siobhán Parkinson's approach to the 1916 Easter Rising, O'Sullivan presents the reader with various viewpoints of the Civil War, situating good and bad characters on both sides of the conflict: thus the novel can be understood in terms of postmodern histories.[39] As a result, the author does not pledge allegiance to either side but subverts the Regular/Irregular dichotomy with a binary of good and evil, a point which is explicitly revealed to the reader at various stages in the novel, such as when the character of Molly explains to Nora that 'there's evil on both sides and good on both sides, but the longer it goes on the less good there is on either side'.[40] This concept is reiterated by the character of Colonel O'Brien as he states that members of the Irregulars *and* the Regulars are involved in the spate of robberies and

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[36] For an examination of the use of narrative voice in children's literature, see Barbara Wall.
[37] Middleton and Woods, p. 89.
[38] Ibid., p. 89.
[39] For a discussion of postmodern histories, see the Introduction to this thesis.
[40] *Melody for Nora*, p. 69.

that 'there may be a few bad apples on both sides in on it'.[41] It is primarily through the representations of the characters that O'Sullivan presents not only the perspectives of the events, but also the foundations of such viewpoints.

This is evident in the complex construction of the Regular/Irregular dichotomy in the text. From the outset, Peter refers to the character of Jack in affectionate terms as 'the lad', and thus the reader is encouraged to identify with the character before he/she learns of the violent acts that he has committed.[42] In contrast, Nora opines that 'those Irregulars do terrible things', highlighting the nature of the Irregulars' activities.[43] As Nora tends to Jack, the narrator tells the reader that 'it occurred to her that there were many others in these awful days who cried out for help too. All too often it was because of actions of men like Jack'.[44] It is at this point that Nora begins to view the conflict in more personal terms and soon she identifies the personal motivation behind the killing: she comes to see Jack as a 'decent man [...] fighting not simply for the sake of fighting but for a cause he believed in', and realises 'that he had done wrong for what he was convinced was the right reason'.[45] While killing is not condoned, the motivations behind his actions are accommodated. As a result, Jack is separated from the other Irregulars such as Reilly, who is presented as a malicious character and talks in 'sinister tones'.[46] Reilly is paralleled with Captain Doyle, a member of the Regular army who is also represented as morally corrupt (for example, in his merciless actions in the Parnell Hall) and who colludes with Reilly to carry out a series of robberies in the town and shoot Colonel O'Brien.[47] Of all their crimes, the one that is presented as the most deplorable is the burglary of the priest's house:

> 'It's gone beyond the beyonds,' Molly said in despair. 'They broke into the Parish Priest's house and fired a shot over his head. Have they lost all sense of decency?'
>
> 'The priest's house!' Nora repeated in astonishment.'[48]

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[41] Ibid., p. 100.
[42] Ibid., p. 40.
[43] Ibid., p. 68.
[44] Ibid., p. 123.
[45] Ibid., p. 157 and p. 159. In his interview O'Sullivan notes that Jack is 'essentially a good guy who is drawn into this situation where he knows morally he should never have gone. Idealistically he thinks he has to. It's all about someone who is personally unhappy but is quite a brave and strong person'. See *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix.
[46] *Melody for Nora*, p. 197.
[47] Ibid., p. 148 and p. 205.
[48] Ibid., p. 138.

The Irregulars' treatment of the clergy may be an allusion to the tense relationship between the two groups as the Catholic Church denounced Republican opposition to the Treaty and branded the Irregulars as 'murderers'.[49] In contrast to the 'evil' Irregulars, Jack is paralleled with O'Brien, a Regular. Jack says of him 'you couldn't find a more honourable man in Ireland', thus exploring the concept that the true conflict is primarily between good and evil as opposed to Regular and Irregular.[50] This idea is later reinforced by Alec as he recites from René Arcos' World War I poem, 'The Dead', which illustrates that no matter which side one is on in battle, 'the dead are all on the same side'.[51]

In response to the conflict, Molly endorses initial reviews of the Irregulars and introduces a female perspective of history into the narrative: "'I know, I know but the Free State boys are no angels either [...]. One thing is certain," Molly murmured, "that we women will be left picking up the pieces"'.[52] While the public history of Regulars and Irregulars is dominated by male characters, the female characters of Molly and Nora initially seem confined to the domestic sphere. However, as the novel progresses, Nora transgresses these traditional gender boundaries and plays a major role in public events. O'Sullivan acknowledges that in writing for his daughters he deliberately tried to create strong female characters:

> I wanted to tell my daughters that sexes achieve in the same way. In effect I suppose this seems almost redundant in some ways now because society has changed, but even fifteen years ago, which is when I began to sit down and think about writing for my own kids, it wasn't so obvious, particularly down the country it wasn't so obvious. So that was definitely an intention, strong female characters that they could identify with for a start but also see that they could be as strong as they wanted to be.[53]

Nora's strength of character becomes evident at several moments in the novel and intertextual references to strong women in history support her determination. Early in the narrative, Nora notes that she had gone to see the film *Joan of Arc* with her

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[49] See Michael Hopkinson, *Green against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), p. 182.
[50] *Melody for Nora*, p. 130.
[51] Ibid., p. 171.
[52] Ibid., p. 68.
[53] See *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix. Strong young female characters are evident throughout O'Sullivan's work such as Lida Hendel in *More Than a Match*, Mayfly in *Silent Stones* and Nance in *White Lies*.

mother. Following the film, Annie comments to Nora that 'a woman can do as much as any man and be just as brave, and by God, in this world she has to be!', mirroring the exchange that is occurring between O'Sullivan and his daughters.[54] It is also significant that the films mentioned by the author contain female stars, indicating that the possibilities and opportunities that exist for women are not limited to the domestic sphere.[55]

Throughout the novel, she is reluctant to believe that she has the same opportunities as men, as her debate with Alec reveals: '"But you're a man,' she said impatiently, "you can go anywhere you want to. You're not trapped like I am"'.[56] It is not until toward the end of the narrative that she takes control of her own situation, refuses to wait for Peter to return and offer advice, and sneaks out to assist Jack and Alec.[57] As a result of documenting the experiences of a young girl during the period, O'Sullivan's text may be seen as operating within the context of subaltern studies, and functions in terms of popular memory as an act of recovery that represents female involvement in the history of the nation.[58] Chapter 1 discussed the frequent exclusion of the role of women in Irish history from traditional historiographies and, as David Lloyd writes: 'One is continually struck in reading standard histories of modern Ireland by how little attention is paid to the importance of feminism in the national struggle or to the significance of the links between republicanism and suffrage'.[59] Myrtle Hill notes the importance of foregrounding the experiences of women and revealing that 'women were, in the main, neither silent nor passive observers of the

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[54] *Melody for Nora*, p. 51.

[55] Ibid. p. 87. This also poses an interesting debate in the writing and re-writing of history. In the novel, O'Sullivan notes that the film *Black is White* starred 'Dorothy Watson', however the actress' name was in fact Dorothy Dalton. See the Internet Movie Database at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0010995/> [accessed 2 June 2006]. O'Sullivan claims that he got the information from reading the local newspapers of the time (see Interview), so perhaps the mistake was in the initial newspaper report. This instance reveals how the 'facts' of history can be easily distorted. If the error was in the newspaper, then the 'facts' of history that were recorded were incorrect. This reveals that accessing a historical record does not always result in getting the facts right. If the mistake was made as a result of a simple clerical error on behalf of O'Sullivan, then it was the author who 'misread' the facts of history. Either way, the presence of the errors in the novel can perpetuate a misreading of history for the child reader.

[56] *Melody for Nora*, p. 127.

[57] Ibid., pp. 188-189.

[58] See Lloyd (pp. 77–88) for a discussion of Ireland and subaltern studies. See also *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Guha and Spivak. As Luke Gibbons argues: 'to reclaim the memory of those who have been forgotten or who have been written out of history in these circumstances is not to indulge in the self-absorption of victim culture but the opposite; to engage in an act of ethical imagination in which one's own uneven development becomes not just a way in, but a way out, a means of empathising with other peoples and societies in similar situations today'. See Gibbons 'A Global Cure?' p. 104. O'Sullivan 'reclaims' memory in a similar way.

[59] Lloyd, p. 40.

world they inhabited, but played their part in determining its direction'.[60] Therefore, O'Sullivan's text represents an attempt to reclaim some of the lost narrative of women's history in Ireland.[61]

It is also possible to read Nora's argument with her father as an assertion of her independence and a rejection of patriarchal authority as she shouts 'shut up, Daddy!'.[62] This section can be interpreted on a number of levels. In terms of gender theory, Nora's assertion that 'all you want is a maid' may be a challenge to conservative ideologies associated with patriarchal culture, but it can also be read in metaphorical terms when viewed in the context of child/adult relations and postcolonialism.[63] The relationship between Nora and her father can be understood as analogous to that between Ireland and Britain, as Mr Canavan is depicted as exploitative and abusive parent at the beginning of the novel. It is possible to apply Joseph Zornado's theories of children's literature and imperialism to gain an understanding of Nora's advancement toward adulthood which can be read as a shift in and renegotiation of child/adult power relations in terms of colonialism and postcolonialism.[64] Nora asserts herself and mirrors the Free State's new-found independence and desire to demonstrate the confidence that it had acquired during the period. Therefore, the text allows for a proliferation of voices in expressing attitudes toward the conflict.

As a result, the complexities of the Regular and Irregular involvement in the war introduces moments of 'discontinuity' into the metanarrative of history as it counters any notion of a simplistic binary. Similarly, Foucault's theories of 'descent'

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[60] Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2003), p. 13. Margaret Ward notes the need to continue to reclaim the role of women in Irish history stating that 'if we do not win this battle, then not only will our past as Irish women be forgotten about once again, but so too will our present, and contemporary accounts of the campaigns and sacrifices of the past decades will be in danger of the same fate' (p. 22). See also Chapter 1 of this thesis for a further discussion of these issues. It is also of interest to note the role that women played in the public history of the period and that 'radical feminists [...] unanimously opposed the compromised Free State that was established in 1922'. See Lloyd, p. 29.

[61] See also Mary E. Daly, "Oh Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!'- The Condition of Women in Twentieth Century Ireland', in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, ed. by Anthony Bradley and Maryann G. Valiulis (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), pp. 102-126; and Sinéad McCoole, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years 1900-1923* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2004). In the Introduction to McCoole's book, Margaret Ward notes that 'the role of women in revolutionary Irish nationalist movements is still under-researched and underestimated' (p. 13).

[62] *Melody for Nora*, p. 177.

[63] Ibid., p. 177.

[64] Zornado, p. 102. For similar arguments relating to child/adult power dynamics, also see Charles Sarland, 'Ideology', in *The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, p. 41; Roger Cox, p. 6; and Rose, p. 19.

and the contradictory nature of history are useful in understanding and unearthing women's histories.[65] By incorporating historiography and memory into a postmodern framework, O'Sullivan avoids constructing a simplistic linear account of the war and reveals the 'haphazard' composition of history. This chaotic nature of history and the difficulties of representing it in a coherent form reflect the chaotic processes of trauma experienced by the characters in the narrative and thus reinforce ideas of disjointedness and fragmentation throughout the novel.

Section 2. Private and Public Traumas

Nora's Trauma

From the opening of the novel it is possible to read Nora's experiences as representative of the broader cultural events occurring at the time in which the novel is set, as childhood is repeatedly aligned with the Irish nation. Nora's story begins with a literal nightmare,[66] a series of disjointed images that set the tone for the thematic style of the novel, and corresponds to Cathy Caruth's argument that dreams and hallucinations feature as common symptoms of trauma. The nightmare pre-empts some of the events that Nora will experience when she moves to Tipperary, or the 'landscape of new discovery'.[67] The sense of loss and isolation which Nora later feels is alluded to by references to her absent family as she 'was convinced that she had only imagined that her mother and father and the two boys had ever existed. Where she had come from and where she was going she had no idea'. Nora's nightmare continues as she feels that 'close behind her someone was standing, watching, listening'.[68] This is possibly a reference to Jack who later watches Nora at her bedroom window and enters her bedroom.[69] It is also possible to interpret this nightmare as a metaphor for Ireland and its break from the British Empire as it too became a 'landscape of new discovery' where the birth of the independent Irish nation represented a moment of potential and possibility.

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[65] See the Introduction to this thesis for an overview of Foucault's theories in relation to 'descent'. Similarly, Lloyd notes that 'the apparent discontinuity of popular memory becomes the index of its refusal of developmental histories' (p. 42).

[66] *Melody for Nora*, pp. 7-8. This nightmare may also be read in terms of postmodern histories and the fragmented nature of memory and of the past.

[67] *Melody for Nora*, p. 7.

[68] Ibid., p. 7.

[69] Ibid., pp. 64-66. Jack's transgression can also be read as indicative of the impingement of public events of the Civil War on the private life of the individual.

This idea of independence is reinforced by the reference to the loss of family, possibly an allusion to Britain as the 'mother country', while Ireland was also in a period of significant transition, where the citizens of the country could not predict the direction of future events or where it all 'was going'.[70] The sense of there being a stranger within signifies an internal threat; similarly Ireland, free from the British Empire must now deal with its internal conflicts in the form of the Civil War. In the dream Nora is playing a melody on the piano, one that seems to flow easily, until her hands begin to bleed. Terrorised by the experience she turns to the stranger for help, but he has disappeared. Again, the bleeding fingers, which interrupt the melody, can be read as the bloody Civil War which halted Ireland's new-found harmony, and the helplessness arises from the realisation that independence now prohibited a reliance on external aid from Britain. As the piano 'crashed with an almighty bang', Nora's melody and Ireland's sense of harmony come to an end, a theme which forms the central basis of the novel as Nora's dream emerges as a metaphoric reference point for an Irish cultural nightmare.[71]

This alignment of child and nation continues in a slightly different form throughout the narrative as O'Sullivan parallels the assassination of Michael Collins with the death of Nora's mother, noting that the

> young priest rushing through the prayers at Mrs Canavan's graveside felt a twinge of guilt. Like most of those present his mind was preoccupied with another death – one they could not help thinking was infinitely more important than this sadness in the hearts of the Canavans.[72]

The reader is presented with the alignment of cultural and personal loss, an intrinsic metaphoric parallel, with both Ireland and Nora losing a parent. This is further reinforced when Nora arrives in Tipperary with her aunt and uncle as they are greeted by Colonel O'Brien. O'Brien sympathises with Peter and Molly over the death of Annie, which is shortly followed by a discussion of Michael Collins: 'They talked

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[70] Melody for Nora, p. 7.
[71] Ibid., p. 8.
[72] Ibid., p. 16. Civil War broke out on 28 June 1922 and Michael Collins was killed on 22 August 1922. See Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hutchinson, 2003), pp. 120-121. The war ended on 24 May 1923. See Dolan, p. 4. Glasnevin Cemetery (where, as O'Sullivan notes, Collins was buried) has become established as a site of nationalist pilgrimage because of the important political funerals that have been held there. See Pauric Travers, 'Our Fenian Dead: Glasnevin Cemetery and the Genesis of a Republican Funeral', in *Dublin and Dubliners*, ed. by James Kelly and Uáitéar MacGearailt (Dublin: Helicon, 1990), pp. 52-72 (pp. 66-67).

sadly for a few minutes about the death of Michael Collins and how he would be missed in the long years ahead'.[73] In this way, the two deaths are explicitly linked within the text.

This move from Dublin to Tipperary has a profound effect upon Nora who struggles to cope with her new surroundings amidst Civil War conflicts in the town. The separation of Nora's family and the accompanying sense of loss of a previously stable and cohesive environment can be read as a traumatic experience for the fourteen-year-old. In this discussion, 'trauma' is identified (in Caruth's terms) as a particular experience that produces symptoms of extreme stress and anxiety. Nora's trauma arises from the death of her mother and the subsequent events and conflicts which place her in a position of fear and isolation.[74] This is a 'severe trauma [which] explodes the cohesion of consciousness' for the child character as her life and sense of unity are thrown into disarray.[75] Through the character of Nora, O'Sullivan explores the impact of memory and trauma on the individual and then relates it to the experiences of the nation.

It is significant that Nora travels to Tipperary by train, as the Victorians often associated modern rail travel with trauma. As Kirby Farrell notes 'Railway travel brought an epidemic of symptoms such as anxiety reactions, phobias, and the specific conversion hysterias – paralysis or loss of responsiveness in part of the body – called "railway spine"', elements which come to the fore of Nora's character as she makes the transition from Dublin to Tipperary life.[76] This section of the novel represents the disempowerment and helplessness of Nora as a force stronger than herself removes her from her previous life. The journey signals a physical dislocation that is accompanied by an emotional dislocation.[77] This is evident in her hysteria on the train:

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[73] *Melody for Nora*, p. 39. As is discussed below, this paralleling of Annie and Collins becomes increasingly significant when Annie's relationship with Jack, the Irregular, is read as a failed romance.

[74] This corresponds to O'Sullivan's desire to depict characters as 'outsiders'. See *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix.

[75] Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Anthenaeum, 1994), cited in Kirby Farrell, p. 1.

[76] Kirby Farrell, p. 9.

[77] For a further discussion of railway travel and modernity see Nicholas Daly *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 10-34, and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (1977) (Hamburg and New York: Berg Publishers, 1986).

> The train gave a sudden lurch and began to move along by the platform. Now, even the roar of the engine under the station roof was not enough to drown the cry that seemed to rip through her and it took all the strength she could muster to contain it.[78]

This passage also reveals the emotional state of the character through a series of outbursts to her Aunt Molly and also to a fellow passenger:

> 'I don't care!' she fumed privately.
> The woman opposite peered out over her newspaper crossly, exclaiming: 'I beg your pardon!'
> 'Mind your own business!' Nora shouted and every head in the carriage turned toward her.[79]

As a result, the intertwining of the physical and psychological distancing of Nora from her former life is emphasised. Space also becomes an important signifier when read in terms of Wolfgang Schivelbusch's assertion that rail travel was characterised by an 'annihilation of space and time'.[80] The train journey can be understood as a spatial metaphor as Nora's experiences of ever-decreasing spaces mirrors Ireland's journey toward independence and partition. Nora moves from being part of a large metropolis to a life of isolation in a small rural town and is finally confined to her little bedroom after she falls down the stairs.[81] It is while recuperating in her room that she 'vowed never to be fooled by the childish hope that led you to expect great wonders in your life and, in the end, left you disappointed'.[82] Similarly, this can correspond to a sense of Ireland's decreasing space, from being part of the British Empire to a small isolated island, which is further reduced to twenty-six counties after partition; post- revolutionary hopes of an independent united Ireland had also been 'shattered'[83] as the Civil War 'woke us up from the mesmerism of the romantic dream'.[84]

The trauma which leads to an emotional and physical paralysis is evident at the end of the train journey as Nora resolves that 'there was no going on – nor was

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[78] *Melody for Nora*, p. 33.
[79] Ibid., p. 33.
[80] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, p. 33.
[81] *Melody for Nora*, p. 59.
[82] Ibid., p. 59.
[83] Ibid., p. 59.
[84] '1916–1941: Tradition and Creation', *The Bell*, 2.1 (Apr. 1941), 11, cited in Dolan, p. 149. No author given.

there any turning back'.[85] This refusal to participate in her new surroundings heightens her sense of loneliness and alienation in her new Tipperary environment as she decides not to cooperate with her aunt and uncle: 'no matter how much they did for her, no matter what they said she would despise them and this new life she was being forced to lead'.[86] This isolation and helplessness receives symbolic significance as Nora falls down the stairs and remains bedridden and incapacitated for a number of days.[87] Her social exclusion is increased both mentally and physically as she enters a state of physical paralysis. During this period, she stubbornly resists the efforts of Peter and Molly to help her become part of the community, such as telling Alec that she never wants to see another piano again.[88] She refuses to take part in the film screenings and decides that only when the troubles are over will she 'put aside her promise never to play the piano again'.[89] As a result, neither mind nor body are willing to progress and she places herself in a liminal space of trauma, frozen between the past and the future.[90] The link between this type of personal trauma and the trauma of culture is made by Kirby Farrell as he suggests that

> in trauma, terror overwhelms not just the self, but the ground of the self, which is to say our trust in the world. In this way trauma is an injury not just to the central nervous system or to the psyche, but also to the culture which sustains body and soul'.[91]

Nora's loss of trust in the world mirrors Ireland's trauma of the Civil War, with the internal conflicts where 'brothers and sisters, parents and children took different sides' resulting in a period of political stagnation with little forward movement.[92]

It is this paralysis which leads to isolation and ultimately forms Nora's identity, while the trauma that she experiences places her in the position of an outsider. However, similar to the character of OD in *White Lies*, Nora is not as unique as she had hoped.[93] As she encounters Alec and Jack, she recognises that she is not

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[85] *Melody For Nora*, p. 35. In *Silent Stones*, Robby also experiences nightmares and finds himself 'alone in the white room of his paralysis' (p. 130).
[86] *Melody for Nora*, p. 34.
[87] Ibid., p. 55.
[88] Ibid., p. 60.
[89] Ibid., p. 71.
[90] The narrator describes it as 'a strange world somewhere between dream and nightmare', *Melody for Nora*, p. 59.
[91] Kirby Farrell, p. xii.
[92] Dolan, p. 3.
[93] See *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix, for a discussion of the character OD.

alone in feeling excluded. She realises that she and Jack 'were both [...] outcasts in their different ways', while Alec says to her, 'we're both on our own and it doesn't matter how nice people are to us, we still feel like we're locked out from the world we want to be in'.[94] It is the sense of trauma and isolation experienced by all three that brings them together, causing the outcasts to form their own community: this corresponds to Kirby Farrell's view that 'responses to trauma may be a means of creating social bonds.'[95]

Alec's Trauma

The inability to overcome memories of the past is further reinforced by the character of Alec Smithson who is also established as an outsider in several ways. Peter notes that Alec is now disowned by his family, telling Nora that 'I don't think his people have much time for him', a separation which aligns his situation with that of Nora.[96] Alec is also an outsider in the Tipperary community, an alcoholic who is described by Mrs Roche as a 'waster'.[97] In contrast to Nora's trauma which is caused by her private history, Alec's trauma arises from his involvement in public history as the alcoholism results from his attempts to escape the horrors of his time in the trenches during World War I.[98] He is also isolated from people in the community who look upon his membership of the British army as a betrayal,[99] as is revealed in the narrator's description of Nora's reaction:

> It didn't surprise her that he'd been in the British Army. In fact it seemed to fit perfectly with his sense of being different. What did surprise her was that he and her uncle, who had fought

[94] *Melody for Nora*, p. 67 and p. 127.
[95] Kirby Farrell, p. 18.
[96] *Melody for Nora*, p. 108.
[97] Ibid., p. 110.
[98] Kirby Farrell notes that 'Victorian theories of trauma deepened considerably when World War I sent home a generation of "shell-shocked" men. The victims suffered a host of torments from catatonic immobility and suicidal depression to fits of rage' (p. 10). In Aubrey Flegg's *Katie's War*, Katie's father also suffers from the trauma of participating in World War I, as his experiences in the trenches influence his pacifist ideologies. See Flegg, pp. 44-46.
[99] Ireland's participation in World War I is still a problematic issue as is demonstrated by the controversy surrounding the wearing of poppies on Remembrance Day. See Nuala C. Johnson, *Ireland, The Great War and the Geography of Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Michael Hughes also sees the war as a turning point in Irish history claiming that 'the significance of the Great War for Ireland was that it created the circumstances which led to a form of psychological partition which could not have been predicted before the war.' See *Ireland Divided: The Roots of The Modern Irish Problem* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. 235. For a similar discussion see also David Fitzpatrick, 'Commemoration in the Irish Free State: A Chronicle of Embarrassment', in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. by Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 184-203.

> against the British, were apparently such good friends. She'd often heard her father describe fights in the bars he frequented, between Republicans and ex-British soldiers – all of them nonetheless Irish men.[100]

O'Sullivan also avoids an over-simplification of Irish history by referring to the friendship of Peter and Alec despite Alec 'having fought alongside the old enemy in the Great War', and highlights the complicated nature of British-Irish relations.[101] The narrator's pointed reference to 'all of them nonetheless Irish men' challenges traditional binaries of 'Irish versus British' that are found in many nationalist histories as well as in texts for children, such as Gerard Whelan's *The Guns of Easter*.[102] O'Sullivan reveals that it is possible to accommodate contradictory viewpoints and to distinguish individual personal traits from group affiliations. Peter is still able to overlook Alec's former political ideologies and treat him as a friend; similarly, Nora helps Jack despite disapproving of his involvement with the Irregulars.

However, not all the characters are as accommodating as Peter. Alec is initially reluctant to help Jack as he says to Nora, 'do you realise what you are asking me to do [...]. These lads have been shooting ex-British army men like myself'.[103] Once again, it is only when the individual is separated from the group and Alec sees beyond Jack's political allegiances that he decides to help, realising that 'he's a good sort'.[104] In this sense, the relations between the characters function as a microcosm of the structure of the novel when read in terms of reception theory. As the characters accommodate each other, despite many traits conflicting with their own ideologies, the reader is also presented with a series of conflicting discourses which he/she can understand and accommodate simultaneously.

Alec's assistance to Jack continues as he takes Jack's place under the stage in the Parnell Hall.[105] Following this event, the real trauma of Alec's life is revealed: 'Inside in that hole under the stage, it was like being in the trenches again [...]. The

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[100] *Melody for Nora*, p. 58.
[101] Ibid., p. 58.
[102] For a representation of Michael Collins in children's literature, see Gerard Whelan's *A Winter of Spies* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998).
[103] *Melody for Nora*, p. 114.
[104] Ibid., p. 114.
[105] The events in the Parnell Hall are based on a true story; see *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix. As a result, this episode functions in terms of popular memory, as a social memory of a local incident is documented by O'Sullivan. The name of the Hall is also significant as an intertextual reference to Charles Stewart Parnell and connotations of nationalism and revolution.

past is always there waiting for you, isn't it, girl? Waiting to drag you down.'[106] As a result of her own trauma, Nora begins to understand the profound effect of World War I on Alec and the reasons behind his alcoholism. Consequently, she too is attracted by the release offered by his bottle of whiskey; 'She was tempted to taste it, it looked so good, its promise of escape so reassuring'.[107]

Alec's desire to forget his mental scars is then paralleled with his attempt to cover the physical manifestations of war. O'Sullivan once again aligns physical and emotional wounds as Alec wears black leather gloves in order to conceal his damaged hands, describing them as 'not a pleasant sight'.[108] However, as discussed in Section 3, despite missing a finger, the wounds of war cannot prevent him from playing the piano and finding some comfort in music.[109] When he finally removes his gloves, Nora 'grinned and felt strangely proud of the fact that he no longer hid his wounds' as the horrors of past traumas are overcome by a recognition and acknowledgement of the scars that are there.[110] In terms of trauma theory, this acceptance of the scars can be viewed as a 'working through' of trauma.[111] It becomes evident throughout the narrative that Alec must acknowledge the reality of the past and his current situation, and refrain from suppressing and hiding his wounds, both mental and physical, in order to build a brighter future for himself.

Jack's Trauma

As Alec hides beneath the stage, his wartime past is aligned with Jack's current struggle. In common with Alec and Nora, Jack is also established as an outsider and his trauma can be understood as a metaphor for the Civil War. When Jack is compared with Nora, the narrator notes her sentiments that 'They were both, she felt, outcasts in their different ways', while hiding beneath the stage aligns Jack's current struggle with Alec's wartime past.[112] As an Irregular, it is possible to read Jack as being separated from official government politics and excluded from major sources of power and from many people in the town who disagree with his motives. According

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[106] *Melody for Nora*, p. 152.
[107] Ibid., pp. 166-167.
[108] Ibid., p. 58.
[109] Ibid., p. 60.
[110] Ibid., p. 173.
[111] See LaCapra, p. 22.
[112] *Melody for Nora*, p. 67. Characters who are considered outcasts also feature dominantly throughout O'Sullivan's ouevre, such as Lida in *More Than a Match*, OD in *White Lies*, and Robby in *Silent Stones*.

to the vote held, which indicated that the majority of citizens accepted the terms of the Treaty, the Irregulars, along with several opposing politicians, were in a minority.[113] For Jack, trauma is present in the form of memories of the past. He is unwilling to accept the Treaty and to end the bloodshed, which weighs heavy on his mind as he tells Nora that during the Civil War he has murdered people: '"I've killed, Nora", he said so quietly she could just about hear. "Killed my enemies and people that were once my friends"'.[114] Similar to Alec and Nora, Jack is overwhelmed by memories of the past and, as a result, he concludes that 'Even if I live to see the end of this war [...] I'll never be the same again. I'll never have a minute's peace or rest'.[115] This struggle to come to terms with his past is also evident as he dwells on thoughts of his childhood sweetheart, Annie, who was Nora's mother.

Jack's trauma results from being haunted by memories of the past and those he has killed, and adheres to the idea that the 'core experience of trauma is violence'.[116] This theme of haunting increases in significance when, from a distance, Jack sees Nora standing at her mother's bedroom window and stares 'upwards in her direction as if he'd seen a ghost', concluding that Nora is Annie.[117] Jack later tells Nora, 'You're the image of your mother [...]. The other night when I saw you at the window, I got an awful fright'.[118] Nora's resemblance to her mother is established throughout the text, as is evident in Colonel O'Brien's assertion that 'Your mother'll never be gone while you're around' and his comment to Molly that 'She's the image of her, isn't she'.[119] Jack's error symbolises the oppressive manner in which the past can inform the present, one of the central themes of the novel. Nora's resemblance to her and the supposed sighting of a ghost allude to ideas of the physical manifestation of the past in the present.[120]

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[113] See Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, p. 110.
[114] *Melody for Nora*, p. 139.
[115] Ibid., p. 139. It is interesting to note that Jack uses the word 'killed' while Nora sees it as 'murder' (p. 164), again exposing inherent ideologies in the description and construction of perspectives of history. This also echoes the Bishops' denunciation of the Republicans in describing the killing as 'murder before God'. See Hopkinson, p. 182. For a discussion of language and its ideological function in children's literature, see Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*.
[116] Kirby Farrell, p. 14.
[117] *Melody for Nora*, p. 64.
[118] Ibid., p. 97.
[119] Ibid., p. 39. Jack also tells Nora that 'you sound very much like your mother', *Melody for Nora*, p. 93.
[120] This idea of the presence of an absence is discussed later in this chapter in relation to the use of film in the narrative.

Jack's obsession with the memory of Annie becomes increasingly significant as the narrative develops and it is revealed that they were once in love and, as explored below, their relationship becomes a metaphor for the Civil War. He admits that 'It broke my heart when I heard that she was gone' and her death now symbolises the impossibility of him ever reuniting with his sweetheart.[121] The love between Annie and Jack is evident in the poem that Nora discovers in her mother's bedroom, described as 'her mother's words from a happier time'.[122] The poem refers to a place in the woods where the two lovers used to meet, and Nora later identifies the location as that of Jack's 'safe house' when she attempts to aid him.[123] It is in this place that Jack is later killed: he dies in the arms of Nora, perhaps a close substitute for Annie, or the representation of the presence of an absence, a concept which is discussed below in detail in relation to the use of film in the novel.[124] As a result, the private location of the love affair gets fused with public politics and once again suggests that the character of Annie can be read as Michael Collins. It is possible to understand Jack, who has a failed union with Annie, as the representative of an ideal past that is now impossible. Jack's mission for reunification is doomed to failure: he can only be reunited with Annie in death. In this way it can be argued that the novel dramatises themes of the reunification of Ireland during the period. Like Annie and Jack, Collins and those who opposed the Treaty were once on the same side until they followed separate ideologies. With the subsequent death of Collins and resulting absence, the union that once existed could never be restored.

Many of these ideas are evident in the love poem which symbolises a 'happier time' for the nation. The War of Independence represented a moment of great potential for the Irish people and their new government with the possibility of an Irish Republic, free from British rule.[125] The poem, dedicated to 'My Sweetheart', signifies a unification but also alludes to the multiple possibilities in the near future and the hope of a new beginning. This is evident in the reference to a 'sunlit day in Spring', Ireland having emerged from a 'winter' of colonialism.[126] The 'budding trees' also

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[121] *Melody for Nora*, p. 97.
[122] Ibid., p. 76.
[123] Ibid., p. 186.
[124] Ibid., p. 200.
[125] Margaret O'Callaghan writes that in 1922 'Pearse's clarity of vision was a luxury the nation could no longer afford'. 'Language, Neutrality, and Cultural Identity in the Irish Free State, 1922-7: The *Irish Statesman and the Catholic Bulletin* Reappraised', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 24.94 (Nov. 1984), 226-245 (227).
[126] *Melody for Nora*, p. 76.

represent a rebirth for the Irish people while the reference to 'a cottage bare' recognises the potential and possibilities that can arise from the various political structures that remain after the British withdrawal which has left 'bare' the governing bodies of the nation.[127] Jack and Annie, like Ireland and its new leaders, have the capacity to use the framework in order to realise their own dreams or their 'very own home'.[128] However, for Jack and for the Ireland of the period, these dreams are shattered as the house does not become a home for lovers, but a hideout for killers.[129] Jack is unable to overcome the loss of Annie and the loss of a section of Ireland in the form of the Treaty. Alarmingly, he only finds peace from his anxiety in death, which possibly signifies the consequences of not overcoming the traumas of the past. Similar to Nora and Alec, Jack's trauma arises from dwelling on the past, an obsession which greatly impacts upon the present and creates a form of paralysis. Whereas Jack's inability to move on becomes self-destructive and leads to death, Nora and Alec articulate their anxieties through the medium of music, work through their trauma, and live.[130]

Ireland's Trauma

Through the representation of trauma in the novel, O'Sullivan creates a narrative that encourages an understanding of conflicting ideologies and the possibility of accommodating multiple viewpoints simultaneously, as Nora, Alec and Jack learn from each other's experiences. Through a combination of memories, historiographies and fiction, O'Sullivan documents the past in a postmodern form and establishes Nora as a site of negotiation where conflicting ideas emerge, a technique which allows for the exploration of the complexities of the Civil War. As a result, it is possible to understand the text in terms of LaCapra's work as he suggests that by fusing history and fiction, an author can give 'at least a plausible "feel" for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods'.[131] By encouraging the reader to identify with the personal traumas, O'Sullivan also

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[127] Ibid., p. 77. The reference to 'the cottage' may also be an allusion to Wall's cottage in Knockanaffrin, Co. Wexford where the leaders of the Republican movement had gathered to discuss the end of the Civil War in 1923. See Dolan, p. 94.

[128] *Melody for Nora*, p. 77.

[129] Again, it is possible to read the cottage as a metaphor for Ireland. Instead of peace and unity, the nation becomes filled with violence and terror.

[130] In *Silent Stones*, Robby also finds a means of coping by immersing himself in the music of Jeff Buckley.

[131] La Capra, p. 13.

facilitates a comprehension of the Civil War in terms of a public trauma, thus encouraging the reader to engage with both personal and public history on an empathetic level.[132] This use of personal trauma to explore a national moment of crisis also allows for an understanding of Irish cultural paralysis through Nora's paralysis. Thus the child character can be understood as representative of Ireland, both past and present.

Nora may be understood as a metonym for Ireland during the Civil War as her lack of forward movement mirrors the stagnation in Irish society during the war. However, her paralysis also functions as a metaphor for contemporary Ireland and its refusal to represent the war, thus signifying the nation's failure to acknowledge and work through its own cultural trauma. Documenting or writing about the Irish Civil War raises controversial debates regarding the conflict in Northern Ireland as the signing of the Treaty is often viewed as the primary cause of the continued partition and violence.[133] This is reflected in the work of Bill Kissane as he notes that 'the key issue in the civil war – how Irish republicanism could be reconciled to a democratic but 26-county state – remains a source of contention in the early twenty-first century, and the current growth of Sinn Féin ensures that it will remain so'.[134] The lack of representation of the Civil War may be seen as a way of avoiding the uncomfortable Northern 'question': after events in Northern Ireland in 1968 and 1969 'there could be no reminders of a divided south' for fear that an analysis of the causes of the Civil War may endorse the armed conflict in the six counties.[135] In October 1990, at the opening of the Collins Heritage Centre, EC Commissioner Peter Sutherland spoke out against using Irish history as a justification for current battles and said that 'those who are carrying out vicious and sordid acts of murder and pointless violence in Northern Ireland today must never be allowed to involve the name or the authority of those who took part in the War of Independence, and least of all Michael Collins, to justify their crimes'.[136]

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[132] The exploration of the emotional and the rational in O'Sullivan's work stem from his readings of writers such as William James and Antonio Damasio. See *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix. See also William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981) and Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes's Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994).

[133] O'Sullivan notes his interest in Northern politics in his interview (Appendix). This is also evident in *Silent Stones* which deals with the impact of IRA violence on Robby's family life.

[134] Kissane, p. 231.

[135] Dolan, p. 56.

[136] *Southern Star*, 20 Oct. 1990, cited in Dolan (no page number given), p. 96.

As a consequence of such philosophies from public figures, the Civil War has been silenced in popular debates; therefore, O'Sullivan's determination to represent in fiction this key event is innovative and Melody for Nora is, then, a significant and unique attempt at documenting an often ignored period of Irish history. The character of Nora can also function as a metaphor for contemporary Ireland, symbolising the need to confront memories of the past in order to move on, an approach that conforms to Ian Mc Bride's claim that 'for national communities, as for individuals, there can be no sense of identity without remembering'.[137] By refusing to explore and acknowledge the period of the Civil War which divided families and left an estimated death toll of between 1,500 and 2,000 people, including 77 executions by the Free State government, Ireland will never escape the trauma of its own violent history.[138] Corresponding to such a view, Eunan O'Halpin notes that 'the divisions marked by the Treaty and Civil War have haunted Irish politics ever since', which suggests that this haunting will continue unless the events are explored and acknowledged.[139] Slavoj Žižek similarly asserts that the

> true choice apropos of historical traumas is not the one between remembering or forgetting them: traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully. We should accept the paradox that, in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly.[140]

As Nora finds a means of expressing her chaotic history through music, perhaps O'Sullivan is suggesting that Irish culture also needs to find a medium to articulate its own chaotic and traumatic past.[141]

Section 3. Survival through Music

Cathy Caruth, in drawing upon the work of Sigmund Freud, discusses the significance of the struggle for survival that accompanies the aftermath of a trauma and notes that

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[137] Ian McBride, 'Introduction', in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. By Ian McBride, pp.1-42 (p. 1).

[138] Dolan, p. 6.

[139] Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: The Irish State and its Enemies since 1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1. This idea of 'haunting' can also be related to Jack apparently being haunted by Annie's ghost.

[140] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 22.

[141] Dolan notes in relation to the Civil War that 'historiography has chosen to overlook it and stop in 1921' (p. 2).

'for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*.'[142] Alec and Nora find a means of survival through the medium of music, which represents a common ground for both characters. Music in the narrative signifies the sublime and it takes a great effort on Nora's behalf to realise its benefits. The piano is damaged, signifying the impact of war and violence on concepts of unity and harmony of both the piano and the characters: 'a bullet smashed into the frame of the piano and inside the severed strings snapped with a weird, ear-splitting twang'.[143] It is through their passion for music that Alec and Nora mend the piano, learn from one another's experiences, confront the crisis and attempt to work through the painful memories together.

As Christopher Ballantine notes music can function as 'a medium for expressing human emotions' and for Alec and Nora, it is a necessary component in working through trauma.[144] When Nora resolves never to play the piano again, Alec responds with, 'Told myself I'd never play again but I found a way to and I'd be even worse off than I am now', signifying that it is not a cure but an aid to survival.[145] Although his determination to move on has become stalled, as is illustrated in his alcoholism and his continued wearing of the black gloves, Alec offers Nora a sense of hope that things will change. As a result, she begins to hope that 'a time would come [...] when all her troubles were over [...]. When that time came she would put aside her promise never to play the piano again. This would be the melody she would play and it would be the overture to all their new tomorrows'.[146] It is only when Alec forces Nora into playing that she begins to appreciate the value of music in her life: 'As her right hand came into play, Nora had a sensation of such power that she was driven on and on, the swell of music resounding all around her. It seemed as if time itself paused to catch its breath at her brilliance'.[147]

However, it is the emotional release which accompanies the playing of the piano that signifies music's function as a vehicle to work through issues of trauma, with the cathartic potential connoted by the subsequent description when playing has ended: 'She folded her arms around herself to hold in the heave of emotion that

[142] Caruth, p. 9. Emphasis in original.
[143] *Melody for Nora*, p. 172.
[144] Ballantine, p. 3.
[145] *Melody for Nora*, p. 60.
[146] Ibid., p. 71.
[147] Ibid., p. 119 and p. 121.

threatened to rip her apart'.[148] This reveals her inability to articulate or to cope with her emotions and thus corresponds to Middleton and Woods' belief that 'a traumatic incident overwhelms the capacity of the mind to process the emotions and thoughts it produces' as she decides to remain in a state of emotional paralysis, a state which could have detrimental effects on her well-being.[149] This is also apparent when Nora rejects the relief brought about by the harmony of music, and deliberately deprives herself of a sense of coherence within her own identity, thus threatening her chances of survival.

Middleton and Woods note that 'it is now widely believed that memory is the foundation of personal identity, and that anything that damages it will threaten the self' revealing the impact that traumatic memories can have on identity formation.[150] It is only by viewing Alec's predicament that Nora acknowledges that a similar fate awaits her if she continues to avoid articulating her emotions. When Alec emerges from under the stage and claims that the past is always there to 'drag you down', Nora realises that 'It doesn't have to be like that'.[151] It soon becomes apparent to her that she will never be free of her past, but that she can cope with it once she views it from a certain perspective. As a result, both characters work through their anxieties in different ways, where 'working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some visible extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation'.[152]

The narrator expresses Nora's state of mind as follows:

> If you dwell on the awfulness of the past, she thought, you might as well still be living through its horrors. It was like the excruciating pain that followed her fall. Terrible as it was, it had eased with time. Now and then there was a reminder of that pain but for the most part she was able to forget the accident had ever happened. Surely it would be the same with bad memories. You will always be hurt by them but it will be less and less as you go on.[153]

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[148] Ibid., p. 121.
[149] Middleton and Woods, p. 97.
[150] Ibid. p. 92. In a discussion of identity formation in the child characters in O'Sullivan's *Angels Without Wings*, Watson notes that 'they could never be whole with no knowledge of their early history; with no access to the origins of their consciousness'. This statement could equally be applied to Nora's and Ireland's identity formation as both need to understand and comprehend their past in order to create a coherent identity in the present. See Watson, p. 154.
[151] *Melody for Nora*, p. 152.
[152] LaCapra, p. 42.
[153] *Melody for Nora*, pp. 152-153.

In this way, the character begins to recognise a means of coping with the overwhelming forces of the past.[154] While Nora desires the impossible dream of being reunited with her own family, she reaches an acceptance that she must make the most of what she has got. The fragmentation of family that was present at the beginning is replaced by a new family structure of Nora her aunt, her uncle, and Alec:

> In that moment she felt she had found her home even if, for the present, it was in a house under siege. It was perhaps not a very typical family. An aunt and uncle, their niece and a stranger with war-torn hands. But all through that long sleepless night the bonds between them grew closer than those of any other family in town.[155]

This idea of acceptance is acknowledged by O'Sullivan in an interview, as he states that 'the new parents that she has at the end are a second best. They are not her parents [...]. It's a more difficult, it's a less safe kind of world, but she has learned to live in it and create her own individuality'.[156]

Alec undergoes a similar transition while playing the piano as Nora dances with her aunt and uncle 'lost in a world where there was no anger or violence, no right causes, no wrong actions, no sorrow and no death'.[157] For Alec, this experience gives him new hope in his future as he exclaims to Nora: 'I felt like I did years ago. I felt like I could do whatever I wanted and there were no obstacles in the way. Nothing at all to stop me only fear'.[158] Therefore, Alec has also found a sense of coherence and purpose in his life that allows him to deal with the past and embrace the future and explains it in a note left for Nora: 'I'm not running from anything – rather I'm going toward my true destiny. I mean to compose again'.[159] He encourages her to return to music and play the tune that he has written for her. In this sense, Nora not only learns from Alec's story, but the physical presence of the 'Melody for Nora' also functions

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[154] Nora does not believe that events of the past can be forgotten, feeling that 'it seemed the past would never be allowed to fade from her memory,' but recognises that 'you don't stop living because things are not working out as you hoped'. She returns to music in order to prove that 'she wasn't powerless in the face of huge forces that seemed to drag so many people down and make their lives miserable'. See *Melody for Nora*, pp. 208, 217, and 215.

[155] *Melody for Nora*, p. 174. The sequel to *Melody for Nora*, *Wash Basin Street Blues*, opens with Nora, Peter and Molly having a family photograph taken, thus reinforcing the idea of a new family structure.

[156] See *Mark O'Sullivan Interview*, Appendix. Similarly, there is a sense that Ireland must end the Civil War and make the most of the terms of the Treaty.

[157] *Melody for Nora*, p. 211.

[158] Ibid., p. 212.

[159] Ibid., p. 213.

in metaphoric terms as an expression of their symbiotic relationship: inspired by Nora, he writes a melody that she uses to work through the final stages of her own trauma.[160] Playing the piano completes her 'working through' of her trauma and finally allows her to move beyond her troubles and be transported to a 'state of hypnotic rapture' where 'she felt she had taken command of her own life and would never again be slave to a tyrant of misfortune'.[161] In this sense there are multiple paradigms to history. Alec functions as a model for Nora as she can learn from his story in order to survive her own crisis. On another level, perhaps the author is suggesting that the reader in contemporary Ireland can learn lessons from Nora's experiences and from the history and memories of the Civil War in forging a peaceful future. Consequently, Nora can be read as a metaphor for contemporary Ireland and the necessity of articulating oppressive memories of the past that dominate the present.

However, to understand music as a mere form of expression in the text is to oversimplify the complexities of O'Sullivan's narrative. O'Sullivan refers to the work of two composers, Frederic Chopin and Ludwig van Beethoven, as music functions as a site to unite theories of revolution, both personal and cultural, while also attempting to represent chaos in a coherent form.[162] Chopin was a Polish nationalist[163] and the reference in *Melody for Nora* to his 'Étude'[164] may be an allusion to his Étude Opus 10, no. 12 which was nicknamed 'The March of the Revolution',[165] thus linking both Nora and Ireland's struggle with that of the Polish revolution.[166] The revolution in Warsaw that inspired Chopin occurred when he was Vienna, and his experiences there mirror the dislocation felt by Nora in O'Sullivan's novel. Similar to Nora, Chopin was 'depressed, lonely, and uncertain of his future' as the separation from his home and

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[160] As a result, she no longer feels powerless against forces 'like those which had robbed her mother of all her dreams. Forces that had, in the end, beaten Jack in spite of his courage and his high ideals'. *Melody for Nora*, p. 215. For a discussion of similar themes in *Silent Stones*, see Watson, pp. 141-142.
[161] *Melody for Nora*, p. 216.
[162] *Melody for Nora*: Chopin, pp. 121 and 125; and Beethoven, p. 214.
[163] See Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin* (London: Keegan Paul, 1985), pp. 100-102
[164] *Melody for Nora*, p. 120.
[165] Ruth Jordan, *Nocturne: A Life of Chopin* (London: Constable, 1978), p. 105. The revolution took place on 29 November 1830.
[166] In an analysis of Katherine's Mansfield's opinions on the conflicts, Jenny McDonnell links the Polish revolution with Ireland's struggle for independence: see 'Making Her Own History: Katherine Mansfield's Revolutions', in *New Voices in Irish Criticism 4*, ed. by Fionnuala Dillane and Ronan Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 147-156.

family became unbearable.[167] The parallels between Nora and Chopin become increasingly significant when *Melody for Nora* is read as representing a journey toward maturity and acceptance. The writing of the Ètudes also marked a significant progression in Chopin's work, with Simon Finlow noting that the Op. 10 Études 'signified a vital stage in Chopin's own development, as both composer and pianist. They mark the end of his artistic adolescence, the clear beginnings of a maturity.'[168] As Nora plays the music of Chopin she experiences a similar growth out of adolescence and toward maturity. Once again, O'Sullivan creates a number of paradigms as Chopin's music, inspired by dislocation and revolt, in turn becomes a text for Nora to use in coping with her own sense of isolation and trauma.

Similarly, the music of Beethoven in the text can be read as a channel toward happiness for Nora, as Beethoven maintained that 'he who truly understands my music will be freed therefore from all the miseries of the world'.[169] In order to survive, Nora attempts to articulate her emotions through music and, in a sense, instrumental music becomes elevated to a level above verbal language as words fail her while music offers an alternative mode of expression.[170] This articulation takes the form of the piano Sonata 'Appassionata', the nickname for Sonata in F. Minor op. 57 (1804). By the end of the novel, Nora's piano-playing represents a merging of the practical and the spiritual as she enters 'a state of hypnotic rapture' and as soon as she touched the keys she had 'thrown open the door to a new freedom.'[171] After playing the Sonata, Nora finally works through her trauma. Ballantine's explanation of the concept of 'return' in the Sonata may also function as a fitting description of the conclusion of Nora's journey:

> In sonata, 'return' means recapitulation, or the summary and synthesis of finale; the simultaneous taking up and surpassing of the original contradictions which were symbolic of

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[167] Ateş Orga, *Chopin: His Life and Times* (Kent: Midas Books, 1976), p. 45. See also Ruth Jordan, p. 97.

[168] Simon Finlow, 'The Twenty-Seven Études and their Antecedents', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. by Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 50-77 (p. 50).

[169] Cited in Ballantine, p. x.

[170] See Andrew Bowie, 'Music, Language and Modernity', in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin (1989) (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 67-85 (pp. 70-72).

[171] *Melody for Nora*, p. 216. See Ballantine (pp. 44-45) for a discussion of the union of the spiritual and the practical in Beethoven's music.

> the estrangement of man from man, and of the alienation of man from his own true self and from nature.[172]

Drawing upon this statement, it is possible to comprehend the importance of music in Nora's survival: by playing Beethoven, she also overcomes contradictions, and issues of alienation and estrangement. Daniel Barenboim's assertion that the 'element of courage and of struggle are integral parts of performing Beethoven' aptly aligns Beethoven's music with Nora's struggle and, by extension, that of the Irish nation.[173]

On one level, the crisis of the Civil War can also be aligned with the music in the text as both Chopin and Beethoven were associated with revolutionary periods. Beethoven was eighteen at the start of the French Revolution and the Sonata as a form was developed at the time of the Revolution. The intertextual reference in *Melody for Nora* thus links the French Revolution with Ireland's revolutionary period. For Nora, music does not offer a means of transcending the conflict, but of articulating the contradictions and paradoxes that it presents. Similarly, in his discussion of Beethoven, Hegel, and Marx, Christopher Ballantine notes that the Sonata is 'a way of musical thinking which generates contradictions between (say) opposing tonalities, themes, rhythmic characters, within the course of a single movement as well as over a multi-movement structure' corresponding to the conflicting discourses of the Civil War that are evident in O'Sullivan's text.[174] Nora's journey through her trauma can be read in terms of the structure of the Sonata which is 'the highest musical articulation of the idea of forward movement through conflict'.[175]

It is also significant to note that Nora returns to music by playing at her uncle's film screenings, thus establishing music as an important symbol that is analogous to the process of writing history.[176] Nora's piano-playing provides a wordless musical accompaniment to someone else's enactment on screen. This encourages the spectator to interpret the images before them in a particular way. Similarly, the writer of historiographies adds his/her own accompaniment to the events of history by shaping and constructing the past in a certain manner or in a specific narrative form and encourages the production of a particular meaning on

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[172] Ballantine, p. 45.
[173] Barenboim, in *Parallels and Paradoxes*, p. 144.
[174] Ballantine, p. 32.
[175] Ibid., p. 32.
[176] *Melody for Nora*, p. 216.

behalf of the reader. Such is the case with O'Sullivan as he manipulates elements of fact and fiction through the representation of trauma in an effort to encourage the reader to empathise with both the past of the child character and the past of the nation.

The use of the cinema reinforces the complex relationship between past and present within the novel. In the early days of silent cinema, music was used to add a more human dimension to the ghostly figures on screen. According to Hanns Eisler, the film images created a 'ghostly effect' and

> music was introduced as a kind of antidote to the picture. The need was felt to spare the spectator the unpleasantness involved in seeing effigies of living, acting, and even speaking persons, who were at the same time silent. The fact that they are living and nonliving at the same time is what constitutes their ghostly character, and music was introduced not to supply them with the life they lacked [...] but to exorcise fear or help the spectator absorb shock.[177]

In Christian Metz's terms, the film image signifies 'the presence of an absence', not the thing that was present, but merely a representation of it.[178] Music adds an action in the present to re-enactments from the past and anchors the film experience in the present moment. O'Sullivan's writing about the past explores similar themes of 'the presence of an absence' with ghostly figures and memories of the past influencing the actions of the characters. Similar to music in the silent cinema, O'Sullivan's text recreates aspects of Irish history in the present moment as the absent past of the Irish Civil War becomes present during the act of reading.[179]

Therefore, music can also be understood in relation to the processes involved in the writing of history as is suggested by Edward Said. In terms of melody, Said refers to the 'vertical pressure of the horizontal discourse' and explains it as follows:

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[177] Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 75.

[178] See Metz, pp. 61-64.

[179] LaCapra notes that 'the historical text becomes a substitute for the absent past only when it is construed as a totalized object that pretends to closure and is fetishized as such' (pp. 10-11). O'Sullivan's text does not necessarily construct the past as a 'totalized object', but documents the chaotic nature of the past. However, it is still possible to read the historical accounts of the novel as a means of documenting aspects of a lost the past within the present moment and thus creating the presence of absence.

> The melodic line and the rhythm go in a horizontal direction, but there is always a vertical pressure of the chording, of the harmonies, that is constantly there. In this respect, music is exactly like history, which has to be lived both simultaneously and subsequently.[180]

Such a statement alludes to the chaotic nature of representing the past and the impossibility of portraying a complete or 'true' linear narrative, as there are always certain conflicting factors which disrupt ideas of continuity and temporality. As is argued above, the novel reflects such a fragmented process by utilising concepts of trauma and memory. Therefore it is possible to understand *Melody for Nora* as a metatext. As Nora articulates the chaotic nature of her personal past through the medium of music, a form that allows for the presence of contradictions, O'Sullivan, as an author, similarly expresses the chaotic nature of the Irish past through the medium of fiction, a postmodern narrative that accommodates the simultaneous representation of conflicting and contradictory ideologies. Such an act by the author is extremely significant as it articulates a trauma of the past which is often ignored in Irish culture.

Conclusion

> It is thus in the interest of the new social order to airbrush out the competing social visions which stood in the way of their own ascent to power, to impose an all-embracing narrative of the nation on what were, in fact, highly contested episodes and events whose outcome was not at all preordained at the time.[181]

The limited representation of the Civil War in Irish culture, indicates the significance of O'Sullivan's novel not simply within the discipline of children's literature, but within Irish Studies in general. His representation acts as a refusal to 'airbrush out' the events of the war from Irish history and to explore the contested ideologies and philosophies of the period, which also remain controversial to the present day. In raising the issue of the Civil War and the Treaty, O'Sullivan reveals that many of Ireland's leaders during the period had alternative ideals regarding the future of the nation that conflict with current government policies, particularly in relation to establishing a United Ireland.[182] As is demonstrated above, there is also a concern that, by acknowledging and legitimising the use of violence in the founding of the

[180] Barenboim, in *Parallels and Paradoxes*, p. 148.
[181] Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Conclusion', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 196-208 (pp. 199-200).
[182] See Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 97-141.

state, paramilitary organisations in the present may draw upon such a history to validate and justify their own causes. As a result of such fears, these events of the past have often been ignored or silenced. However, in applying Foucault's theories, O'Sullivan's text recovers a moment of 'descent' within Irish history and refuses to adhere to a seamless, hegemonic linear narrative of Irish history from the birth of the nation in 1916 to the present day. Analysing the presence of childness in the form of adult memory, child-adult relations, and the child as a metaphor for the nation allows for the understanding and exploration of such complex approaches to history within the text.

In documenting conflicting perspectives on events, O'Sullivan's text avoids simplistic binaries and does not blame either the pro-Treaty side or the anti-Treaty side for the causes and effects of the Civil War. Multiple views are presented equally, the horrific impact of the violence is emphasised, and the reader is invited to conclude that 'there are good and bad on both sides'. This results from the fusion of memory and historiographical details in a postmodern fiction that defies homogeneous accounts of the past. The author's stylistic approach to writing the novel is then used to mirror themes of fragmentation within the narrative, particularly the fractured and disjointed processes of trauma.

Middleton and Woods note that postmodern histories are difficult to represent in a coherent form and refer to the 'unrepresentable excess' of memory claiming that 'where memory was there is now an unstable discourse divided by temporality, fragmented in space and lost for words'.[183] In working through her personal trauma, Nora attempts to represent this 'excess' of memory through the medium of music. Similarly, O'Sullivan's writing technique attempts to represent this 'unrepresentable excess' of cultural memory by depicting multiple perspectives of the same event in a postmodern narrative.

Such a liberal approach to documenting the war appears to be in keeping with the 'Peace Process' politics of the 1990s where a 'detached south observes Northern Ireland from a rather comfortable remove' and emphasis is placed on ideals of pluralism.[184] Published in the same year that the IRA declared their first ceasefire,[185]

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[183] Middleton and Woods, p. 81.
[184] Dolan, p. 56.
[185] Although there was also a ceasefire in 1975, 1994 is recognised as the first in terms of facilitating the subsequent Peace Process in the 1990s. See Tony Harnden, *'Bandit Country': The IRA and South*

Melody for Nora's postmodern perspective on the past encourages the idea that acknowledging and understanding contrasting viewpoints and ideologies will lead to tolerance and acceptance.

However, while O'Sullivan problematises the idea of representing a grand narrative, such pluralism is also part of a larger ideological construction, which warrants investigation. Such a liberal philosophy is somewhat idealistic. It also suggests that each perspective is equally valid while failing to explore the background of such ideals. While the liberalism of the novel avoids creating simplistic dichotomies in the representation of conflicting ideologies, the postmodern nature of the text also avoids investigating or contesting the fundamental philosophies that inform these ideologies of the past and of the present. As a result, it is possible to argue that when politicians glossed over the controversies of history throughout the twentieth century and, as Dolan claims, 'espoused a paragon of forward looking pluralism and pragmatism, it was still an abuse of the past as valid or, more fittingly, invalid, as the abuse that continues to reaps its violent rewards'.[186] This suggests that manipulating versions of the past and using the war to endorse pluralism is equally as 'invalid' as drawing upon memories of the war to justify contemporary armed violence. In citing from an article in the *Irish Independent*, Dolan continues to argue that '"old hatreds can no longer be used to fan present divisions", but new lies cannot merely paper over the cracks'.[187] Therefore, while O'Sullivan's work is extremely important in its simultaneous construction of alternative viewpoints, the ideological foundations of such perspectives must also be problematised.

Armagh (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p. 15. This ceasefire broke down and another one was called in 1997.

[186] Dolan, p. 96.

[187] Ibid., p. 96. Citing the *Irish Independent*, 25 October 1990 (no page number given).

Chapter 3

History, Memory and Memoir: Joan O'Neill's *Daisy Chain War*

Joan O'Neill's *Daisy Chain War* (1990) is the first book in a best-selling trilogy of novels, *Bread and Sugar* (1993), *Daisy Chain Dreams* (1994), with a fourth book *Daisy Chain Days* published in 2004.[1] The first novel documents growing up in Dublin in the 1940s and is primarily written in first-person narrative from the viewpoint of Lizzie Doyle, who features as the central child protagonist. From the narrator's perspective, as she looks back at her Irish childhood, the reader is introduced to the impact of World War II (or 'The Emergency' as it was officially known in Ireland, in order to emphasise the State's neutral stance) on the private lives of the Doyle family.[2] The character of Lizzie narrates her childhood experiences, beginning just before the outbreak of war when she is approximately ten years old, until after her first sexual encounter at the age of nineteen. Throughout this nine-year span she must cope with great changes in her own life, changes which are also influenced by World War II.

Throughout *Daisy Chain War*, O'Neill uses a fictional individual memory in the exploration of a collective cultural memory. What results is a symbiotic relationship where private stories attempt to validate the veracity of the public accounts of history and conversely the public histories are designed to frame and strengthen the private experiences of the Doyle family within wider political and social upheavals. This interdependence corresponds to Maurice Halbwachs' work on memory as he claims that 'individual memory is [...] part of group memory [...] to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu', signalling that individual memory is reliant upon collective memory.[3] The author's use of narrative voice to represent these versions of political, cultural, social and personal histories and the problems that arise when memory is employed as a mode of documenting the past is explored below.

The theoretical foundation of this analysis can be found in the work of Michel Foucault and his theories about understanding the construction of the past within a

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[1] O'Neill's books for children also include *Fallen Star* (London: Hodder, 2005) and *Dream Chaser* (London: Hodder, 2006).

[2] For an overview of children's fiction and accounts of war see Mitzi Myers, 'Storying War: A Capsule Overview', in *Lion and the Unicorn*, 24.3 (September 2000), 327-36.

[3] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 53. In *Literatures of Memory*, Middleton and Woods note the importance of Halbwachs' contribution to studies of memory, stating that 'since Maurice Halbwachs' work on collective memory was published posthumously [...] in 1952, historians and social theorists have recognised the importance of what has variously been called collective memory, social memory and cultural memory' (p. 85). They also note that terms such as 'collective', 'cultural' and 'social' memory are often interchanged.

contemporary context. The idea of memory is central to O'Neill's work and the novel allows for the exploration of the processes involved in remembering both a personal and a cultural past, as childhood and concepts of Ireland become conflated in the text. The author constructs a particular form of childness in the novel as the adult author's memories create a nostalgic form of childhood which is then fused with concepts of Ireland. This results in the employment of a narrative of childhood to explore a narrative of the nation. The child character is used to establish a past of self and a past of nation, corresponding to Krips' view that the child functions as a conduit to the past.[4] This chapter examines the manner in which O'Neill's text combines these ideas as adult memory is used to construct a childhood past and a collective past for a child audience, imbuing both the public and the personal with a sense of nostalgia that is often associated with heritage. Incorporated into this analysis are theories relating to childhood and memory, and to adult/child power dynamics, concepts which are explored in the work of Peter Hollindale, Joseph Zornado, Jacqueline Rose, and John Stephens. However, as is demonstrated below, the reconstruction of a version of the past through a memory of childhood is also examined in terms of the 'fallibility' of memory as it is a 'selective process which registers some processes and discards others'.[5]

Combining theories of childness with those of memory and heritage, this chapter examines the relationship between memory and history and the dependence of individual memory on collective memory.[6] This reading of *Daisy Chain War* is also greatly influenced by the Popular Memory Group's analysis of memory which includes an exploration of the relationship between public and private memory, as they claim that personal memories make a vital contribution to the documentation of history.[7] These theories relating to popular memory are employed as methodological tools in an analysis of O'Neill's text in gaining an understanding of the use of private memory to explore cultural memory, the use of memory to bridge ideas of past and present, and how these issues relate to contemporary cultural concerns.

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[4] Krips, p. 24.
[5] The Popular Memory Group, p. 223.
[6] See Krips, Nora, Halbwachs, and Samuel. See Introduction for an examination of these theories.
[7] The Popular Memory Group, p. 207. In the construction of her narrative framework, O'Neill adheres to the ideas of the Popular Memory Group, in their discussion of autobiography, memory and tradition, as they argue that 'private memories cannot [...] be readily unscrambled from the effects of dominant historical discourses' (p. 210).

In establishing the private history of the Doyle family within the public domain of world history, O'Neill creates several major narrative voices including the omniscient narrator; the first-person narratives of the characters Lizzie, Karen and Paul; and the poetry of WB Yeats, thus creating multiple perspectives of a particular historical period. Drawing upon theories of narrative voice in Barbara Wall's *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*,[8] this chapter examines the manner in which O'Neill continually encourages the reader to identify with the character narrator in order to understand the private struggle within the public histories. Therefore childness in the novel is present in the relationship between author, narrator and child reader. Section 1 explores the use of WB Yeats' poem 'To a Child Dancing in the Wind'[9] to establish themes such as youth and age, fantasy and reality, and past and present, ideas which recur continuously throughout *Daisy Chain War*. Yeats' poetry also aligns concepts of childhood with Ireland and constructs a specific nostalgia for childhood which is then echoed in the opening chapter of the novel, 'Daisy Chain', as is discussed in detail in Section 2. The use of a third-person narrative voice in this chapter mirrors many of the themes in Yeats' poem such as youth and age and the sentimental construction of childhood, as a narrative of childhood is employed to explore Ireland's national history. This can be understood as yet another form of childness in the text.

The memoir style of the majority of the narrative takes the form of a pseudo-autobiography where the individual fictional memory of Lizzie Doyle is used to construct a social memory of Ireland, an approach which is examined in Section 3. Lizzie's narrative fuses public and private histories and documents her experiences during World War II. Although fictional, this approach is then combined with O'Neill's own memories of childhood,[10] as O'Neill unearths a local social history that is predominantly excluded from 'official' historiographies.[11]

Within this memoir are the letters and diary extracts from Karen and Paul which function in terms of postmodern histories as the author provides multiple

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[8] See also *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults*, ed. by Sandra Beckett (London: Garland Publishing, 1999).

[9] WB Yeats, from *Responsibilities* (1914).

[10] O'Neill claims that 'even though it isn't my family, not really, it's very similar, it's semi-autobiographical'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[11] Tom Inglis notes in *Truth, Power and Lies: Irish Society and the Case of the Kerry Babies* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003), that telling stories about Irish women helps to create 'a distinctive sense of cultural self-identification and self-imagining' (p. 9). In this sense, *Daisy Chain War* can also be linked to the women's histories explored in *Amelia* and *Melody for Nora*.

perspectives of the war, Karen writing from London and Paul from Paris. This section also explores themes of remembering and misremembering within the diegesis, and the novel's blurring of fact and fiction.[12] As is discussed below in Section 4, the novel can also be read in terms of popular memory as an act of recovery that provides an alternative perspective of the past by documenting responses of individuals and communities to war, emigration and Church teachings. However, more significantly, the fallibility of the author is also explored throughout as O'Neill misremembers many official historical details. It is argued that as a result of the author's inaccuracies while writing, the novel can be read as a metatext that reveals the complex processes of memory involved in writing about memory. As with the previous chapters, this is achieved by identifying elements of childness within the text, relating them to discourses surrounding historical representation, and finally positioning this analysis within the context of contemporary Irish culture. This examination of O'Neill's work, then, serves to locate children's literature within wider contemporary debates in Irish society, particularly in relation to representations of the nation during World War II, the fallibility of the author, and the sentimental construction of Ireland and childhood within modern processes of globalisation, thereby proposing that children's texts can illuminate and make a vital contribution to such discourses.

Section 1. Yeats, Ireland, and Childhood

O'Neill begins each of her novels with a quotation from the poet William Butler Yeats, setting a specific tone for the reader by using a public voice that is recognised both nationally and internationally. The poems quoted in the first three novels introduce themes of youth and age, fantasy and reality, and past and present, motifs that recur throughout *Daisy Chain War*. The construction of childhood in the poems and the novels is framed in terms of a nostalgic longing, as distinct and separate from adulthood, and as a lost realm which can only be accessed through processes of remembering.[13]

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[12] For a discussion of blurring fact and fiction in historical fiction and the creation of a 'quasi-past', see Middleton and Woods, pp. 67-69.

[13] This approach adheres to Kimberley Reynolds' argument that 'ambivalence about the relationship between adult and childish selves as well as between adult and child continues to dominate our thinking about children and children's literature'. See Reynolds, *Children's Literature in the 1890s and the 1990s*, p. xi.

In *Daisy Chain War*, O'Neill places the poem 'To a Child Dancing in the Wind'[14] prior to the narrative of events concerning the Doyle family. It is possible to interpret the poem as a yearning for a childhood state as it illustrates the separation of the child from the concerns of the adult world, thus creating a nostalgia for a time past that was filled with the hopes and dreams of a bright future.[15] The opening lines of the poem immediately represent a division between the realm of childhood and that of adulthood: 'Dance there upon the shore' positions the poet as observer, distanced and removed from the realm of childhood occupied by the girl.[16] However, the poem concerns itself with adulthood rather than with childhood experience. The poets asks 'What need have you to care / For wind or water's roar?' and focuses on the concerns of the adult:

> Being Young you have not known
> The fool's triumph, nor yet
> Love lost as soon as won.[17]

Yeats, as an adult writer, sees childhood as divorced from the harsh realities of adult life. The poem ends with 'What need have you to dread / The monstrous crying of wind?' and focuses attention on the problems of the adult sphere, a position to which the child seems oblivious. This is represented by the child dancing in the wind whose perspective on life prevents her from seeing the harsh realities of the world, or 'the monstrous crying of wind' that the adult must endure. In this sense, the concept of childhood *innocence* is distinct from *inexperience*. It is the childhood state of innocent perspective that is invoked rather than the child having limited experience in the world.[18] As is documented below, these themes are also central to O'Neill's text, as despite the harsh childhood experiences that Lizzie relates, it is this innocent outlook

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[14] WB Yeats, from *Responsibilities* (1914)

[15] Similarly, Vivian Schoback notes that 'the child becomes the signifier of the 'future'. But the child also simultaneously becomes the signified of the "past"', in 'Child/Alien/Father: Patriarchal Crisis and Generic Exchange', *Camera Obscura*, 15 (Fall 1986), 7-34, cited in Joe Kelleher, 'Face to Face with Terror: Children in Film', in *Children in Culture*, pp. 29-54 (p. 31).

[16] The child is Iseult Gonne. See A. Norman Jeffares, *New Commentary on the Poems of WB Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 121. This style of writing as 'observer' is employed by O'Neill in the opening chapter of the novel. See discussion below.

[17] This line is misquoted in the Hodder version of *Daisy Chain War* with 'have' replacing 'love'. Such an error becomes increasingly significant later in this analysis as it is one of many inaccuracies in the text which leads to a questioning of O'Neill's authorial competence.

[18] See Kiberd, 'Childhood and Ireland' in *Inventing Ireland.*

on life and the potential for realising hopes in the future that permeates the narrator's account of events in *Daisy Chain War*.[19]

'To a Child Dancing in the Wind' not only presents the reader with the poet's personal view of childhood, but also allows for an exploration of the links between the construction of childhood and the invention of the Irish nation. This is revealed as Yeats alludes to Irish politics and culture and couples a longing and desire for childhood innocence with the hopes and dreams of a nation. The lines that lament the 'best labourer dead / And all the sheaves to bind' are often interpreted as a reference to the death of J. M. Synge in 1909 and the work still to be done by the National Theatre Society.[20] It is also possible to understand the lines as signifying the death of the political leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891 and Ireland's continued struggle for independence. Combining these two readings allows for an interpretation that merges Yeats' cultural and political nationalism with concepts of childhood.

This alignment of childhood and Ireland can be read in terms of Declan Kiberd's approach in *Inventing Ireland* and the association of Yeats' poetry with adult desires about childhood.[21] These themes associated with childhood could equally be applied to O'Neill's work where it is the position of the adult remembering that is to the fore of the narrative rather than any investigation or 'exploration of the inner world of the child'.[22] Childhood becomes a symbol of a lost period of time where, similar to Yeats, O'Neill preserves a form of culture 'jeopardized by modernity', through documenting a family and a cultural narrative within a public sphere.

A similar concept of childhood is established at the beginning of the second novel of the series, *Bread and Sugar*, as O'Neill uses the chorus of Yeats' 'The Stolen Child'[23] and establishes themes of a loss of childlike innocence.[24] This theme is

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[19] See discussion below in relation to Lizzie's letter to Santa and her view of Karen's pregnancy.
[20] See A. Norman Jeffares, p. 121.
[21] Kiberd, p. 104. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Yeats' poetry in relation to *War of the Buttons*.
[22] Kiberd, p. 108. Similarly, Sebastien Chapleau notes that 'by projecting /writing their wishes into the book, adults wish to make childhood what they wish it to be, so trying to equate reality and fiction'. See Sebastien Chapleau, 'A Theory Without a Centre: Developing Childist Criticism', in *Studies in Children's Literature 1500-2000*, pp. 130-137 (p. 132).
[23] From *Crossways* (1889).
[24] The sentiment attached to this poem is revealed by Yeats in a letter to Katharine Tynan in March 1888 as he states 'I have noticed [...] that it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world [...]. The Chorus to 'The Stolen Child' sums it up – that it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge but of longing and complaint – the cry of the heart against necessity'. See *The Collected Letters of WB Yeats, Vol. I, 1865-1895*, ed. by John Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 54 -55. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the poem in relation to *War of the Buttons*.

continued in 'When You Are Old'[25] which O'Neill places at the beginning of *Daisy Chain Dream*. Written by Yeats for Maud Gonne in 1891, the poem is positioned in a manner which highlights the distinction between age and youth that constructs themes of past and present while also illustrating the process of remembering.[26] The fourth and final novel in the series, *Daisy Chain Days*, is somewhat different in that it does not contain the same issues regarding temporality as do the other novels. The novel is set in contemporary Ireland of 2003 and therefore does not require the reader to engage in constructing an imagined adult future of nostalgically reminiscing about a lost state of childhood. While the use of Yeats' poems in the other novels encourages the reader to engage with themes of past and present before the narrative begins, an understanding of such motifs is unnecessary for a reading of *Daisy Chain Days*. As a result, the Yeats poem, 'To a Squirrel at Kyle – Na – No' is used to open the novel as, unlike the previous poems, it does not mourn the loss of childhood or address themes of memory, youth and age.[27]

Also, O'Neill's approach to writing about the past is similar to the processes employed by Yeats in his poetry, as she draws upon personal memories and experience in the creation the narratives.[28] John Untrecker notes that 'almost from the beginning of his career, Yeats had worked out a theory of the personal as a critical element in poetry'[29] where both childhood and a sense of place are recurring themes. In an interview, O'Neill acknowledges that experiences from her own childhood greatly influenced the writing of the novels.[30] She also recalls her father's love for Yeats' poetry when she was a child.[31] By placing Yeats' poems at the beginning of the novels, the author draws upon memories of her own childhood and consequently establishes a sense of nostalgia and sentiment that frames the story of the childhood of Lizzie Doyle.

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[25] From *The Rose* (1893).

[26] The reference to 'take down this book' can be read in terms of Halbwachs' discussion of heritage and nostalgia as he states that 'when one of the books which were the joy of our childhood, which we have not opened since, falls into our hands, it is not without a certain curiosity, an anticipation of a recurrence of memories and a kind of interior rejuvenation that we begin to read it'. Halbwachs, p. 46. For a further discussion of this topic see also pp. 46-47.

[27] WB Yeats, in *The Wild Swans at Coole, and other poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1919).

[28] See Hollindale's *Signs of Childness* (pp. 62-75), for a discussion of memory and child/adult relations in children's literature. Hollindale notes that in the construction of childness 'the writer's memory of childhood plays a major part' (p. 62). A similar process is at work during the opening narration of *War of the Buttons*; see Chapter 5.

[29] John Untrecker, *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats* (Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1959) p. 7.

[30] See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix, where she states in relation to the characters in the Doyle family that 'it's semi-autobiographical'.

[31] See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

As a result, the poetry of Yeats employed by O'Neill fuses concepts of childhood and Ireland, where a public version of childhood, suggesting dominant cultural ideologies of childhood innocence, is used to endorse the author's own construction of childhood within *Daisy Chain War*.[32] Thus, an integral part of Irish cultural heritage that is represented by Yeats and his poetry, becomes an essential source in the creation of a very specific form of 'childness' in the novel as both public and personal memories are combined. Subsequently, the theories of Krips and Halbwachs can be used to understand the processes at work in the writing of the novel where the author draws upon her own childhood memories to create a fictional memory of childhood that explores a collective memory of Irish society and culture.

Section 2. The Omniscient Narrator

The opening chapter entitled 'Daisy Chains' contains a similar yearning for a lost childhood and also raises themes of youth and age, and fantasy and reality. Having cited the public voice of Yeats to evoke ideas of childhood and Ireland, O'Neill subsequently uses the third-person narrative voice to create a pseudo-prologue to the first-person narrative of Lizzie Doyle that begins in the following chapter. The child characters are placed at a distance from the omniscient narrator who details their experiences, similar to Yeats' position as observer of Iseult Gonne. The world of childhood is constructed at a distance from the narrator and subsequently the reader. This is divorced from the realm of adults as represented by the lines, 'Then Gran's voice in the distance called out, 'Lizzie! Vicky! Come in at once'.[33] The adult character, 'Gran', is at a remove from the two girls and is also removed from the physical space that the girls occupy as signalled by 'Come in'. Gran is established as part of an adult sphere that is separate from childhood.[34] Consequently the author

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[32] Corresponding to Rose's theories, the childhood innocence that Yeats and O'Neill construct in their texts is 'not a property of childhood, but a portion of adult desire'. See Rose, p. xii. See also Zornado for a further discussion of adult/child power dynamics.

[33] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 1.

[34] The distinction between child and adult spheres can also be read in terms of reinforcing the child and adult power structures that exist in the novel and conforming to the general *status quo*. Gran is in a very definite adult world and in a position of authority as is evident in her exclamation to 'come in at once'. In Zornado's terms, this passage, and the text in general, can be read as the way in which 'children's stories [...] are more often than not adult propaganda that serves to confirm for the child the hierarchical relationship between the adult and the child' (p. xv). It is possible to read from this section that Gran's world is inside in the domestic sphere of the household and separate from the space of nature and freedom that the girls occupy where 'they sat in the long grass braiding daisies', indicating a clear divide between child and adult worlds (*Daisy Chain War*, p. 1). Such a construction of childhood

draws attention to concepts of youth and age, and past and present, where the reader is introduced to issues of temporality and processes of projecting fantasies onto the past as well as the future, themes which are discussed below in relation to Lizzie's narrative. It is also interesting to note O'Neill's use of a grandmother as opposed to a mother as an adult figure. The generation gap heightens the sense of an age difference between Gran and the girls, and reinforces the contrast between youth and age.[35]

The world in which the children are located is one of playfulness and fantasy where 'they just kept pushing the stems, working them this way and that, their conversations sprinkled with their dreams of kings and queens and palaces and riches'.[36] This passage constructs the child as oblivious to the realities of the adult world while also alluding to traditional fairytales and suggesting a universal experience of childhood. This fantasy is firmly associated with childhood, but this flight of the imagination is subsequently undercut by the awareness of practical realities.

As the two girls make wishes, Lizzie hopes 'to grow up to be a beautiful princess and marry a prince'[37], while Vicky undermines her dreams by drawing attention to the reality of the situation: 'What rubbish. Where will you ever meet a prince? I want to be a doctor and dissect bodies the way I'm dissecting these daisies. Now make another wish. A realistic one'[38]. Therefore, while Lizzie's views conform to the expectations that have been established by the narrator, Vicky's words contradict the sentimental version of a universal childhood. This section suggests the impossibility of constructing universal notions of childhood as the author presents one girl who conforms to the dominant ideological construction of the narrator, while the other challenges such generalisations. However, despite this momentary disruption of narratorial control, the chapter returns to sentimental constructions of childhood.[39]

Throughout, the fantasy world of childhood constructed by the narrator is designated as having a temporary status. O'Neill creates a narrative that continually signals the approach of an adult world that will halt this childish dreaming, with

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as a separate state conforms to Peter Hunt's opinion that 'in so far as [childhood] can be defined at all, it might be as a period of life without responsibility'. See Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature*, p. 6.

[35] For a discussion of the representation of older people in Irish children's fiction, see Lake, p. 261.

[36] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 1.

[37] Ibid., p. 2.

[38] Ibid., p. 2.

[39] This mirrors the process at work during Lizzie's narration, as despite the documentation of hardships, she continually sentimentalises her childhood experiences.

sentences such as 'They were so absorbed in their task that they didn't notice the sun sinking below the hills or the dusk settling in around them'.[40] A scene is created where the child characters are unaware that entrance into the adult world is fast approaching. Light and brightness become associated with childhood throughout the novel, but particularly in the opening chapters which include references to the 'star studded sky',[41] the 'buttery sun',[42] and the 'blue sky'[43]. This style acknowledges the construction of the narrative from an adult perspective, with a knowingness on behalf of the author that these fantasies will soon be overshadowed by the practical realities of the adult world and becomes a story of an adult narrator looking back through memory rather than the experience of a child looking forward.[44]

While 'Daisy Chains' may highlight the possibilities and potential of youth, it does so by drawing attention to the restrictions associated with age, once again echoing some of the themes in Yeats' poetry. Initially, Gran is unwilling to participate in the games that the girls play, but eventually does so. However, by doing this she exposes the limitations associated with age as she 'bent one stiff knee' and said, 'This is as far as I'm going'.[45] In this passage it is possible to read Gran's character as symbolising the physical restrictions associated with ageing adulthood as well as the adult's awkwardness in attempting to participate in forms of child's play. As a result, the distinction between childhood and adulthood is established on a number of levels.

The style of the chapter also suggests the possibility of reading the chapter 'Daisy Chains' as an allegory for the cultural processes of viewing the past from a contemporary perspective. The representation of twilight in the chapter signifies the imminent passing of one time period and the approach of something new, both in terms of the end of the day and the inevitable end of Lizzie's and Vicky's childhood. Written in the 1990s, the novel corresponds to Andreas Huyssen's claim that 'memory and representation [...] figure as key concerns at this fin de siècle when the

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[40] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 1.
[41] Ibid., p. 2.
[42] Ibid., p. 7.
[43] Ibid., p. 8.
[44] For a further discussion of this topic, see Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, p. 42 and p. 49. See also Rose's discussion of the 'glorification of the child' by the adult (p. 8). The narrative control of the adult author and the power dynamics established in children's literature is discussed by Barbara Wall (pp. 39-65). Wall's theories can be applied to *Daisy Chain War* when she states, in relation to *David Copperfield*, that 'child consciousness is presented, but mediated to a greater or lesser degree by the shaping intelligence of an adult narrator' (p. 69). This corresponds to the adult construction of childhood experience by the narrator Lizzie.
[45] *Daisy Chain War*, pp. 2-3.

twilight settles around the memories of this century and their carriers'.[46] O'Neill constructs the text in such a manner that 'twilight' in the novel, both literally and metaphorically, settles around the character of Lizzie who, as 'carrier', documents a personal narrative that expresses the cultural and collective memories of an Irish past and an Irish childhood from a 1990s perspective. In a way similar to Yeats' poetry, O'Neill's text mourns the loss of a personal and a cultural past and explores a national past through a narrative of childhood.

Section 3. The Memoir of Lizzie Doyle

The first-person narrative of the adult Lizzie Doyle creates the most stylistically significant feature of the novel and reveals the use of memory to construct a political, a cultural, and a social past through the lens of a personal past. Although fictitious, the memoir approach allows the author to depict both a personal history and a cultural or national history as the adult writer draws upon the personal memories of her own childhood and relocates them within the public memories of Ireland of the 1940s.[47] Throughout this memoir, World War II is alluded to in several forms and from multiple vantage points such as Ireland's political position, views from London and the Blitz, and accounts from the frontline in Paris. Simultaneously, the narrative explores elements *within* Irish culture such as issues of emigration and the influence of the Catholic Church. As a result, it is possible to argue that O'Neill creates a postmodern narrative as history and fiction are combined in order to construct a coherent sense of the period, yet one which retains multiple and contrasting perspectives and experiences.[48]

The chapter 'Lizzie' continues the nostalgic and somewhat mystical overtones of the Yeats poem and of the chapter 'Daisy Chains'. The events of the narrative are

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[46] Huyssen, p. 2.

[47] In discussing the subject matter of the novel, O'Neill states that 'I set this book in the war. It occurred to me that nobody had written a book, either [for] adult[s] or children, set during the war, set in Ireland at that time. I thought, well, people lived, there was no war, but something had to happen. As I said, I used to hear the conversations about lack of this and lack of that. And when I was a child the oranges were always in the purple wrapping tissue paper stuff. Everything was always 'oh, isn't that great'. And the English would come over for the meat and we had a guest-house in the summertime and they'd be there saying 'isn't it great to get the good food', they didn't have it. They had nothing in England compared to us. And we weren't short or deprived we had plenty of everything, particularly because my father worked in the country'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[48] Hutcheon notes in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* that 'postmodern writing [...] has taught us that both history and fiction are discourses that [...] constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past' (p. 89).

situated within the context of World War II as the chapter 'Lizzie' opens with lyrics from 'White Cliffs of Dover'. The song connotes the same nostalgic and sentimental overtones that are present in Yeats' poem with lines such as

> There'll be love and laughter,
> And peace ever after,
> Tomorrow...[49]

However, it is a British national past rather than an Irish past that is evoked in this instance as O'Neill suggests the impossibility of discussing the Irish past in isolation from its relationship with Britain.[50] The song represents the public memory of World War II and is established as a framing device for the narrative that follows. Drawing upon memory theory as outlined in the introduction to this chapter it is evident that neither form of memory, public or private, exists independently in the narrative as each is constantly utilised in an attempt to reinforce the verisimilitude of the other. Lizzie's story begins with such an alignment, establishing the co-dependency of these modes of remembering: 'Gran came to live with us at the beginning of the war'.[51] The informal and familiar use of 'Gran' immediately invites the reader into a private family narrative, yet locates this tale within the broader context of the established public history.[52]

Following the lines from 'White Cliffs of Dover' and Gran's arrival, the narrator indicates the unreliability of her own memories, a concept that achieves

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[49] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 4. Words by Nat Burton and melody by Walter Kent. Published in 1941. See <www.dover-kent.co.uk/words/blue_birds_over.htm> [accessed 29 November 2004].

[50] Instead, the novel utilises a song published in 1941 that has become synonymous with England and World War II, with the most famous version being sung by Vera Lynn. The lyrics express a hope and optimism during the war, offering the possibility of a happy and peaceful future that will accompany the Allied victory. The connotations of hope imbued in the song can thus be understood as a continuation of the hopes and dreams for the future that were present in the childhood imaginings of Lizzie and Vicky in the previous chapter. Drawing upon the work of Krips it is therefore possible to interpret the song as functioning as a site of heritage for the child reader, a primary source from the past that the author uses to signify a cultural climate of a particular period in history.

[51] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 4.

[52] Following the initial prologue, the author doubly signals to the reader that this is a significant moment of change for the protagonist both within her public and private world. Gran's arrival transforms the private life of Lizzie, yet is framed by the greater public upheaval of World War II. Also, the reference to 'Gran' precedes 'war' in this sentence, signalling the primacy of the private history in the narrative. In this manner, the informed child reader can identify a world history that is used to validate and authenticate the experiences of the Doyle family. For a further discussion of these aspects see my article 'Validating The Veracity: Narrative Voice and the Construction of Authentic Histories in Joan O'Neill's "Daisy Chain War"', in *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 10.1 (London: Routledge, 2004), 71-78.

increased significance as the narrative develops. The narrator is unable to provide the reader with a specific day on which Gran moved in, as revealed by 'I don't remember the exact day',[53] creating a vague and timeless quality to the narrative, again highlighting a sense at the expense of 'fact', as *vraisemblance et vérité* are not the primary functions of the narrative.[54] Valerie Krips notes that 'heritage' is 'a past constituted, in part, by media and tourism' and it 'speaks to a remembrance associated with a sense of the past rather than an experience of or knowledge about it, to *lieux de mémoire* rather than historical evidence, to symbols rather than facts, and to places or sites rather than events'.[55] Throughout the novel it becomes apparent that the author is preoccupied with creating a *sense* of the past, rather than establishing a narrative that is strictly based on fact.[56]

Gran's move from Limerick to Dun Laoghaire is closely followed by the wedding of Lizzie's sister Karen.[57] This family event exposes the continual presence of public events in the private sphere. As Karen marries in Dublin, her husband Paul enters in his 'airforce uniform'[58] and it is later revealed that he is a member of the British airforce as a well as an American citizen. Again, Paul's status represents the influence or intrusion of public history on the private festivities of the Doyle family, and act as an allegorical representation of the impact of international politics on Irish culture. This private memory of the past cannot exist without the presence of the cultural context in which it is placed and is therefore, as Paul Auster notes, not simply 'the resurrection of one's private past, but an immersion in the past of others, which is to say: history – which one participates in and is a witness to, is a part of and apart from'.[59] When the theories of Lyotard are applied to the novel, it becomes evident that it is not a simple case of the 'grand narrative' of history being dismantled by the text. The author frequently draws upon these metanarratives of history in order to validate the fictional private history of the Doyle family. However, there is a cyclical nature to such an approach as the official historiography authenticates a fictional

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[53] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 4.
[54] O'Neill also acknowledges the autobiographical elements of the story as she states that 'the granny is a huge influence on the whole of that book. She is my mother and my father combined'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.
[55] Krips, p. 20. For a further discussion of this topic see also, Michael Bommes and Patrick Wright, '"Charms of Residence': The Public and the Past", in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, pp. 253-301.
[56] See Chapter 5 for a discussion of a similar construction of the past in *War of the Buttons*.
[57] See Chapter 'Lizzie' in *Daisy Chain War*.
[58] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 9.
[59] Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (London: Faber, 1988), p. 139.

narrative which reveals a non-fictional social and cultural history that is predominantly excluded from official historiographies.

Lizzie draws upon elements of her local and cultural history that places her experiences within a particular socio-historical context. This is evident in the list of films that were showing in Dublin at the time such as *Odd Man Out* and *The Jolson Story*, or specific theatre productions such as Noel Purcell in Seán O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* at the Gaiety.[60] O'Neill also allows her narrator to cite lines from playground songs, such as the skipping rhymes 'In and out through the darkie bluebells' and 'Tilly on the telephone, miss a loop, you're out',[61] thus documenting a local oral history of childhood rhymes.[62] It is possible to interpret these rhymes and the list of films and plays as references that evoke a sense of heritage for the child reader.[63] For the reader, objects and artefacts are used in the novel to signify a greater cultural context, and a technique which corresponds to Krips' view that 'things, not words, have become the focus of the late twentieth century's connection to the past'.[64]

It is therefore possible to read Lizzie's narration as functioning as popular memory as it includes 'popular autobiography and community-based history'.[65] In the project of popular memory, the Popular Memory Group claim to 'expand the idea of historical production well beyond the limits of academic history writing' and believe that 'academic history has a particular place in a much larger project', what they term the 'social production of memory'.[66] O'Neill's fictional account which draws upon the reality of lived experience exposes the manner in which personal memoirs can be used to uncover previously undocumented social histories.

Ireland and the Emergency

Much of the public history in the text focuses on Taoiseach Eamon de Valera's political policies during the period, particularly in relation to issues of neutrality. This

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[60] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 202.
[61] Ibid., p. 139.
[62] For a collection of Dublin Street Rhymes see *Out She Goes: Dublin Street Rhymes*, collected with and introduction by Leslie Daiken (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1963). See also *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix, for the author's comments on the issue.
[63] Similarly, the mention of comic books such as *School Friend* and *School Girl's Own Library* adds to the landscape of heritage culture that is created for the child reader through the memoir structure of the novel.
[64] Krips, p. 113. This approach is also discussed in detail below as the letters and diary become primary sources and encourage the reader's direct engagement with the past.
[65] The Popular Memory Group, p. 205.
[66] Ibid., p. 207.

allows for a further reading of the text in terms of popular memory as the possible reactions to official policies are discussed from personal perspectives.[67] In support of such government strategies Mr Doyle notes that 'de Valera won't let us go to war', while the certainty of such a concept is immediately problematised by Mam's subsequent remark that 'With this neutrality we're on our own now'.[68] Mam's comments highlight both the social and political problems that accompanied de Valera's neutrality and isolationist policies. Despite Mam's reservations regarding neutrality, Gran expresses unquestioned loyalty to de Valera by stating 'Tis grateful we should be to Mr de Valera for his integrity',[69] indicating the gratitude that should be shown toward de Valera for keeping Ireland out of a war. Also, Gran's use of 'Mr' when referring to de Valera connotes a respect that is absent from Mam and Da's comments. Gran's support for de Valera continues as, during her conversation with the shopkeeper Mr King, she defends the Taoiseach's wartime strategies: 'Aren't we fortunate to have our health and strength and be safe from that oul' Hitler fella who's raging war on everyone. Only for Mr de Valera he'd be here too. Grand man, Mr de Valera, grand man'.[70] However, despite her natural tendency to praise de Valera, Gran's comments are extremely calculated in this instance as it is a conscious public display of support in order to influence the actions of the shopkeeper, as she continues: '"Oh, and by the way Mr King, if you do get any extra tea in, keep a grain aside for me". She knew Mr King was a member of the Fianna Fáil party'.[71]

Similarly, during an exchange between the character Mrs King, a teacher in Lizzie's school, and her pupils, neutrality is presented as a problematic issue. Mrs King declares in class that 'Neutrality is something not to be proud of, but to be grateful for'.[72] The novel captures a sense of the multiple perspectives of the war, where neutrality is favoured, but does not necessarily signify anti-British sentiment. In fact, O'Neill creates a narrative that firmly aligns the Doyles with supporting the

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[67] O'Neill notes that her family influences as well as her research on political history shaped her representation of Eamon de Valera in the novel; for instance, as she remarks that her father 'wasn't a great de Valera man subsequently. He might have been initially, but he was for an independent Ireland. But my mother used to talk about de Valera and different people used to talk about de Valera and how great he was. And when I researched [...] I discovered otherwise'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[68] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 14.

[69] Ibid., p. 15.

[70] Ibid., p. 26.

[71] Ibid., p. 26. De Valera was leader of Fianna Fáil during this period.

[72] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 92.

Allies in Europe.[73] However, de Valera's policies are never fully explored, but act as a reference point for the larger public history that influences the lives of the Doyles. While the mention of the Taoiseach's policies reveals the official history of the nation, the song that the stall owners sing exposes the collective memories of that history. This is represented as Lizzie recounts a visit to Moore Street where one of the stall owners, Rosie, sings

> Bless de Valera,
> Bless MacEntee,
> Give us the brown bread,
> And half packet of tea.[74]

The song is similar to the playground rhymes that Lizzie sings as it functions as a part of the community's collective memory of the war years that exist outside of official historiographies.[75] Lizzie's individual memory relies upon the position of the song as part of a collective memory, which in turn finds its origins in the official political history of the nation. However, by mentioning the singer by name, the fictional narrator documents a real social history of Dublin as Rosie Walsh was one of the most famous stall owners on Moore Street having worked there since she was twelve years old until finally retiring in 1978 aged 89 years.[76] Consequently, the mention of Rosie and Moore Street in the novel can also be read in terms of popular memory as a means of uncovering both a women's history and a working class history in Ireland.

Rosie's rhyme refers to de Valera's handling of the war and the consequent policies of rationing introduced by the then Minister for Finance, Seán MacEntee.[77] This political situation is later expanded upon in Lizzie's references to ration books

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[73] See discussion above in relation to the Doyle's perspective of the war and below in terms of Paul's accounts of the war.

[74] *Daisy Chain War*, pp. 38-39.

[75] O'Neill acknowledges such a process in her writing as she remarks that 'what I am really doing is rewriting history in a way. Not rewriting history, but giving history as what it was like, what the everyday people were living and what they were saying and what life was like, not as a history in a history book. You know the way you learned history in school, dates and what happened, the battle of such and such, well, I think what mine is, is history but also social documentation of the times and the way people lived and what they were saying'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[76] Rosie was married at thirteen years of age and became known as the 'Queen of Moore St'. See *Siar 1978*. TX Ireland, TG4, 31 August 2005.

[77] For a discussion of neutrality and the system of rationing in Ireland during World War II, see Coogan 'Ourselves (Very Much) Alone; (Neutrality in World War II)', in *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 230-297, and Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-85*, 2nd edn (London: Fontana Press, 1987), pp. 141-238.

and lack of food and tea.[78] For Lizzie it is these rations and shortages that provide lasting memories of the Emergency as demonstrated by her comments, 'I knew all about the Emergency. I knew about the shortages and the pink ration books. The condensed milk we had to use curdled the tea and tasted sweet and horrible and the grey bread gave our insides a good 'turnout' as Gran said'.[79] Drawing upon her own memories of her parents' discussions relating to the war, O'Neill creates a world where ordinary, everyday occurrences are imbued with increased significance and act as a means of understanding the survival of a community within the wider context of politics and violence.[80]

De Valera's political leadership during such hardship has a complicated position in Irish history, a complexity that O'Neill reflects in the novel. His isolationist policies during the war and insistence upon Irish neutrality caused major conflicts with Britain, upon whom Ireland depended economically.[81] As is noted in the work of Terence Brown and Tim Pat Coogan, the animosity between the two countries resulted in Britain's refusal to export many products to Ireland, leading to even greater rationing as is revealed by Lizzie in the following passage:

> 'No reason for panic', the news bulletins had said but we had plenty of reasons. We were a country apart for the first time in seven hundred years. The coal, electricity and gas were in short supply, so we couldn't heat ourselves sufficiently and the winters were freezing. We had our family problems too. All arising from the war.[82]

By simultaneously exploring the private memory within the public memory,[83] the official advice that there is 'no reason for panic' is questioned by the narrator's knowledge of public policies which, in turn, are immediately followed by references to the shortages and hardships that accompany such policies. It appears that a number of factors contribute to the Doyles' circumstances, both the war in Europe and the

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[78] See *Daisy Chain War*, p. 87. In her interview O'Neill claims that she knew about ration books because 'in the dresser at home there were ration books put away'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[79] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 42.

[80] See Krips' discussion of ordinary objects as 'treasures' in heritage culture (pp. 93-115). This can also be understood as nostalgia for the period as is discussed below in relation to the nostalgia for community values that were emphasised by De Valera's policies.

[81] In terms of relations with the US, see T. Ryle-Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality and the USA 1939-47* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977).

[82] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 87.

[83] Personal and collective pasts are aligned, thus corresponding to Middleton and Woods' argument that 'memory is at least assisted if not shaped by collective practices' (p. 86).

government in Ireland, as national and local experiences are aligned. While not overtly criticising the Irish government protocol, the novel gives a sense that the war and the economic pressure exerted by Britain and the United States to participate in the war is not the only cause of Ireland's condition. The passage suggests that there are other contributing factors, such as de Valera's isolationist policies, which were in place long before the outbreak of the war.[84]

While such policies had established Ireland as a 'country apart' in economic terms, neutrality led to a political isolation of Ireland within a world order, which in turn intensified the economic crisis and gave 'reason for panic', a complexity which is explored throughout the novel. However, these policies also functioned as a means of asserting Irish independence and as a mode of unifying the Irish people. While the majority of Irish men and women at the time may have 'supported neutrality as the only sane policy in a world gone mad and got on with their lives as best they might',[85] as is the case with the Doyle family, the government's political strategy found a 'cause that had united the people of independent Ireland under a leader, de Valera'.[86] Such a policy served as a means of unifying post-civil war Ireland. As a result, Lizzie's personal narrative acknowledges this complex position of the Irish nation within a world history. Consequently, O'Neill examines the external influences as well as the internal policies that impacted upon the development of the nation, while also alluding to the concerns within Irish society at the time, thus avoiding simplistic binaries of a narrative of the past and representing the causes of the hardships as arising from an amalgamation of factors.

Not everybody suffered as a result of these circumstances during the war, as is shown through Lizzie's visit to her cousin's farm in Limerick. There, the character of Tom declares that 'Ireland is economically self-sufficient' and 'the farmers are

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[84] In *Cottage to Crèche: Family Change in Ireland* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2001), Finola Kennedy notes that 'When the destructive Economic war was ended by the Anglo-Irish Agreement in April 1938, the damage had been done. The Great Depression now added to the problems of the Irish economy; the 1930 volume of merchandise exports was not reached again until 1960, the year following de Valera's move from the Dáil to Áras an Uachtaráin' (p. 254). In discussing Ireland's economy during the war years, Brown notes that the economic policies enacted during the war years simply perpetuated a culture of isolation that had preceded the war:
'for the majority of Irishmen and women the years of the war represented scarcely more of an experience of cultural isolation and deprivation than had any of the years that had preceded them. The entire period since independence, it must be remembered, had been characterized by an isolationism encouraged by official ideology and protected by censorship'. See Brown, p. 175.

[85] Brown, p. 175.

[86] Ibid., p. 171.

very proud of that fact'.[87] Lizzie's Uncle Mike reiterates the statement, praising de Valera's policies: '"Thanks to Mr de Valera", Uncle Mike added. "The incentive comes from him". He had the same dogged devotion to de Valera as his mother'.[88] However, the support for de Valera is preceded by a reference to the economic benefits that the political policies were having on a minority of people. Perhaps Uncle Mike's endorsement is a consequence of the fact that he is 'making a fortune sending them [apples] to Dublin to the market. There were so few imports on account of the war and with the scarcity of fruit, my uncle was laughing all the way to the bank'.[89] Therefore it is possible to read from this that those who supported Fianna Fáil were favoured in de Valera's economic policies. Terence Brown notes that 'a compulsory tillage policy was introduced in 1940 which, during the war years, almost doubled the acreage under crops' and that 'a lively black market in scarce goods quickly developed' signalling that many people, including farmers such as Tom and Uncle Mike, were to benefit from Ireland's attempt at economic self-sufficiency as well as the policies of rationing that were heightened during the war.[90]

It is also significant to note that in a manner similar to Gran, Mike refers to de Valera as 'Mr', an act which implies respect, yet Lizzie as narrator does not use the term and it can be understood that she does not grant the Taoiseach a similar mark of respect. As the reader identifies with Lizzie throughout the narrative, it is possible that O'Neill employs a technique where the reader is consequently encouraged to criticise de Valera's policies. Therefore, despite the presence of multiple voices, in the merging of public and private history, the novel is somewhat biased in its criticism of de Valera. As is discussed in detail below, when viewed within the context of the novel as a whole, Ireland under de Valera is represented as oppressive and stifling.

Letter Writing

While the memoir documents these political aspects relating to Ireland and the war, O'Neill employs other narrative techniques to present the reader with alternative perspectives on the war, both national and international, through the medium of letter writing. These letters are then placed within the memoir text and function as fictional

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[87] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 84.
[88] Ibid., p. 84.
[89] Ibid., p. 84.
[90] Brown, p. 176. O'Neill alludes to this in the narrative as Lizzie's father is employed as a 'Compulsory Tillage Inspector'; see *Daisy Chain War*, p. 17.

'primary sources' from the historical period. O'Neill's novel combines ideas of heritage and childhood in creating a narrative that contains signs that can activate both the personal and the collective memory of the reader. Consequently, the novel acts as a type of literary museum or archive that intertwines these elements of both the public and the private past for the child reader who must adopt the role of 'historical tourist'[91] in an attempt to create meaning from the text. In relation to the use of objects in the heritage industry Krips claims that 'the role of objects [...] is of central importance.[92] Therefore, these fictional letters, which appear as original sources, are used in an attempt to validate the narrative descriptions of the memoir, and continue the first-person narrative style by personalising the perspective of events.

The first letter in the novel appears as Lizzie writes to Santa. Her request for a doll is followed by a desire for a 'black draping to put over her at night to keep her safe from the bombs'.[93] Following the reported speech of Mam and Da discussing de Valera and the war, Lizzie's letter is constructed in a style that connotes ideas of childhood innocence.[94] The child character is represented as possessing a child-like naïvety to issues surrounding the war, as the informed child reader is aware that black draping will not offer adequate protection from the bombs. The adult narrator does not attempt to describe her feelings and emotions toward the war in this instance as such sentiment can only be coloured by hindsight and memory. Instead, the reader is offered a primary source in the form of a letter that operates as a direct link to the narrator's personal past of childhood. The narrative of the letter does not encompass the same potential for the unreliability or fallibility of memory, but appears to demonstrate an 'authentic' child-perspective from the period. The fictional letter from a fictional narrator thus creates a site of heritage that signifies the wider public concerns of an established history. While the letter reveals the potential destruction that the war can cause, the child perspective expresses the anxiety of the threat of war, a viewpoint that perhaps could not be fully realised through the narrative of memory nor through established historiographical accounts.[95] Therefore, O' Neill employs the

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[91] See Barton, 'From History to Heritage', pp. 245-248, for a discussion of tourist theory and Irish fiction.

[92] Krips also notes that 'in the era of commemoration, memory and not history is the key; the everyday artifact responds to a system of correspondences based on memory' (p. 113).

[93] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 15.

[94] This form of innocence is similar to that established in Yeats' poetry.

[95] Barbara Wall notes that one of the reasons an author chooses to narrate in the first-person is because it is 'a narrative method which keeps the unskilled reader in the same state of ignorance as the characters' (p. 68). Perhaps the letter to Santa functions in a similar manner.

writing technique of a 'letter to Santa', which is associated with childhood and child naïvety, to explore the threat of war from a child's perspective.

Letters also arrive from other relatives that serve as validation of Lizzie's accounts of the war and also of Ireland's economic situation.[96] Using such an approach, O'Neill provides the reader with broader international historiographies, yet retains the first-person narrative voice in referencing such events. Thus the reader is never distanced from the action that is documented but retains a close identification with the narrator's experiences. The events in Britain receive further attention using a similar technique in describing Karen's experiences during the Blitz. Karen, who is training as a nurse in England, sends several letters home to her family in Dun Laoghaire.[97] Karen's letters reveal the private accounts of a nurse in London during the war while framing such experiences with episodes that are documented in established national historiographies. Although Karen's letters are addressed to individual family members, they all contain additional information relating to the state of British society and the everyday challenges facing people, such as 'we aren't allowed into the heart of London yet'[98] and 'the morgue is the busiest place here at the moment'[99]. While the letters addressed to the adults expose the horrors of the situation, the letter addressed to Lizzie is somewhat censored in its limited reference to the war. The risks of living in London are revealed to Lizzie, but in a patronising manner: 'Thank you for taking care of John for me [...] he's a lot safer with you'.[100] While the dangers of having a child in London are acknowledged, the adult censors the information for the child character and conforms to traditional child/adult power

[96] The reader is thus informed of public historical events but always through the lens of private experience, as is evident in a letter from the character of Aunt Sissy: 'The real battle of Britain has begun. Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to destroy Fighter Command as an essential prelude to invasion. [...] We've no soap, tinned meat, biscuits. [...] Thank you for taking care of Vicky' (p. 53). This aspect reflects the personal experiences of the author as she states that 'I used to write letters home when I lived in England'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[97] *Daisy Chain War*, pp. 99-104. While both Aunt Sissy and Karen describe the effects of the war in London, their letters home also establish their emigrant status and allude to Ireland's economic problems and the need to travel abroad for training and employment, an issue which is discussed in detail below.

[98] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 100.

[99] Ibid., p. 101.

[100] Ibid., p. 101. In writing to her father, Karen reveals the reality of the situation and notes that 'the queues are long outside the shops. [...] There is a feeling that we will never survive the Nazi onslaught and if we do, we'll be in a sorry state' (p. 102).

dynamics where the child is constructed in a position of innocence which the adults attempt to preserve.[101]

However, the most significant letter that informs the child reader of public events is in relation to the Battle of Dunkirk. Karen reveals the harsh reality of war that accompanies the mythical versions as she juxtaposes her experiences in the hospital with a line from a famous speech by Winston Churchill:

> It's been chaotic here since the Army and Red Cross lorries rolled in from Maidstone one after another, with the battle victims [...]. They're only boys most of them [...]. Trench foot is the biggest problem. Socks are embedded in men's feet [...]. The armada of small ships lifted the army off the beaches. 'We will fight them on the beaches', Churchill said on the radio yesterday. How right he was.[102]

Churchill's speech, which attempted to inspire the nation toward victory, contains themes common to many of the public accounts of history that promote the war effort in terms of valour and sacrifice, and it is placed in contrast to Karen's account of the harsh reality of war.[103] While the public history associated with Churchill is used to validate the veracity of the character's experiences, it also serves to undermine the mythic status of that public history by revealing the impact on private experiences.

However, this attempt at validation ultimately fails for several reasons as inaccuracies in factual details expose O'Neill's own misremembering in the writing of her novels. When Karen writes home to her family after the Battle of Dunkirk, the letter is dated June 1941 while the Battle actually occurred in June 1940.[104] In this sense, it is not the unreliability of the narrator that is revealed, but the fallibility of the author. For the informed child reader, O'Neill's error draws attention to the fictional nature of the letter and of the memoir, and undermines the accuracy of other historical details that are represented as fact throughout the novel. Therefore, not only are the fictional details of Lizzie Doyle destabilised in the reader's suspension of disbelief, but the real social history that contextualises Lizzie's fictional life is also questioned

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[101] Such assumptions about childhood and the treatment of children lead to a definition of childhood in Jacqueline Roses terms as 'existing outside of the culture in which it is produced' and an attempt to prolong and conserve values which 'are constantly on the verge of collapse'. See Rose (p. 44) and Zornado (p. xv-xvi) in relation to maintaining the *status quo* of child/adult power dynamics.

[102] *Daisy Chain War*, pp. 102-103.

[103] The aim of the speech to function as inspiration in order to achieve a desired goal is evident in the final lines 'we will never surrender'. See Winston Churchill, *Never Give In!: The Best of Winston Churchill's* Speeches, selected and ed. by Winston S. Churchill (London: Pimlico, 2003).

[104] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 102.

by this recognition of the author's fallibility. It is also interesting to note that historians have challenged the authenticity of this particular Churchill speech. It is claimed that Churchill did not actually perform the oration but that an actor, Norman Shelley, was hired to mimic Churchill and read it aloud on the radio.[105] If this theory is accepted as true, then the dominant historiographies which argue that this is Churchill's speech are incorrect. Therefore, the presence of this speech in this passage aligns the construction of public historiographies with personal memories as both are represented as having the potential to contain inaccuracies. In this section, the distinction between fact and fiction in the text becomes blurred as elements of public historiographies have the potential to be as equally fallible as the personal memories of the narrator.[106] As a result, this passage signals the problems with accessing the 'truth' of the past. Even if O'Neill's dates were accurate, the controversy surrounding the speech still reveals the problems with gaining direct access to events of the past.

Paul's Diary

A similar narrative mode is used to explore events in Europe without distancing the reader from the first-person narrative that has become established throughout, as Paul's diary is posted home to the Doyles.[107] Again, similar to the letter, the child reader is presented with a fictional primary source that acts as a means of understanding the events of the war from a different place and perspective, yet still retains first-person narration. The diary form creates a privacy and intimacy that the reader can experience as a relic of history or a site of heritage that signifies the position of the personal within a public domain and also corresponds to Krips' theories of the fetishisation of objects in the heritage industry. Such an approach also

[105] Those that claim that Shelley read the speech include David Irving, *Churchill's War,* Vol. I (Bullsbrook WA: Veritas, 1987), p. 313. See the Churchill Centre website at <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=101> [accessed 20 March 2006] which argues that Irving's theory is a myth and refutes similar claims made by other authors such as John Charmley, Clive Ponting, and Philip Ziegler.

[106] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the distortion of the facts of history in relation to the actress Dorothy Dalton. Accessing an historical record does not always result in the author getting the 'facts' right.

[107] This diary is written in a similar format to the letters, as he specifically addresses Karen, writing, 'I don't know if you will ever read this Karen but I'm hopeful that you will and that if anything happens to me you will understand me better from reading it' (p. 123).

draws upon established accounts of war in children's literature such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*.[108]

As Paul recounts his adventures on the front line, he avoids demonising his own actions of war and violence by emphasising the heroic nature of his behaviour. Thus his narrative conforms to traditional histories of valour and sacrifice as outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis.[109] Although a personal account, Paul's version of the war deals with events that shape traditional historiographies and is in contrast to Karen's account of the brutality of war. As the narrative of the diary develops, the reader is presented with a traditional heroic story of adventure during the war. By stating that 'We raided Hamburg and Cologne, destroying industrial areas' and 'we were to bomb dockyards, ships, submarines and oil tankers', Paul acknowledges his role in the war as a destructive agent, yet distances himself from associations with killing people as he emphasises the non-civilian targets of his mission.[110] In this sense, the atrocities of war are not represented, and O'Neill censors the violence for the child reader, thus mirroring Karen's censoring of the blitz in her letter to Lizzie.

Within this public history of battle during World War II there is a constant return to personal issues as Paul thinks of his wife and son. The events of his private life continue to intertwine with his public role as he notes

> we had finished a massive raid the previous night, and seen German bombers fall out of the sky like flies. I felt deliriously happy and sick. Sick that I couldn't touch a drop of drink to celebrate the birth of my son and sick from the killings that I realised I was becoming immune to. Carnage and wreckage everywhere and I was just sick of it.[111]

Paul's simultaneous bout of nausea and joy demonstrate a combination of both the delight at fulfilling his duties and the ill-feelings he has for completing such actions. However, Paul's dismay does not arise directly from his participation in violence; he is upset that he is not disgusted by his own actions. This moment of self-analysis is

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[108] *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne Frank (1947) (London: Great Pan, 1959). Another famous account of war in diary form is *Zlata's Diary/ Zlata Filipovic* with an introduction by Janine Di Giovanni and translated with notes by Christina Pribichevich-Zoric (London: Penguin, 1994). For a discussion of Anne Frank and the writing of history see Nigel A. Caplan, 'Revisiting the Diary: Rereading Anne Frank's Rewriting', in *Lion and the Unicorn*, 28.1 (January 2004), 77-95.

[109] Similarly, despite Ireland's neutrality, the Doyles' view of events encourages the reader to side with the allies and to identify the Germans as 'the enemy'. See pp. 66, 117 and 177.

[110] *Daisy Chain War*, pp. 120-121.

[111] Ibid., p. 122.

quickly forgotten as he continues with his tales of bravery. Despite Paul's momentary sickness of war, he still wishes to engage in war-related games with his son: 'If I were there I could help mind him, play with him, Cowboys and Indians, soldiers. I have a box of tin soldiers back home for him'.[112] Once again, O'Neill draws the reader's attention to themes of reality and fantasy that were established in the opening poem by WB Yeats. The fantasy of war and conflict that is played out through childhood games such as Cowboys and Indians and tin soldiers is in stark contrast to the reality of war where thousands are killed and many go missing, as is the case with Paul.

Ironically, as a result of the disgust he feels, he becomes increasingly aggressive toward a German bomber, as he states 'I'd show those German bastards who was calling the tune', an act which ultimately leads to disaster.[113] After his interrogation, Paul reveals that his questioners 'weren't interested in my life history and became impatient'[114], thus encouraging the reader to sympathise with Paul and condemn the actions of the Germans. Unlike these German soldiers, the reader is placed within a position where he/she becomes greatly interested in Paul's family life through both Lizzie's narrative and the extracts from his diary. As a result, despite the multiple accounts and perspectives of war at home and abroad, Paul's version of history is but one side of the story and consequently the novel presents the reader with a biased account of the military conflict. Multiple histories are constructed by the author as views from Ireland, England and the warfront reveal personal histories that document perspectives of public history. However, while such an approach may contribute toward dismantling a single grand narrative of history, Paul's account of the battlefield reveals that there are also limitations in writing these versions of the past as his story conforms to a traditional linear metanarrative. Consequently, despite the portrayal of diverse experiences, the failure to document a complete and all-encompassing story of the past suggests the incommensurability of history.[115]

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[112] Ibid., p. 126. This representation of war as a type of heroic adventure conforms to the mythical depiction of war in Churchill's speeches and many public accounts of events that tend to heroicise these actions. However, the experiences of the character Pete Scanlon during the war undermine such an account as he returns with an injured leg. Pete also compares war to a game. See *Daisy Chain War*, p. 182.

[113] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 123.

[114] Ibid., p. 123.

[115] It is also worth noting that themes of remembering and forgetting which are established from the outset of the novel are explored in depth in Paul's diary extract. Paul draws upon memories of Karen in order to help him survive, once again introducing projected future fantasies into the narrative and revealing how memory can both be recovered and used as a means of coping in the present moment and also manipulated to forge an imagined future. Through the act of writing, Paul reconstructs images

However, there is a momentary breakdown of linearity as the author places the lyrics from the song 'Dark Moon' at the beginning of Paul's diary.[116] O'Neill positions them within the narrative in a manner that implies they are lines of poetry written by Paul during the war. However, they are actually from a song written by Ned Miller and originally recorded by Gale Storm in 1957, before becoming a hit for Elvis Presley in 1966.[117] Therefore, there are several ways of reading the presence of the lyrics. Perhaps O'Neill believed that the song was from the period that she was writing about and this is another example of the author's misremembering, as was the case with the references to Dunkirk. However, employing a real song and passing it off as lyrics written by a fictional character suggests that the author is aware of the processes involved in her blurring of fact and fiction and implies that this is a deliberate prompt for the informed reader. This differs from the error relating to Dunkirk as Karen's letter does not contain such a prompt or mode of recognition for the reader. For the informed reader, the anachronism in Paul's diary highlights the fictional nature of the memoir in the novel and suggests the necessity of imaginative recreation in writing about and remembering the past. Therefore Paul's diary is an amalgamation of traditional historiographies and elements of fiction which momentarily disrupts the sense of linearity that is constructed throughout.

By using the formats of letter and diary O'Neill moves the setting from Dublin, to London, and also to Paris, acknowledging a series of public histories through private recollections, yet never distancing the reader by altering the mode of narrative voice.[118] However, the personal and social history constructed in the novel not only deals with World War II but also documents the aftermath of the war and continued socio-economic concerns of the Irish nation. Details in the narrative provide individual witness to larger social change, particularly in relation to issues of

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of Karen that keep him 'from cracking up in this monotonous existence' (p.124). The diary also reflects the merging of fantasy and reality as he projects a fantasy of the future while on missions, again creating an almost fairytale quality to the narrative. He imagines the day when he will see Karen again stating 'I thought of you during the missions and lived for the day we would be together again'(p.120). This echoes the themes of hope in the future as well as concepts of past-present relations that are embedded in the chapter 'Daisy Chains' as well as in 'White Cliffs of Dover'. Therefore, it is not only the memories of Karen that keep him sane but also the projected fantasies of their life together: 'When I get home we'll start again, a real family this time. We'll buy a cottage and have a spare room' (p.125). In this sense, the author creates a narrative where fantasies of the past and the future function as modes of stabilising the present turmoil.

[116] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 119.

[117] See 'Elvis Presley: The Originals' at <http://users.pandora.be/davidneale/elvis/originals/list2.html> [accessed 9 May 2006). This may also be an anachronistic intertextual reference that aligns Paul's military history with that of Elvis Presley.

[118] This also makes plain the notion of writing in different voices for different audiences.

the Church, emigration, and sexual politics as the text functions in terms of popular memory and the reader is encouraged to draw upon contemporary cultural circumstances in understanding social change of the past.

Section 4. Church, Emigration, and Sex

Although the tone of the narrative is filled with sentiment, the narrator represents Irish society of the period as dogged by poverty and sexual repression. Lizzie continually reports hardships after the war has ended, noting that

> Times were still very hard and you couldn't shop without ration books [...]. Houses were scarce too. Although there were plans for an enormous new housing scheme in Dun Laoghaire, there was no money to start the building. Unemployment was high, food was scarce and choices limited.[119]

For many of the characters, Ireland does not offer the resources for a stable future and it is implied that greater opportunities lie abroad. Because of such a culture, Gran, who is represented as a staunch de Valera supporter, remarks that 'Anyone with a brain in their head is emigrating'.[120] Despite her loyalty to de Valera, Gran acknowledges the harsh social conditions that have caused so many people to leave, including Pete Scanlon. Pete first leaves for England[121] and eventually emigrates to Detroit[122] with no suggestion that he will return to Dublin.[123] Irish culture in the narrative is represented as a stifling environment of poverty, where guilt and anxiety dominate issues of sex and childbirth. In opposition to this, England is constructed as a space of employment, and also a place where sexual experimentation and exploration can occur.

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[119] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 195.
[120] Ibid., p. 195. In the middle of the twentieth century Seán O'Faolain commented on the rates of high emigration in Ireland by stating that 'in the black forties of the nineteenth century we were hungry because we were so many. In the black forties of the next century will we be hungry because we are too few?'. See 'Love Among the Irish', in *The Vanishing Irish*, ed. by J.A O'Brien (London: WH Allen, 1954), pp. 105-16 (pp. 106-107).
[121] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 204.
[122] Ibid., p. 244.
[123] See Roisin Ingle's article, 'They Won't be Home for Christmas', in *The Irish Times*, 4 December 2004, which documents the plight of many of the working-class Irish who emigrated to Britain in the 1950s. Available online at
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/newsfeatures/2004/1204/2613068148WK04LONDON.html>
[Accessed 2 June 2006].

The novel establishes a collective memory of the religious culture in Ireland during the 1940s and 1950s and represents the characters as greatly influenced by the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.[124] In this sense the novel is concerned with issues of popular memory and 'the relation between these public discourses in their contemporary state of play and the more privatised sense of the past which is generated within a lived culture'.[125] Throughout the novel, the author has repeatedly drawn the reader's attention to past-present relationships and modes of reading and viewing the past from a contemporary perspective as is evident the poems used and the memoir style of the narrative. Consequently it is possible to read the author's construction of elements of the past as a deliberate attempt to comment upon the continued need for changes in Irish culture, particularly in relation to the influence of the Church in Irish society.

Throughout the narrative the Catholic Church is represented as playing an influential role in the lives of the Doyles, from Karen's wedding to confrontation with the nuns at Lizzie's boarding school.[126] However, the divisions between public ideologies of the Church and private experience soon become evident as Karen's pregnancy is concealed during the wedding celebrations as sex before marriage is in conflict with the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Gran comments 'Did you notice Karen looked a bit plump in that dress?'.[127] O'Neill does not explicitly state that Karen is pregnant, but encourages the informed child reader to reach this

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[124] For a discussion of the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society see Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987) and *Truth, Power and Lies*; Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2000); and Finola Kennedy, *Cottage to Crèche*. O'Neill claims that the State was greatly influenced by the Church and 'in actual fact, it was [Archbishop] John Charles McQuaid whole ruled'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[125] The Popular Memory Group, p. 211.

[126] See *Daisy Chain War* pp. 158-173. Inglis acknowledges that the Church had almost total control over the Irish Education System throughout the twentieth century. See Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, pp. 4-5. Gran's challenging of the nuns in *Daisy Chain War* may symbolise the continued need to challenge Church teachings in Irish society. In her interview O'Neill claims that this episode at the school is autobiographical: 'Yes, that is just exactly what happened. (Laughs) That is autobiographical, my mother coming down to the school and killing the nuns. Just as they were about to complain about me, the Reverend Mother called her in and said 'now you know, I have to tell you, Joan is causing trouble'. Before she could get the next words out my mother just reefed her asunder. 'Don't blame my daughter'. I was causing trouble. (Laughs). 'We haven't got a proper teacher for science [...].' She gave out yards. And my mother had been a nun so she wasn't afraid of the nuns. She was one of the very few mothers that wasn't deferential and afraid and scared to death to open her mouth, she used to march in. She only came once or twice. But the other schools we were in, the national schools, she'd be down to the nuns regularly. She would talk on a level with them, whereas the other mothers that we knew didn't go near them. She was very authoritarian. She is very much the granny in the story, and Gertie'. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

[127] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 11.

conclusion.[128] However, the narrator's description of events is somewhat complicated as she states, 'Sure she was bursting with joy. Sure, didn't she tell me so herself'.[129] These remarks from the narrator are in contrast to the majority of narrative style in the novel. The memoir element is predominantly a narration of episodes from the perspective of an adult Lizzie who is reminiscing about her childhood experiences. However, at this moment, she adopts a tone of a naïve child in order to provide a childish perspective. For the uninformed reader, O'Neill's approach to the narrative operates as a form of censorship as he/she may assume that Karen was simply 'bursting with joy', a process which signals conservative adult/child dynamics in writing children's literature.[130] However, for the informed child reader this mode of address could ultimately be interpreted as patronising as it disrupts the suspension of disbelief that was created by the original tone and draws attention to the narratorial control of the adult narrator. By adopting this tone, the narrator's representation of the child's perspective conforms to dominant stereotypes of children as naïvely innocent and consequently attempts to reinforce conservative ideologies. The author's writing style does not contest such an ideology but mirrors this process by patronising the child reader.[131]

The impact of political and cultural ideologies, in the form of Catholic teaching of the period, on the private lives of the Doyles reveals a collective memory of oppression. Karen's pregnancy poses problems for the Doyles who are worried about the opinions of others as demonstrated by Gran's concern that Karen's return to have her baby should be delayed so as to prevent the neighbours from gossiping.[132] She remarks that 'It means we will be a disgrace in the Parish if she comes home too soon'.[133] It is important to note the use of 'parish' in this sentence. It is not a simple case of embarrassment in the neighbourhood because Karen has conceived out of wedlock, but it is evident that the 'Catholic Church was the means behind this [...]

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[128] Gran comments that the child will need as much water as possible at the christening while Lizzie notes that the iced cakes from Karen's wedding were used as food for the christening, signifying the closeness of the two celebrations (pp. 43-44).
[129] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 12.
[130] See discussion above in relation to censorship of letters.
[131] For a further discussion of the power dynamics involved in writing for children, see Barbara Wall, particularly in relation to 'writing down' to the child reader (pp. 13-14).
[132] Finola Kennedy notes that 'sexual activity outside marriage carried a risk of social exclusion. But this pattern was buttressed by a value system based on Catholic Church teaching' (p. 258).
[133] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 29.

system of moral discipline and social control'.[134] The circumstances are firmly placed within the religious community of the 'parish', drawing attention to the impact of Church teaching on influencing the views of the community and the way this in turn affects the personal lives of the Doyles. The pressures of Church teaching become burdensome for Gran who believes 'We won't be able to raise our heads'.[135] For Gran, Karen's pregnancy is clearly 'wrong'[136] as she dissociates herself from her granddaughter's behaviour by remarking that 'We never had any trouble like that on our side'.[137] Gran's predictions about the neighbours prove correct as May Tully tells Lizzie, 'My mother says your Karen is a disgrace'[138] while Mrs Tully also insults Mrs Doyle by saying, 'Young bastards is all they're fit for rearin''.[139] Therefore the novel uncovers a history of the impact of public policies on private experience, a history which Tom Inglis, writing three years before the publication of *Daisy Chain War*, claims was predominantly absent in Irish culture.[140]

While the idea of the 'parish' can be used to explore the teachings of the Church as contributing toward the formation of dominant ideologies and perceptions in the community, a more direct influence of the Church can be identified in relation to the concept of 'churching' in the novel. As the Doyles reflect upon the fact that Paul will be unable to attend the christening of his son, Gran reminds them 'Poor Karen will miss it too. She hasn't been churched yet'.[141] Churching refers to the presentation of a woman at Church to receive a blessing and give thanks after childbirth, a controversial ritual that had to take place before a woman could enter the church again. This was a common practice at the time and the child was usually baptised as soon as possible, often without the mother being present. There were connotations also that this was a 'purification' of women after childbirth and that

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[134] Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, p. 5.
[135] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 29.
[136] Ibid., p. 30.
[137] Ibid., p. 30.
[138] Ibid., p. 31.
[139] Ibid., p. 32. It was not until the *Status of Children Act* was introduced in 1987 that the distinction between children born inside and outside of marriage was removed from Irish law. See Finola Kennedy, p. 247.
[140] Inglis remarks that 'there has already been quite an amount written about the Catholic Church in Ireland, but much of this comes from a liturgical, pastoral, or theological perspective and has been written by committed members [...]. The main problem with this research is that it has concentrated on gathering facts and data, usually through social surveys, and has avoided dealing with the larger, more general, questions about the position and influence of the Church'. See *Moral Monopoly*, pp. 2-3.
[141] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 42.

women were somehow tainted by the experience of giving birth.[142] However, the ritual of churching is criticised in the novels as Mam becomes upset, believing that it is 'such a lot of nonsense [...]. Poor Karen considered 'unclean' just because she gave birth. It's an old pagan custom'.[143] Mrs Doyle also refers to churching as 'rubbish'[144] strongly criticising the tradition and reflecting the author's own position on the issue.[145] The presence of the ritual in the narrative adds to the sense of historical displacement, a ritual of times past, yet still alive in the collective memory of modern Ireland, as it was only removed as a requirement in the late 1960s.[146] These private accounts become public criticism when placed within a novel which receives a wide readership and also provides a basis for cultural resistance as they give a history to contemporary struggles.[147]

O'Neill's representation of Catholicism comes at a period in Irish history when attitudes to Church teachings were significantly changing. In 1987, Tom Inglis wrote that 'the Catholic Church has, until recently, remained aloof from rigorous criticism and public accountability' and that 'the walls and of censorship and silence which protected the Church in the past from criticism are beginning to crumble'.[148] These changes occurred in the wake of numerous tragedies which questioned the essence of social morality in Irish culture, such as the deaths of the Kerry Babies[149] and the death of teenager Anne Lovett as she secretly gave birth near a grotto.[150] In

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[142] Mary Kenny notes that there were often cultural misunderstandings around the concept of churching and that it also had a practical function as women were not expected to have sexual intercourse until after churching (pp. 288-289). See also Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*.

[143] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 42.

[144] Ibid., p. 42.

[145] See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix, for her critical views of the Church.

[146] This was removed after the Second Vatican Council, an event which had major influence on the attitudes and values of Irish Catholics as discussed by Finola Kennedy (pp. 249-250). Other examples of pressures to conform to Church teaching are evident in Father Gilmartin's reference to the family's 'temporary absence' and also to Lizzie's experiencing of guilt in relation to the seven deadly sins. See *Daisy Chain War*, p. 44 and p. 140.

[147] The Church also receives a negative portrayal in O'Neill's other books such as *Bread and Sugar*, *Daisy Chain Dreams* and *Fallen Star*, part of which is set in a Magdalen laundry. See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix, for some of the author's views on the reception of Noel Browne's Mother and Child scheme (documented in *Bread and Sugar*) as well as criticism of Magdalen laundries in *Fallen Star*.

[148] Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, p. 2.

[149] In 1984 the bodies of two babies were found in Co. Kerry. Joanne Hayes, a young woman who became pregnant while having an affair with a married man, secretly gave birth to at least one of the babies and was blamed for the deaths of both children. For a discussion of the controversy surrounding the Kerry Babies see Inglis, *Truth, Power and Lies*, as he argues that 'it is a story about Irish women, about honour and shame, about Ireland awakening from the Catholic Church's monopoly over sexual morality, about the state and what happens when people turn a blind eye to the way the police operate, of the way the legal field operates, and of the synergy between police, lawyers and judges', (p. 3).

[150] For a discussion of many of these events see Finola Kennedy, p. 251.

the 1990s more scandals relating to the Catholic Church were revealed such as the relationship between Annie Murphy and Bishop Eamon Casey and the wave of child sex abuse allegations directed at members of the clergy.[151] Published in the midst of such change, O'Neill's text reflects some of negative perceptions of the Church, firmly establishing churching as part of a recent past. As a result, when this representation is read within the cultural context in which O'Neill is writing, it functions as a means of justifying contemporary criticism of the Church and provides a history for present day struggles. By documenting a practice that is no longer used, the author acknowledges that the Church has the ability to recognise outdated doctrines and to change its policies. As O'Neill places this in a narrative that continually relates ideas of past and present, perhaps she is suggesting the continued need for change in Church teachings in contemporary Ireland.

In response to what are represented as oppressive forces in Irish society, many of the characters choose to leave Ireland and move to England. In particular, the discussion of emigration in the novel allows for an exploration of relations between England and Ireland and the manner in which England acts a resource for Irish citizens on multiple levels. In terms of education, Karen leaves Ireland to live and train as a nurse in London; Britain provides employment for those wishing to emigrate; and England also acts as a space of sexual exploration. As a result, the novel creates a collective memory which represents Ireland as a space of moral conservatism and poverty in comparison to the opportunities and experiences available in Britain.

Emigration to Britain as a common occurrence is established from the outset as Lizzie waits in constant hope for her sister Karen's return while May Tully's two older brothers have emigrated to England.[152] Aunt Sissy also resides in London, providing the basis for Vicky's entrance into Lizzie's life. In order to avoid the destruction caused by the Blitz, Vicky is sent to live with the Doyles in Dun Laoghaire. In this manner, the traditional move from Ireland to England is reversed as Vicky stays with her family in Dublin for the purposes of safety and survival a concept of mutual dependence which arises again in the novel during a debate in the classroom. The character of Tess has a father who works in England and states that

[151] In 1992 Annie Murphy revealed to the public that she had had an affair with Bishop Eamon Casey and they had had a son together. See Finola Kennedy, pp. 250-251.
[152] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 31.

'There's no work here. He calls this country the island of scants and collars. Politicians laying down the law and no work'.[153] Tess's comments arise from a confrontation with Mrs King where the teacher informs the children that they are 'old enough to know about the economy'. This instigates Tess's retort, 'or lack of it', which opens up a debate on the condition of Ireland's economy during the Emergency.[154] Tess's phrasing draws attention to the traditional myth of Ireland as a land of 'Saints and Scholars' and consequently her pun demythologises such romantic views of the nation. Therefore, themes of fantasy and reality are foregrounded as the novel reveals a contrasting history that documents the harsher lived experience of Dubliners that exists outside of sentimental representation of the nation.

This history is also complicated by the text as Tess blames the politicians for the lack of employment, while Mrs King argues that it is the Emergency and the war that creates an environment where 'Wages are at a standstill and incomes are frozen'[155] and that in spite of it all 'Mr Lemass is doing his best'[156]. However, Mrs King also believes that 'Emigration is the only solution. Britain is anxious for people to work in her industries. A lot of farmers are gone to work in factories in Birmingham. At least we should be grateful to Britain for the work'.[157] As a result, Mrs King introduces aspects of the convoluted and complicated nature of British and Irish politics by demonstrating the mutual dependency of the two nations. The use of the word 'anxious' connotes that the British should be somewhat grateful for the Irish emigrants that find work in the British industries. Likewise, Ireland should be 'grateful' to Britain for providing the employment. Yet there is a point where this recognition and inter-dependency ends as represented by Mrs King's irate reaction to a pupil's declaration of 'God Save the King',[158] which can be read in several ways. The teacher may be annoyed that this is a disrespectful pun on her name 'King,' but the child's comment may also be understood as a declaration of allegiance to Britain. As a result, it can be read that while Mrs King may be satisfied that Ireland can depend on Britain for employment, Ireland's independence must also be asserted.

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[153] Ibid., p. 91.
[154] Ibid., p. 91.
[155] Ibid., p. 91.
[156] Ibid., p. 92. Seán Lemass was Minister for Supplies during the Emergency. For a discussion of Irish politics and economics during the period, see Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor For So Long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004).
[157] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 92.
[158] Ibid., p. 92.

Such ambiguity represents the often-contradictory relationship between Ireland and Britain during the war period, but also uses ideas of colonial relationships to symbolise child and adult relations. Concepts of Ireland and childhood are consequently conflated as 'King' refers both to British Imperial power and to the adult teacher's position of power over children in the classroom, conforming to Zornado's theories relating to childhood and imperialism where child/adult relations in Victorian England are equated with those of colonised and coloniser.[159]

However, despite the teacher's claims that the war is the root cause of Ireland's hardships, poverty and emigration continue after the war has ended. This is reported by Lizzie as she acknowledges that 'the world's wounds were not yet healed. Deprivation and shortages were everywhere. Ireland continued on much the same, in a state of low-grade poverty, hopelessly living from hand to mouth'.[160] Yet despite such claims, this poverty is never fully evident in the novel as the reader is only presented with reports from Lizzie, rather than any demonstration in the narrative that it greatly affects the Doyles, and can be read within the context of the production of childhood memories. Maurice Halbwachs suggests that although childhood may be a 'faraway world where we remember we have suffered [...] the great majority of people more or less frequently are given to what one might call nostalgia for the past'.[161]

Not only does Britain provide economic opportunities from the adversity that is mentioned but also acts as a space for sexual exploration. In constructing Lizzie's narration, O'Neill ensures that any representations of sex outside of marriage take place outside of Ireland. As is evident from the discussion above, Karen becomes pregnant while working in London, Mr Keogh and his girlfriend Madge Ryan have an affair and escape to England,[162] and Lizzie has her first sexual encounter when she visits Pete in London.[163] The description of Pete and Lizzie as they walk through the countryside before making love can be read in metaphoric terms, as they are located within nature and are free from the constraints of society. In order for the couple to reach the area where they do finally make love, Lizzie notes that they 'walked

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[159] See Zornado, pp. 101-134, specifically p. 102. Rose also draws such an analogy. Rose states that 'children's fiction has a set of long-established links with colonialism which identified the new world with the infantile state of man' (p. 50).
[160] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 178.
[161] Halbwachs, p. 49
[162] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 68.
[163] See *Daisy Chain War*, pp. 211-228.

through narrow lanes and climbed a hill past an old churchyard'.[164] The 'hill' can be read as an attempt to overcome an obstacle, while the reference to the churchyard may position traditional Catholic teachings that prohibit sex before marriage as forming the basis to this obstacle. Passing the churchyard can be read as moving beyond and rejection of traditional religious ideologies.

However, on Lizzie's return to Ireland, Mrs Doyle discovers that Lizzie has visited Pete and organises a place for her daughter to study nursing at St Michael's in Dublin, asserting that it will 'put a stop to your gallop'.[165] This is an act of intervention on the part of Mrs Doyle who, in Lizzie's eyes, 'drove a wedge' between Lizzie and Pete, proclaiming 'this time I'm not going to sit back and let things happen the way I did with Karen'.[166] Once again, the freedom that Lizzie experienced in England is placed in contrast to the oppressive forces of Church and family in Ireland as the author reveals a social history of many of the personal responses to the oppressive forces facing women of the period. However, it also provides a social history for the continued struggle for women's rights in Ireland at the time of writing the novel, particularly in relation to issues surrounding sex, such as contraception and abortion. It is possible to read O'Neill's use of the UK as a space of sexual freedom and liberation as an allusion to circumstances occurring in Ireland at the time she was writing, where many Irish citizens had to travel to the UK to purchase contraceptives or to have abortions.[167] O'Neill's documentation of a predominantly private women's history conforms to Inglis' theories that 'it is important to tell stories which challenge the myth that great men have made Irish history. Part of this struggle involves producing stories about Irish women'.[168]

Conclusion

This memory of the impact of Church teaching in Ireland and the nation's relation with Britain can therefore be read as the documentation of a form of social memory

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[164] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 217.
[165] Ibid., p. 225.
[166] Ibid., p. 222.
[167] See Finola Kennedy's discussion of contraception (pp. 158-165). The Family Planning Act, 1979, made contraceptives available via prescription for married couples. It was not until the mid 1990s that restrictions on the sale and distribution of condoms were relaxed in Ireland. See Kenny, p. 239 and p. 318. An Abortion Referendum held in 1983 was defeated.
[168] Inglis, *Truth, Power, and Lies*, p. 8.

for future generations of Irish child readers.[169] The text exposes some of the difficulties, concerns and complexities in employing the narrative of memory as a means of documenting the past. Issues of remembering, fantasising and forgetting feature throughout the text, both in terms of narrative content[170] and the author's own processes of writing.[171] Such themes are brought to the fore through Yeats' poem, where childhood is represented from an adult perspective as a desirable lost realm which is also aligned with a nostalgia for a cultural past. Combining these ideas of childhood with her own childhood memories, O'Neill fuses fact and fiction to create a memoir of growing up in 1940s Dublin. As a result, a particular form of childness is established in the text as a narrative of childhood is used to explore a narrative of the nation.

Memory[172] and forgetting can also be identified by the informed child reader when the author's process of writing is closely examined. While the inaccuracies surrounding the Battle of Dunkirk may call into question O'Neill's 'factual' evidence used to reference events in the reality of public history, *Daisy Chain Days* also reveals the manner in which the author misremembers the past histories of her own fictional characters. *Daisy Chain Days* is the fourth novel in the series and is set in contemporary Ireland, where the character of Lizzie Doyle still resides in Dublin and

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[169] See Chapter 6 for a discussion of *The Boy From Mercury* and social memory.

[170] The process of remembering and forgetting is also explored in Karen's relationship with Paul. Lizzie describes how Karen deals with Paul's absence and how she 'talked about him constantly', spending her days 'dreaming and thinking, thinking, thinking' (p. 152). Karen devotes her life to finding Paul ensuring that the authorities will not forget about him; 'she would never let them forget' (p. 154). For Paul, memory also functions as a source of comfort as he thinks of Karen during his time in battle (p. 121). Paul's recollections are similar to Karen's, where he fuses fond memories of the past with his hopes and dreams for the future as he writes, 'we'll swim and take our son for a paddle' (pp. 126-127).

[171] At the beginning Dad believes that Gran no longer thinks about her dead husband and that 'she's forgotten all about him' (p. 16). This reinforces ideas of 'perspective' in the narrative. Dad's view is later revised for the reader as Gran recounts tales of her youth to Lizzie in which emphasis is placed upon issues of marriage and family as she warns against making mistakes in these areas. Gran recollects getting married very young to a 'cold and unfeeling' husband and warns Lizzie of the dangers of marrying too young (p. 151). This contradicts the viewpoint of Lizzie's father, as Gran does in fact think about her husband.

[172] It is later revealed in *Bread and Sugar* that Paul suffered from amnesia, his loss of memory leading to a loss of identity, indicating the importance of both personal and cultural memory in the construction of identity of self. These ideas of past, present, and future correspond to Karin Liebhart's theories on the narration of cultural identity as she states that 'the discursive construction of national identity revolves around three temporal areas of the past, the present and the future', acknowledging the processes of imagining and reinventing national histories from the past, in the present, for the future. See Karin Liebhart, *The Construction of National Identity*, trans. by Angelika Hirsh and Richard Mitten (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 25. Paul and Karen's use of the past to reimagine the future from a present perspective can also be used as an analogy for the shaping of the Irish future by using the past, as is mentioned below.

is now married to Pete Scanlan. Her granddaughter, Beth, narrates the events of the narrative and notes that 'Granny had been a nurse in England during World War Two [...]. Granny's recollections of those days were distinct and in sharp focus'.[173] The author's memory of her character is incorrect, as in *Daisy Chain War* Lizzie did not leave Ireland to work as a nurse in London, but trained as a nurse in Dublin shortly after the war, an error which was not deliberate, as acknowledged by the author in an interview.[174] Consequently the reliability of the author's documentation of events is problematised and the construction of the heritage that is produced for the child reader is called into question and the informed reader is learns not to trust an apparently omniscient narrator.

By relocating her own childhood memories of the Fifties and Sixties to Ireland of the 1940s, O'Neill fuses history, memory and fiction to explore the effects of public events on private lives and presents the child reader with 'systems of signification by which we make sense of the past'.[175] O'Neill links the past to the present, recovering lost private histories. Therefore, the text functions as popular memory, documenting injustices of the past which gives a history to present-day struggles, particularly in relation to women and the Church.[176] As demonstrated above, while the war and its impact may be viewed from several perspectives, many of the narratives of the past that are constructed, such as in Paul's diary, are limited and somewhat conservative, only offering the reader one view of events on the front line. However, despite these problems and Lizzie's reiteration that 'times were still tough,' the tone of the novel continually sentimentalises the Irish past and the past of childhood experience. A paradox exists where the past is simultaneously criticised and romanticised. There is a constant return to ideas of nostalgia as first presented in

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[173] *Daisy Chain Days*, p. 36.

[174] See *Joan O'Neill Interview*, Appendix as she recognises 'Oh God, it is Aunty Sissy who has the stories about the Blitz. That's wrong'.

[175] Hutcheon notes that 'postmodern writing [...] has taught us that both history and fiction are discourses that [...] constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past'. See *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 89. This fabrication of a memoir of the war and its impact on modes of perceiving and understanding history and history writing can be found in Middleton and Woods' discussion of Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of Childhood, 1939-1948* (1995) (p. 93). They describe Swiss writer Wilkomirski as a 'memory thief' who 'presented plagiarised images of a childhood during the Holocaust as authentically his own [...] stealing the images and experiences in his memoir from the archives'.

[176] As Tribe notes in his discussion of popular memory, 'the 'lessons' of history are not inscribed in the simple existence of a past; they are the product of the construction of a history which can be deployed in contemporary arguments' (p. 10).

the Yeats poem and the pseudo-prologue. Also, in the first-person narrative, Lizzie's voice repeatedly draws the reader back to this nostalgic world:

> What more could I wish for in this magic world of my childhood, encircled by a love and warmth that reached out from within, strong enough to melt the icy snow and sustain me down all the years of my memory? [177]

Lizzie describes the difficulties of wartime and its impact on her family, noting many hardships such as getting slapped, missing her family members, being bullied and having to leave Ireland to have her first sexual experience. However, despite these unhappy moments, she continually adopts an affectionate tone for her narration, recollecting her childhood as period that she still longs for, a time of family warmth and community:

> Lit by the love of our family, the circle widened to encompass those around us and their lives. I grew up in the light of their love. I was lucky.[178]

This contradiction of writing about unhappy times, yet looking upon that past with a nostalgic eye, is typical of many of the juxtapositions and paradoxes in the novel such as 'Gran sounded cross but her face was wreathed in smiles',[179] or 'they all laughed in cheerful misery'[180]. There is a sense that despite all that was going on in the world, the family, and later Ireland, acted as a place that one could constantly return to, a stable and coherent environment, thus creating a nostalgia for childhood and for elements of Irish heritage. Such an approach to writing about the past and of childhood conforms to Krips' comments that few adults would wish to return to the world of childhood as it actually was, with all its difficulties and humiliations, but that 'returning to a past in which the problems of adulthood are by and large unknown is a different and much more enticing project'.[181] It is possible to view O'Neill's account

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[177] *Daisy Chain War*, p. 18.
[178] Ibid., p. 247.
[179] Ibid., p. 3.
[180] Ibid., p. 39.
[181] Krips, p. 16

of childhood in conjunction with the theories of Krips and Halbwachs, since suffering appears to be absent and sentiment prevails.[182]

Therefore, O'Neill's version of childhood and Ireland can be read as a form of fantasy, conforming to nostalgic expectations of Ireland and childhood and, in Zornado's terms, it reproduces the 'dominant culture's ideological status quo' of child and adult relations.[183] RF Foster, in his book *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (2001), notes the increased commodification of childhood in Irish culture in the 1990s, citing the phenomenal commercial success of books such as Alice Taylor's *To School through the Fields* (1988) and Franks McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1997).[184] Similarly, Diarmaid Ferriter notes that 'the seemingly insatiable appetite in Ireland and beyond for memoirs of Irish childhood'.[185] Foster argues that the 'fantasy element in Irish childhood is the essential ingredient for commercial success'.[186] The fantasy elements which Foster refers to include allusions to a prelapsarian world of both childhood and Ireland that can be found in texts such as Alice Taylor's *To School Through the Fields* which was published in 1988, two years prior to *Daisy Chain War*. There are many similarities between the two texts, particularly the focus upon the apparent simplicity of life, with emphasis constantly placed on family and community, and it is possible to argue that O'Neill adopts a similar style in order to trade on such commercial success as is evident in comments made in her interview.[187] Therefore, elements of history in the novel may not intentionally function as acts of recovery, but as a marketing strategy that conforms to expectations of Ireland and childhood, themes which are also explored in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

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[182] In *Bread and Sugar*, poverty, illness and tuberculosis are explored more fully through the representation of the Quinn family. However, in *Bread and Sugar* O'Neill creates an omniscient narrator who describes events, thus placing the reader at a distance to those characters that directly experience the adversity.

[183] Zornado, p. xv.

[184] *To School through the Fields: An Irish Country Childhood* (Kerry: Brandon: 1988), *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir of Childhood* (London: Flamingo, 1997). As noted, O'Neill's narrative can be placed somewhere between the two extremes of Taylor's and McCourt's work as she both sentimentalises and criticises the Irish past.

[185] Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Suffer Little Children? The Historical Validity of Memoirs of Irish Childhood', in *Childhood and its Discontents: The First Seamus Heaney Lectures*, ed. by Joseph Duncan and James Kelly (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2002), pp. 69-105 (p. 69).

[186] Foster, *The Irish Story*, p. 165.

[187] In marketing terms, O'Neill believed that this type of novel had the potential to sell in the USA as she notes that John McGahern told her that 'that granny will travel the world to America'. See *O'Neill Interview*, Appendix.

This emphasis on the community and family values of the 1940s also provides a sense of constancy and stability in a modern shifting and changing Ireland, what RF Foster refers to as the 'digitally enhanced, post-religious, post-nationalist twenty first century' that we now live in.[188] For many readers, de Valera's emphasis on the importance of community can prove an extremely attractive alternative society to the present-day global consumer economy that promotes and stresses individualism.[189] As Finola Kennedy notes

> it is acknowledged that there was much that was undesirable in family life in the past including economic hardship, forced emigration and the subjugation of the individual to the group, but there were many elements, the value of which may only be fully appreciated when they have been lost .[190]

Similar to Yeats' use of childhood to preserve a culture 'jeopardized by modernity' at the beginning of the twentieth century, O'Neill's narrative signals a similar attempt at preservation of certain values against modern processes of globalisation.[191] While the content may criticise the past, the benefits of family and community are also foregrounded. As a result, the novel can be read in the context of Foucault's theories as the writing of the past is greatly influenced by the present-day perspective from which it is written, and also in terms of childness in the form of an 'autobiographical' text.

Foster believes that autobiographical texts around the time 'struck a resounding chord with an Irish-reading public which possesses an endless appetite for reassurance about the verities of times past'.[192] However, O'Neill's narrative is not

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[188] Foster, *The Irish Story*, p. 165.

[189] See *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. by Roland Robertson and Kathleen E. White; and Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. For a discussion of the breakdown of communities and the increase of individualism in society see also Eugene Halton, 'The Modern Error: or, The Unbearable Enlightenment of Being', in *Global Modernities*, pp. 260-77 (p. 276). See Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 for a discussion of Irish heritage within a global culture.

[190] Finola Kennedy, p. 256. Therefore, in terms of the ideas of past, present, and future outlined above in relation to the processes of memory, it is also possible to argue that O'Neill is reimagining what she deems as valuable elements of the past (such as family and community) in the present moment in order to preserve them in writing for future generations.

[191] The breakdown of such values are alluded to by JJ Lee as, in relation to Irish culture in the 1990s, he comments that 'people exist only as producers and consumers [...] it is an economy not a society. It is therefore virtually the polar opposite to the dream Ireland of de Valera, which was far more a society than an economy'. See 'A sense of Place in the Celtic Tiger?', in *Are we Forgetting Something?: Our Society in the New Millenium*, ed. by Harry Bohan and Gerard Kennedy (Dublin: Veritas, 1999), pp. 71-93 (p. 80).

[192] Foster, *The Irish Story*, p. 164.

concerned with creating 'verities' but with creating an *illusion* of verisimilitude as fantasy and reality merge in the text. By manipulating the memoir style in such a manner, the author writes a novel that offers the child reader a means of exploring and deconstructing the processes involved in representing the past. The author's unintentional factual inaccuracies, regarding both historical events and fictional characters, create a much wider forum for the informed child reader to explore attempts at documenting history. Consequently, while the narrative content describes the private struggles that are often overshadowed by dominant histories, the modes of constructing the past through memory can subsequently be challenged by the reader, as the authority of O'Neill as a reliable 'carrier'[193] of events is questioned. Therefore, while the writing style is often superficial and sentimental, the text as a whole, including authorial fallibility, reveals the difficulties and complexities of writing about Irish history from a 1990s perspective.

[193] See Huyssen, p. 2.

Chapter 4

American Dreams and Irish Myths: John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish*

John Sayles' 1994 film *The Secret of Roan Inish* offers a complex multi-layered representation of myth and folklore that intertwines aspects of a cultural and a personal past.[1] In exploring the relationship between a mythic past and a modern present, Sayles interweaves ideas of both Ireland and childhood as sites of origin in a contemporary global culture. As a result, childness in the film can be read in terms of the alignment of the child characters with the Irish nation, the child as a symbol of origin, and the child as sign of hope for the future. These elements of childness are then placed within wider discourses regarding the representation of the past and related to representations of Ireland within a global context. By positioning the production and reception of the film within diverse theories of globalisation this chapter draws upon the work of Roland Robertson and concepts of 'glocalisation'.[2] Robertson analyses the relationship between the local and the global and the 'global institutionalisation of the expectation and construction of local particularism',[3] exploring the intricate relationship between issues of universalism and particularism.[4] Such an approach allows for an examination of Sayles' construction of Ireland as a particular site of mythic origins in a film that attempts to speak to the global viewer in universal terms.[5]

While Frederic Jameson refers to globalisation as an 'untotalizable totality',[6] Robertson draws upon Marshall McLuhan's idea of the 'global village'[7] and describes

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[1] Other films directed by John Sayles include *Silver City* (USA, 2004); *Casa de los babys* (USA/Mexico, 2003); *Sunshine State* (USA, 2002); *Limbo* (USA, 1999); *Men with Guns* (USA,1997); *Lone Star* (USA, 1996); *Passion Fish* (USA, 1992); *City of Hope* (USA, 1991); *Eight Men Out* (USA, 1988); *Matewan* (USA, 1987); *The Brother from Another Planet* (USA, 1984); *Baby It's You* (USA, 1983); *Lianna* (USA, 1983); and *Return of the Secaucus 7* (USA, 1980).

[2] Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity', in *Global Modernities*, pp. 25-44.

[3] Ibid., p. 38.

[4] The concept of 'universalism' is problematic as it presumes that diverse cultures around the world experience similar needs and wants, as is found in the work of Joseph Campbell. His work traces the parallel motifs and structures that exist in many cultural myths that originate from contrasting societies. In essence, it is not necessary for the reader to accept theories of universalism as I simply argue that Sayles is *striving* for a universal myth; whether universalism exists or not is secondary. Robertson also problematises universalism in global culture in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (pp. 97-114).

[5] For further reading on issues of globalisation, see Roberston, *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology* and *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. For a discussion of children's literature in global culture see *Children's Literature Global and Local: Social and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. by Emer O'Sullivan, Kimberley Reynolds, and Rolf Romøren (Oslo: Novus Press, 2005).

[6] Fredric Jameson, 'Preface', in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. by Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. xii. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of *War of the Buttons* and globalisation.

[7] This concept was first introduced in McLuhan's *Explorations in Communication* (Boston: Beacon, 1960).

globalisation as a concept that 'refers to both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole'.[8] This idea of globalisation and compression is central to an understanding of *The Secret of Roan Inish* within a global culture, which relies upon 'the export and the import of culture'.[9] The exchange between cultures and the idea of a shared Celtic heritage is explored in the first section of this chapter, focusing on the significance of transferring the original narrative, *Child of the Western Isles,* a novella by Rosalie K. Fry, from a Scottish to an Irish setting.[10] This transfer results in the creation of a particular site of origin in the form of Ireland and the subsequent use of concepts of Ireland to explore universal myths for a global audience. Robertson notes that 'the relationship between the universal and the particular must be central at this time to our comprehension of the globalization process'.[11] It is this relationship of particularism and universalism which creates a methodological framework for the analysis of the film.

Set in the early 1950s, the plot of *The Secret of Roan Inish* focuses on the experiences of Fiona Conneely (Jeni Courtney), a ten year-old girl who leaves her father (Dave Duffy) in the city to live with her grandparents, Hugh and Tess (Mick Lally and Eileen Colgan), and her cousin Eamon (Richard Sheridan), on the Donegal coast.[12] This move from the urban centre to the rural coastline prompts a series of storytelling episodes where Fiona and consequently the viewer learn about the Conneely family history, in terms of their recent past and their distant past. As a result, Fiona engages with folklore and myth in an effort to find her missing brother Jamie (Cillian Byrne) and encourages her grandparents to return to the family's home island of Roan Inish.

Section 1 examines the construction of Ireland in this children's film as both a site of loss and a site of origin in global culture.[13] As a result, Ireland is established as an archetypal space that allows for the exploration of the formation of identity using

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[8] Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, p. 8.
[9] Fredric Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', in *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 55.
[10] Rosalie K. Fry, *Child of the Western Isles* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1957).
[11] Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, p. 97.
[12] In the original novella, Fiona's grandparents reside on one of the larger islands. In the film, this move to the mainland affects the interpretation of the narrative as the story not only deals with island culture, but also explores Irish mainland culture.
[13] Sayles discusses children as a target audience, acknowledging that he hoped that he would appeal to a literary child viewer or viewers that could engage with the storytelling techniques in the narrative: 'the kids who are going to like it the most are the kids who are read to, not the kids who only sit in front of the TV and watch Saturday morning stuff that has a lot of fast cutting'. See John Sayles in John Sayles and Gavin Smith, *Sayles on Sayles*, p. 211.

universal myths, focussing on humanity's relationship with nature. Section 2 then uses theories of childness to explore the paralleling of an idea of Ireland with concepts of childhood as a site of individual origin. Sayles uses established concepts of childhood in culture to explore ideas of a loss that can never be regained, echoing Warner's argument that childhood is often viewed as a site of lost innocence.[14] However, in the film, childhood functions both as a symbol of hope for the future, and as a means of accessing the past in the forging of a new identity.[15] It is in this sense that childhood and history become aligned in the search for origins.[16] Such an analysis also draws upon the work of Michel Foucault and his theories of history and genealogy set out in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' which aligns the search for the origins of self with the search for origins of culture. Drawing upon theories of childness, the examination of the film also incorporates the idea of a child character's perspective of events and how this frames the narrative for the viewer.

Section 3 then places the film within the context of the wider film industry and the history of representations of Ireland in film and literature. Sayles' use of stereotypes to explore connections with myth led to a predominantly negative reception of the film in Ireland. However, as is explored in Section 4, Sayles establishes these recognisable characteristics in order to appeal to a global viewer, but subsequently subverts these tropes in order to depict the island of Roan Inish as a liminal space where myth can become reality. Sayles avoids depicting a simplistic binary of rural and urban Ireland in the 1950s and creates a third space that expands beyond ideas of tradition and modernity. This section incorporates concepts of the spatialisation of history in social theory, drawing upon the work of critics such as Edward Soja, Michel Foucault, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha.[17] The island acts as a separate space from the mainland and reinforces the division between the mythic

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[14] Warner, *Managing* Monsters, p. 41.

[15] Merlock Jackson notes that 'a hope for the future has always been at the core of childhood innocence, as embodied by children both onscreen and off'. See Merlock Jackson, p. 10.

[16] Krips also believes that 'a psychologized and individualized sense of self, looking inward for origins and history, and representing the world in its own image, found a potent realization in the "heritage" representations of the past which developed between 1945 and 1980. I shall argue that such a selfhood found a symbol in the fictional child, a character who was to be as important for the collective relation of past to present as it was for the individual' (p. 1).

[17] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Michel Foucault *Power/Knowledge* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1992); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1978); and Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Social Theory* (London: Verso Press, 1989), and *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

world and contemporary Ireland as well as constructing a childhood space free from adult interference. Thus, using childness as a methodological framework allows for the simultaneous exploration of Ireland as a site of origin and of child adult-relations within the text.

Central to the analysis of the film is the concept of 'myth', a term which can be understood in a number of ways. In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes argues that concepts of myth and ideology are interchangeable, a theory which can be applied to *The Secret of Roan Inish* as the myth of the island may be understood as an alternative ideology which replaces both the ideologies of traditionalism and of global capitalism.[18] In a discussion of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957),[19] Mircea Eliade defines myth as 'an extremely complex cultural reality which can be approached and interpreted from various and complimentary viewpoints' which tells a society 'how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a creation'.[20] Eliade's understanding of myth can be applied to Fiona's family history as her Selkie ancestry offers a means of understanding her current situation, the loss of her brother, and her relationship with nature as ideas of myth are closely linked to concepts of identity. However, the film also alludes to changes in the understanding of the term, from one of cultural identity to a falsehood.[21] In 'Myth and Identity in 20th Century Irish Fiction and Film', AMP McKendriok similarly argues that 'from being a revered story, a concept that included fundamental beliefs of society, "myth" came to express the exact opposite'.[22] McKendriok also notes that 'myth [...] is closely linked to the way in which a society sees itself, it is linked with its identity', suggesting that a loss of myth in society leads to a loss of identity, a

[18] Barthes states that 'the notion of myth seemed to me to explain these examples of the falsely obvious'. See *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Trinity, 1972), p. 11.
[19] *Anatomy of Criticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973).
[20] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 5-6.
[21] For a further discussion of myth as 'falsehood' see Michael Bell, 'Introduction', in *Myth and the Making of Modernity: The Problem of Grounding in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. by Michael Bell and Peter Poellner (Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 1-8 (p. 5).
[22] AMP McKendriok, 'Myth and Identity in 20th Century Irish Fiction and Film' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Open University, 2001), p. 5. McKendriok also notes that 'the notion that myth has lost its function is not unique to the twentieth century. During the Enlightenment, it was regarded as archaic and bound up with the past, primitive society and primordial situations' (p. 2).

concept which is explored throughout Sayles' film.[23] Myth in this sense can be read as a form of history, an idea which is explored in detail below.

The function and role of myth and storytelling in culture are established as central themes in the narrative, as discussed in Section 5. Through applying the theories of Jack Zipes and Walter Benjamin, this section explores the sense of belonging that comes with storytelling and how it is ultimately used to retrieve a loss, a loss of identity and also a loss of understanding of cultural origins.[24] Three main stories feature in the film and depict three representations of history in the form of a political past, a personal past, and a mythical past. As a result, different storytelling practices are integrated into one narrative as personal history is aligned with cultural history, a method which can be read in terms of Foucault's theories of employing a genealogical approach to the study of history.

As Marina Warner notes, myths are a common feature of many children's stories and are often closely linked to ideas of childhood and nature. These themes are also central to *The Secret of Roan Inish*. Within stories of childhood and nature Warner claims there lies a secret treasure in the form of

> The story of identity and belonging, the myth of home, which places everyone in relation to mothers, to fathers, to offspring, to here and to elsewhere, to time past and time present – and in so doing lays the path of the future, where we may or may not be saved.[25]

In *The Secret of Roan Inish* it is this story of identity that forms the basis for the character Fiona's journey of discovery. Distanced from her father in the city, the child character returns to her grandparents and enters a rural lifestyle in which storytelling features prominently. The stories then provide Fiona with access to the discovery of her own family origins and reunion with her lost brother Jamie. In Warner's terms, Fiona finds her place in the world, recognises the links between past and present, and uses her knowledge of the past to forge a future for herself and her family. As a result, myth, storytelling, and ideas of origin all become associated with the symbol of the child and concepts of childhood, and can be read as forms of childness within the text.

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[23] McKendriok, p. 5.

[24] See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1973), pp. 83-107. Jack Zipes draws upon Benjamin's work in *Happily Ever After: Fairytales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[25] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p. xv.

An analysis of these components of childness allows for an exploration of childhood and an Irish past within the context of global culture.

By encouraging the viewer to identify with Fiona's position as subject, Sayles suggests that universal myths have relevance in modern global culture. Such an approach to the narrative can be read in terms of Eugene Halton's theories in 'The Modern Error: Or, The Unbearable Enlightenment of Being' where he discusses the function of myth within a global culture. Halton claims that

> It is time to begin to body forth a new world view and world civilization, new ways of living both locally and globally in harmony both with outer nature and the nature within us ... as well as rediscovering the lost resources of the human past and new ways of joining them to the present. Without the hope of such a thoroughgoing transformation, we are likely to continue to go the way of the earth's ozone shield into corrosive self-extinction.[26]

Halton argues that rediscovering elements of the past and using them in the present may offer alternatives to modern-day consumer culture where 'anything goes if people will buy it, only the real cost for the delusion of endless possession is a loss of self-possession'.[27] Constructing an identity of self and understanding relationships with nature and the world are at the centre of Fiona's journey, leading her to her family and to the lost element in her life in the form of her brother Jamie.

As a result, the discussion below demonstrates that Sayles establishes an idea of Ireland in order to construct a recognisable space for the exploration of universal myths. This 'idea of Ireland' is based upon received images of the nation and dominant representations of Irish culture, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, it is argued that it is possible to read the text as simply conforming to stereotypical representations of the nation as Sayles overtly draws upon elements of local culture and tradition in constructing a narrative for a global viewer. However, the subsequent subversion of such tropes in the narrative allows for an alternative reading and suggests that the film can also be understood as a critique of rural Irish culture. The west of Ireland is not presented as a rural idyll for the characters, but as an oppressive space. The Conneelys long for a return to Roan Inish, an island where myth and folklore are a reality of everyday life. Consequently, it is argued that the

[26] Halton, p. 276.
[27] Ibid., p. 272.

island becomes representative of an imagined liminal space that provides an alternative to both stifling traditionalism and global consumerism.

By conducting a close textual analysis, this chapter represents a re-evaluation of the film within the context of Irish film studies and challenges previous readings of the film. It is argued here that the analysis of this children's text offers insights into the complex position of representations of Ireland both nationally and internationally. Unlike many of the novels examined in the previous chapter, history in the film is not reworked or manipulated to draw the viewer's attention to the processes of constructing versions of the past. *The Secret of Roan Inish* demonstrates complicity with previous representations of Ireland on screen and avoids a radical re-reading of history. It is proposed that Irish history is used as an allegory for global culture through the portrayal of a loss of tradition and a loss of understanding of tradition.

Section 1. 1950s Ireland as Site of Origin

To justify an analysis of text as a global commodity using Jameson's ideas that such a world system 'alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings', the global elements of the production process must first be identified.[28] Written and directed by an independent Irish American filmmaker, the film is an adaptation of a 1957 children's novel, written by Canadian Rosalie K. Fry.[29] In Britain the novel was published as *Child of the Western Isles*, while in the US it can be found under the title *The Secret of Ron Mor Skerry*.[30] During World War II, Fry worked as a coast-watcher on the coast of Scotland, where she witnessed seals in their natural habitat and also became familiar with the selkie folklore of Scotland.[31] Fry draws upon these selkie myths and incorporates them into a narrative that explores the contemporary concerns of a young character named Fiona McConville. While Fry set her story in the contemporary Western Isles of Scotland of 1957, Sayles relocated the narrative to the immediate postwar period of 1949/50 and shot the film on the Donegal coast. The global nature of the production is apparent from the outset; an Irish American director adapts a novel set in Scotland written by a Canadian author, relocates the narrative to

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[28] Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', p. 55.

[29] Sayles' great-grandparents came from Cork and from the Northwest of Ireland. See *The Magic of Realism: John Sayles Interviewed by Carol Allen* at <http://www.talkingpix.co.uk/Interview_John%20Sayles.html> [accessed 19 September 2005].

[30] *The Secret of Ron Mor Skerry*, 1st American edn (USA: Dutton, 1959).

[31] See John Sayles, in *Sayles on Sayles*, p. 208.

the Northwestern Irish coast and receives funding from an American television corporation, Jones Entertainment.[32]

An analysis of the narrative of film in the context of the global film industry incorporates theories of adaptation which highlight the significance of transferring the setting from Scotland to Ireland and the creation of a local form of particularism. The basic storyline of the film corresponds to that of the original novel and in adaptation theory can be understood in terms of what Geoffrey Wagner describes as 'transposition', or the process 'in which a novel is given directly on screen with a minimum of apparent interference'.[33] *Child of the Western Isles* is set among the islands of Scotland as Fiona McConville returns from the mainland to live with her grandparents on a large island. After hearing the tales of their original family home on one of the smaller islands, Ron Mor Skerry, Fiona is aided by her older cousin, Rory, in locating her lost brother who has been living with the seals. However, setting the story in Ireland is a departure from the original text and does not conform to ideas of fidelity which form the basis for 'transposition' and can thus be read as what Wagner terms 'commentary', his second category of systems of adaptation. 'Commentary' is where an original is taken and 'either purposefully or inadvertently altered in some respect [...] when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation'.[34] As is detailed below, the intention of conveying a sense of loss is central to Sayles' film and thus required a change of setting.

The relocation of Sayles' narrative from Scotland to Donegal may initially appear insignificant, as selkie folklore is a part of both Irish and Scottish culture and consequently both nations act as credible backdrops to such a tale. This can also be read in terms of Sayles' desire to portray myths that transcend ideas of national boundaries in a global culture, similar to those Celtic myths that are found in different nations. David Thomson's *People of the Sea* documents many of the shared selkie myths of Ireland and Scotland, several of which Sayles incorporates into Fry's basic narrative structure, thus adding a more complex dimension to the text.[35] However, the

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[32] Jones Entertainment is a Colorado-based cable TV corporation. See Paddy Barrett, 'The Secret of Roan Inish', in *Screen International*, 917 (13 July, 1993), 16.

[33] Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1975), p. 222.

[34] Ibid., p. 224.

[35] See David Thomson, *The People of the Sea* (1954) (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996). These elements include references to Teach Duinn, the story of Sean Michael and the cingulum, the rescue of Sean Michael, and the story of Liam and the Selkie woman. These aspects are discussed in detail throughout

deliberate transfer of the narrative setting becomes an important component of constructing themes of origins for a global viewer. The ideological construction of Ireland in cinema throughout the twentieth century results in 1950s Ireland in the film not simply functioning as a backdrop to events, but as an important cultural signifier of themes of loss and return. This approach also relies upon establishing recognisable characteristics of Ireland so that the location and its cultural resonance are immediately identifiable for the global viewer, particularly in terms of land, nationality and Catholicism.[36]

The change of surname from McConville in the novel to Conneely in the film is also significant in constructing a specifically Irish dimension to this personal history as the Irish family name 'Conneely' claims selkie origins.[37] Such a technique allows for a series of modes of representing and understanding both personal and cultural history. Interwoven into these tales are stories of Ireland's political past and the impact of British colonialism on the island community, thus positioning the events as part of a distinctly Irish narrative. Also present is Ireland's mythic past in the form of selkie folklore. As Fiona searches for a sense of identity and understanding in her life, she discovers that one of her ancestors, Nuala (Susan Lynch), was in fact a selkie woman. The use of 'Roan Inish' in the title of the film not only uses the Irish language words for 'seal' and 'island', but also refers to a real island located off the Donegal coast. In terms of her own remembered, personal history, it is established that four years previous to the opening events of the film, the entire Conneely family were evacuated from their island of Roan Inish and moved to the mainland. Ideas of Ireland as a place where an oral tradition still survives in the form of storytelling, or the traditional Irish art of Seanchais, are evident as Fiona listens to tales of her family's past and the viewer learns that during the evacuation, Fiona's younger brother Jamie drifted out to sea in his cradle, and has not returned. Fiona's quest to uncover the secrets of her family history eventually lead her to her brother, and also results in a return to Roan Inish.

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this chapter. For a discussion of children's texts that incorporate selkie lore see Rosaleen Cox, 'Mermaids, Mermen, and Seal People in Children's Literature' (unpublished MA thesis, St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Dublin, 2001).

[36] Fintan O'Toole asserts that 'Daniel Corkery's famous definition of Irishness as characterised by Land, Nationality and Catholicism remained ideologically potent right into the 1970s'. See *The Ex-Isle of Erin: Images of a Global Ireland* (Dublin, New Island Books, 1996), p. 15.

[37] The story of the Conneely family and the seals is established in Irish folkloric tradition. See Thomson, pp. 190-191. The tale can be read online at <http://www.irishsealsanctuary.ie/html/folklore> [accessed 06 April 2005].

Sayles remarks that a number of factors influenced this decision to locate the narrative in Ireland. Along with a greater familiarity with Irish rather than Scottish history, it was the association of concepts of Ireland with ideas of loss that informed his view of setting:

> [O]ne of the things that I did get from the Irish Americans around me growing up and in Boston was that so many American songs are about going on the road, going to a great place, while Irish songs very often are about loss, they're about leaving something behind. That sense of Ireland being this island that's obsessed with loss – their national sovereignty, their language, their sons and daughters, and a certain past, seemed to me perfect for this particular story, which is about the loss of an island and a way of life. And is there any way to go back to that world? Scotland has its own preoccupations, but the loss isn't as heavy.[38]

The Irish American community that Sayles refers to is important in understanding both the production and reception of the film in global culture.[39] It can be argued that many of the motifs of origins and homeland that permeate the text appeal to members of the Irish diaspora around the world as Ireland is established as site of nostalgia. Ireland in the film can be read in John Urry's terms, as a place or a homestead that can be visually consumed.[40] Thus 'Ireland' is established as a consumer item, a commodity, and as a concept that can be marketed in a global culture, as is the case in the tourist industry. Images of Ireland on screen very often incorporate a touristic gaze and construct the nation as 'a rural utopia to be sold as a commodity to a world market'.[41]

The importance of the Irish diaspora in marketing an Irish identity cannot be underestimated. While Sidney Olcott's Kalem Company films from 1910 and 1911 demonstrate that Ireland has always been commodified by the film industry, this

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[38] John Sayles, in *Sayles on Sayles*, pp. 209-210. For further interviews with and articles on John Sayles, see *American Independent Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. by Jim Hiller (London: British Film Institute, 2001); *John Sayles Interviews*, ed. by Diane Carson (USA; University of Mississippi Press, 1999); and Jack Ryan, *John Sayles, Filmmaker* (London: McFarland, 1998).

[39] In an article on 'Ireland and the Irish in American Children's Literature', John F. Savage notes that 'in the 1990 U.S. Census, 39 million Americans listed their ancestry as Irish, almost eight times as many people as are living in Ireland today. It's little wonder, then, that the Irish are becoming more prominent in the multicultural mosaic of American children's literature'. See *Children's Books in Ireland*, 18 (Spring 1998) p. 36. This suggests that the Irish-American diaspora would also be a potential audience for Irish themes in children's film.

[40] See John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1. In the creation of nostalgia in postmodern culture, see also Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) and Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

[41] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 201.

implosion of economics and cultural representation increased greatly during the 1990s.[42] This conforms to positioning the film within the context of theories of globalisation, what Jameson terms as 'the becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural'.[43] In 1990, President Mary Robinson lit a candle in Áras an Uachtaráin in honour of all those Irish who lived abroad. This act constituted a very public recognition of Ireland as an 'imagined community', to borrow Benedict Anderson's term,[44] acknowledging the possibility of claiming Irishness without residing within a specific geographic locale.[45] Likewise, in 2001 Diane Negra wrote that 'it would be difficult to overstate the positive currency of Irishness in US popular culture [...]. As Irishness has surged into a globally marketed identity, Irish-American ethnicity has emerged as a particularly nostalgic point of connection with this phenomenon',[46] emphasising the Irish American market that existed for *The Secret of Roan Inish*.[47] In particular, there was an intensification of Irish–US relations culturally, politically and economically during the 1990s.[48]

As many commentators have noted, this sense of loss and return in Ireland is epitomised in John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952).[49] Sean Thornton's return to the

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[42] For a discussion of the increasing commodification of culture in 1990s Ireland see Michel Peillon, 'Culture and State in Ireland's New Economy', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 38-53.

[43] Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', p. 60.

[44] Benedict Anderson describes the nation and national identity as 'imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that might prevail [...] the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), p. 7. I argue that the Irish diaspora can also 'imagine' themselves as an Irish community despite not living in the country.

[45] In popular culture, everything Irish became a commodity from pop groups such as U2, the Corrs and Westlife, to dance shows like Riverdance and Lord of the Dance. For a further discussion of these aspects see Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, p. 5.

[46] Diane Negra in 'The New Primitives: Irishness in recent US television', *Irish Studies Review* 9 (Britain: Avon, 2001), p. 229. Cited in Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, p. 5.

[47] For a discussion relating to US and Irish cultural issues, see Gibbons, *Transformations*.

[48] For a discussion of US – Irish relations during the Celtic Tiger Economy see Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 'Introduction'. In terms of US political relations with Ireland, see Eunan Whyte's discussion of the changing relations of Ireland and America throughout the twentieth century, in 'The Changing Nature of Global Politics was a Significant Factor in Allowing Bill Clinton to Make a Decisive Contribution to the Northern Ireland Peace Process' (unpublished MA thesis, Dublin City University, 1998). In particular, Whyte explores the contribution that Bill Clinton made to the Northern Ireland Peace Process when he came to power in 1992 and places it within the context of global political culture.

[49] See Luke Gibbons, *The Quiet Man* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002); Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, pp. 71-76; McLoone, *Irish Film*, pp. 52-59; and Barry Monahan, 'Deconstructing the Nation: The Abbey Theatre and Stage-Irishness on Screen, 1930-1960' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2004). Gibbons' discussion of the film in 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', in Cinema and Ireland, pp. 194-257 (p. 199) explores Inisfree as 'heaven'. This can be aligned to the construction of Roan Inish as a type of heaven as is discussed below.

Irish homestead is bound up with a sense of fantasy and wonder and its resonance in relation to homecoming is such that it is later adopted as an intertextual reference in Steven Spielberg's *ET*. It is watching *The Quiet Man* on television that prompts ET's request to 'phone home'. Not only does this oft-cited example establish the significance of *The Quiet Man* as connected to ideas of 'home', but it also links the text to the children's film industry and concepts of childhood and origins. Fiona's journey home can be compared to that of Sean Thornton in the form of returned emigrant. The greeting of Fiona by her grandfather is reminiscent of the moment that Sean Thornton encounters Inisfree, his family homestead. Fiona's journey to her grandparent's home can therefore be read as that of the returned emigrant, coming back to discover her roots.[50] The opening shots of Fiona on board the ferry reverse the traditional image of the emigrant leaving Ireland on board a ship as is evident in films such as *Far and Away* (1992) and *Titanic* (1997). Fiona, positioned at the helm of the ferry, represents a return to the area that she left approximately four years ago. During this sequence the audience are provided with a flashback of Fiona's past as she remembers her mother's funeral on the island of Roan Inish. The representation of Fiona's childhood memories introduces the viewer to binaries of past and present, concepts which are to the fore of the film. Positioning childhood memories of the child character within a text set in the past that explores mythic and family history also invites the viewer to engage with the multiple forms of history and memory within the narrative. In this flashback, the camera pans across the many gravestones on the island, signifying both the life that once existed and the death that has replaced it. It symbolises not only the mortal death of the individual, but also the end of a culture and way of life on the island which, as is revealed later in the film, is caused by a mass evacuation and emigration. In this sense Ireland's cultural past of emigration, while not directly explored on screen, is implied in the narrative.[51] Therefore, the emigrant or the subsequent generations of Irish diaspora viewing the film are implicated in the opening images in terms of leaving, but also in terms of returning in search of origins as is represented by the character of Fiona. These

[50] Although the initial journey of return by ferry is present in Fry's novella, it does not make geographical sense to have Fiona arrive on a ferry. Her grandparents live on the mainland, and Fiona is coming from city on the mainland. It seems unusual for Fiona to travel by sea, as primary routes to urban centres near that region of Donegal would not be accessed by sea.

[51] Brown discusses these radical changes in Irish society noting that 'predominant amongst these was the widespread rejection of rural life that in the immediate post-war period quickened into what almost amounted to an Irish exodus'. (Brown, p. 211).

images are also aligned with the concept of childhood as a site of origin, as childhood also becomes a commodity for the global viewer.

Section 2. Childhood and Origins

As is discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Peter Hollindale's concept of childness can be used as a means of uncovering and exploring the various constructions of childhood that are present in children's fiction. The construction of childhood in the film is present in several forms, but is primarily manipulated to explore themes of origin for the global viewer, a technique which Sayles also uses in his portrayal of Ireland on screen. As Ireland is depicted as a site of origin for a global viewer, childhood also becomes an object of desire in global culture.

As the representation of Ireland satisfies a particular desire for global viewers, the myth of childhood innocence in the film satisfies the audience's expectations of childhood. Both Ireland and childhood become particularised for a global audience. Jacqueline Rose notes that a children's text can show 'innocence not as a property of childhood but as a portion of adult desire [...] relying as it does on myths of primordial innocence'.[52] In many ways, Rose's theories of childhood can be related to the construction of ideas of origin in the film as she aligns cultural and individual innocence, claiming that children's fiction emerges

> out of a conception of both the child and the world as knowable in a direct and unmediated way, a conception which places the innocence of the child and a primary state of language and/or culture in a close and mutually dependent relation.[53]

When constructed as 'knowable', childhood, therefore, represents a means of accessing both a personal and a cultural past. In the film, the child is utilised to access a cultural Irish past of the 1950s, a political past of the nineteenth century, and a mythical past of selkie lore. The ancestral link to the selkies also connects Fiona to nature, with both Jamie and Tadhg (John Lynch) described as 'dark ones', their dark eyes originating from the seal branch of the family. The selkie stories are bound up with ideas of humans working in conjunction with nature, as opposed to destroying it,

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[52] Rose, p. xii.
[53] Ibid., p. 9.

and as Tadhg notes, 'man and beast lived side by side sharing the wealth of the sea', linking ideas of childhood to the natural environment.[54]

At various moments in the film the child characters, and those who are childlike, are connected with the sea, the landscape, and the wildlife, a feature that dominates many children's films.[55] This alignment of childhood and nature is evident on a number of occasions such as Fiona's drifting across the sea to Roan Inish, Eamon's seafaring capabilities, Tadhg's ability to catch fish with his bare hands, and Jamie's adoptive guardians being seals. Throughout all these sequences there is a sense that the child knows something much more than adults and has access not only to a different world, but also to a different perspective of the world.[56] In Marina Warner's terms, 'the child both mirrors our potential and represents what we have forfeited', recovering something that the majority of adult characters have lost.[57] Childhood, like Ireland, is not a realistic representation but an imagined idea that is used to explore links with a mythic past. The association of childhood with the other worlds of myth and folklore is a common trait in many stories. As Warner notes, 'the commitment of the Romantics to imagination, to fantasy as an instrument of truth, led them to this idea of the child who could provide an unspoiled, undoctored, spontaneous response to the world'.[58] This is how the child character is represented in Sayles' text, and functions as a means of bridging the real world and the world of fantasy.[59] It is this contemporary child mythology that 'presupposes that the child has access to a form of desirable wisdom, of potent innocence'.[60] Sayles uses the idea of the child to reveal the audience's loss of understanding of the world and of nature. It is through these figures that the spectator can gain access to these myths of origin. The child protagonist therefore has a dual function in the film. The character of Fiona as hero can appeal to younger viewers as her knowledge of the reality of the myth

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[54] This corresponds to Warner's theories outlined above. Tadhg's statement also reinforces Halton's view of living in harmony with the natural environment which forms a central theme of the film.

[55] As is noted in the analysis of *War of The Buttons* in Chapter 5, films such as *National Velvet* (Clarence Brown, USA, 1944) and *The Yearling* (Clarence Brown, USA, 1946) associated childhood innocence with animals. This tradition is continued today with films such as *Into The West* (1992), *The Secret Of Roan Inish* (1994), *Fly Away Home* (Carroll Ballard, USA, 1996) and *The Mighty Celt* (Pearse Elliott, Ireland, 2005).

[56] Rose, p. 9.

[57] Marina Warner, *Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), p. 41.

[58] Ibid., p. 40.

[59] Rose also notes the 'primitive or lost state to which the child [as constituted in children's literature] has special access' (p. 9).

[60] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p. 36.

places her in a privileged position to the adult characters. Meanwhile, she also represents a site of memory and loss for the adult spectator. However, this sense of loss is coupled with themes of hope.

Eamon and Fiona's rejuvenation of the cottages represents a new beginning on the island, and it is possible to read the return to Roan Inish as a combination of both the myth of the Irish west and the American west.[61] There is a move westward, to an old heartland, but one that has the potential for new beginnings. It is not a simple case of revisiting old myths, but using and adapting these myths in conjunction with present day needs. This is evident in Fiona's comment to Eamon as she stands by her mother's grave on the island: 'We'll plant some things here when we move back', recognising the death of one form of life on the island, but also the ability to forge a new future for her self, that will draw upon tradition but will not necessarily be confined by it. As the film concludes, Eamon, Fiona, Jamie and their grandparents sit in the newly renovated cottage on Roan Inish. Jamie, as a feral child uncorrupted by the modern world, may be read as a form of hope, a *tabula rasa* where this small community can create a new and alternative way of life. Therefore, the characters are not simply going back to a world of myth, but are taking elements of these myths to move forward into the future.

Throughout the narrative, Fiona as a child is not granted the same degree of credibility as her adult counterparts. However, rather than reinforcing such ideology, Sayles gradually undermines adult authority in the text and encourages the viewer to identify with Fiona's viewpoint. Indeed, the theme of perspective and point of view dominates the narrative. When Fiona first arrives at her grandparents' home she gazes out of the window and Hugh directs her attention toward Roan Inish. The camera remains at Fiona's eye level, encouraging the audience to identify with her perspective. As Fiona points to the position of Roan Inish on the horizon, Hugh shows his excitement by exclaiming to Tess, 'She sees it. Only them that's born to the island can see it at this distance'. Hugh's remark indicates that Fiona has a special insight into seeing and understanding her place of origin. This idea of an understanding of events is further reinforced when the camera shoots Fiona gazing out of the window at the night sky. The establishing shot of the scene is composed of a starry night sky as

[61] For a discussion of links between the Irish west and the American west see Cheryl Herr, *Critical Regionalism and Cultural Studies: From Ireland to the American Midwest* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1996), and Gibbons, *Transformations*. Chapter 5 of this thesis also discusses aspects of the American West in *War of the Buttons*.

the camera gradually pans to Fiona's bedroom window and positions her in the frame. The perspective then shifts to present the spectator with a point of view shot as Fiona sees the light on Roan Inish. This signifies the truth of the rumour that Eamon has already told her. Therefore, for the majority of the film, the audience is encouraged to identify with Fiona. This corresponds to Marina Warner's view of films such as *The Spirit of The Beehive*[62] and *Fanny and Alexander*[63] that

> use the central perspective of a child to draw the spectator into a different angle of vision, to make us accept the camera's pristine angle of truthfulness, to intensify the pathos and the drama. By making us as little children, we are helped to shed cynicism and resistance to the material on view, and to mind more because more is at stake.[64]

It is clear that the viewer is placed in a privileged position, as he/she has witnessed Fiona's sightings and subsequently knows more than the adult characters. This undermines the initial adult authority in the film, encouraging the viewer to side with Fiona and question traditional assumptions regarding adult/child power dynamics. This sequence of searching in the darkness and seeing the truth, or the light, also draws attention to the spectator's own process of viewing the film. For the viewer, watching thus becomes a self-conscious act as he/she realises that an understanding of events is based upon being exposed to selected information as well as understanding events from the perspective from which they are viewed. This is demonstrated by Fiona's determination to prove her grandparents wrong, a motivation that arises from her witnessing of the light on the island. While the adults remain ignorant because of their refusal to look, Fiona gains access to the reality of the myth and uses knowledge of her personal past and of the Irish past in forging a new future for her family.

Section 3. 1950s Ireland as Rural Utopia?

Although Sayles changes the setting of the film from Scotland to Ireland, he retains the time period in which the *Child of the Western Isles* was set. Published in 1957, the text is not a historical novel or a period narrative, but rather Fry locates events within

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[62] Victor Erice, Spain, 1973.
[63] Ingmar Bergman, Sweden/France/West Germany, 1983.
[64] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p. 41. See Chapter 6 of this thesis for a discussion of child perspective in *The Boy From Mercury*.

the contemporary context in which she is writing. Making the film in the 1990s but setting the narrative in 1950s Ireland results in the creation of a period piece and is an essential component in the narrative construction of the text. The project uses historical narratives to reinforce a sense of distance and difference from contemporary US culture. By locating the narratives in the past, it is easier to highlight ideas of difference where concepts of nation and national boundaries can be more coherently identified. Setting the narrative in contemporary Ireland would place it in a context of global culture, of fluid national boundaries, with transnational capitalism and the dominance of US culture making it increasingly difficult to assert and identify nations and national difference.

The construction of Ireland as a site of particularism leads to romantic depictions of a rural Irish landscape which can be found in many films, particularly from the US, beginning with Sidney Olcott's Kalem films such as *The Lad From Old Ireland* (1910) and *Rory O More* (1911).[65] As Martin McLoone notes, the 'importance of Irish landscape in these representations cannot be overstressed'[66] as landscape does not function as a mere backdrop, but, as explored by Luke Gibbons, functions 'as a layer of meaning in its own right'.[67] Gibbons' discussion of filmic representations of rural Irish landscapes offers an overview of the romanticisation of Ireland on film which reinforces dominant stereotypes of Ireland both at home and abroad. He notes the varying ways in which film depictions of Ireland can idealise the landscape and country life in terms of both 'soft' and 'hard' representations of primitivism.[68] *The Secret of Roan Inish* encompasses both forms, representing rural life as a romantic pastoral while also documenting the harsh lifestyle that people must lead in order to survive on the island. As Fiona walks from the boat and ventures up the hill to greet her grandfather, the audience is presented with images of an open landscape, a seascape, an old man outside a thatched whitewashed cottage with smoke billowing from its chimney, with a cow, green fields and a stack of turf also in the shot.[69] Such

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[65] For a discussion of Kalem films in Ireland see Rockett, 'History, Politics and Irish Cinema', in *Cinema and Ireland*, pp. 3-146 (pp. 7-12). Rockett notes that *The Lad From Old Ireland* is regarded as the first US film shot on location outside the US (p. 8).

[66] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 19.

[67] Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', p. 210.

[68] Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema'.

[69] This scene is somewhat similar to the ending of *Flight of the Doves* as Derval and Finn (Helen Raye and Jack Wild) reach their grandmother's thatched cottage on the west coast. This return is also similar to that of Terry (Johnny Marley) in *The Schooner* (Bill Miskelly, Ireland, 1983). Eight-year-old Terry

utopian images combined with scenes of storytelling by the fireside conform to the rural idyll of soft primitivism 'where labour and exertion are rendered obsolete in the presence of an opulent, bounteous nature which simply yields itself up to human requirements'.[70]

Aspects of the film can also be read in terms of 'hard' primitivism, a life 'full of terrible hardships and devoid of all comforts'[71] such as the shots of Eamon fishing while standing on the shores of Roan Inish. However, hard primitivism predominantly features throughout the film in terms of reported speech as opposed to having a direct visual presence on screen. When Eamon expresses his desire to return to Roan Inish when he is a man, his grandfather responds with a warning that it will be 'hard work and solitary' and advises Eamon that a wife from the mainland would be reluctant to enter such a difficult lifestyle. These reports of the harshness of life on Roan Inish along with the images of fishing, cutting turf and renovating the cottages add to the romanticisation of rural Ireland and can be compared to Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934) in terms of the individual islander's attempts to 'eke out a living' and to survive on an inhospitable landscape.[72] Such romantic images of Ireland have become familiar features of films and include recent examples such as *The Field* (1990), *Far and Away* (1992), *Into the West* (1992), *Widow's Peak* (1994), *This is My Father* (1998), and *Waking Ned* (1998).[73] Landscape in *The Secret of Roan Inish*, therefore, cannot be viewed in isolation from the historical, political, and ideological construction of Ireland on screen.[74]

This portrayal of 1950s Ireland is also aligned with elements of Catholicism, which appears to reinforce the standard image of Gaelic nationalist Ireland. Examples include the priest at the graveside, Tess raking the fire and blessing herself, Eamon's

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leaves Belfast to summer with his elderly relatives in Donegal. This film also concludes with the return of a child that was mistakenly thought to be lost at sea.

[70] Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', p. 198. Gibbons cites *Finian's Rainbow* (Francis Ford Copolla, USA, 1968) as an example of such soft primitivism.

[71] Erwin Panofsky, 'Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and Elegiac tradition', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), p. 297. Cited in Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', p. 200.

[72] Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', p. 200. Gibbons also examines the complex nature of romanticism in *Man of Aran* (Robert Flaherty, UK, 1934) and how this form of hard primitivism was closer to realism, yet simultaneously reinforced sentimental and romantic images of Ireland (pp. 200-203).

[73] *Waking Ned* (Kirk Jones, Ireland/UK/ France/USA, 1998) is one of the more interesting examples in this genre as it was shot on the Isle of Man and not in Ireland. Despite not being the *real* Ireland, the landscape in the film corresponds to an *idea* of Ireland, a concept that is discussed later in this chapter. *Boy Eats Girl* (Stephen Bradley, Ireland, 2005) is also set in Ireland and shot on the Isle of Man.

[74] See Chapter 5 for a discussion of landscape in *War of the Buttons*.

greeting of 'God bless all here' when he enters the kitchen, the presence of St Brighid's crosses on the kitchen wall, and Tess's story that Fiona's parents met on St Brighid's day. As a result of such a construction of Ireland, Martin McLoone claims, Sayles' text 'recycles some of the hoary old myths about Ireland and the Irish'.[75] He argues that the film succumbs to stereotypical images of romantic Ireland that interconnect 'with contemporary Ireland in regressive aesthetic, ideological and political ways'.[76] Similarly Ruth Barton argues that *The Secret of Roan Inish* revisits traditionally conservative and often clichéd representations of Ireland, claiming that both it and *Into the West*[77] 'are distinguished by a deep investment in whimsy'.[78] In line with this argument, Janette Hamill believes that the Irish language short film *Conneely's Choice*, which draws upon similar selkie myths as those documented by David Thomson, is far superior to Sayles' text.[79]

In aligning *The Secret of Roan Inish* with *Into the West,* Barton draws attention to the 'magical' elements of both films, claiming that 'magic, it seems, is routine in mythical/modern Ireland' noting Ossie's (Ciarán Fitzgerald) underwater rescue by a mythical mother in *Into the West* and the return of Jamie by the seals in *The Secret of Roan Inish.*[80] Similar to the portrayal of landscape, the fantasy elements of the films, which fuse myth and magic, are part of a long filmic tradition that associates Ireland with such tropes.[81] This is particularly evident in children's films or family films set in Ireland that often couple a romanticisation of the landscape with elements of folklore and magic, as is evident in *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*

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[75] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 126.

[76] Ibid., p. 127.

[77] However, rather than focussing on specific moments and aspects of the text, Barton and McLoone merely mention the film as part of a wider discussion of themes and issues related to Irish cinema in the 1990s. While the nature of their critical approach dictates that the analysis of the film is within a broader context of Irish identity and national culture, the absence of a close textual analysis primarily leads to a generalisation and an oversimplification of Sayles' narrative.

[78] Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, p. 151. McKendriok also compares *The Secret of Roan Inish* with *Into the West* (p. 144).

[79] This unfavourable response to the film is also evident in many of the reviews, both in Ireland and abroad from Janette Hamill's description of it as a 'poor, mechanical, barely competent piece of work' (*Film Ireland*, 41 (June/July 1994), 26) to *Hot Press Magazine* noting that it is 'distinctly underwhelming' (Dublin, December 1996) (IFI Archives, File: *The Secret of Roan Inish*, no page number noted).

[80] Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, p. 151.

[81] McKendriok notes that 'Ireland is often regarded as a mythical country, a place where stories about banshees are told and where the little people live in fairy forts' claiming that 'William Butler Yeats was instrumental in establishing the link between Irish identity and myth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (p. 1).

(1959), *Shamus* (1959), *The Johnstown Monster* (1971), and *Flight of the Doves* (1971).

As McLoone also notes, the history of the depiction of rural Ireland in literature, drama and film is extremely complex, and therefore, to dismiss the film as mere 'whimsy' overlooks the complex layering of a text that centres on the search for origins in a modern world.[82] The release of the film in 1994 might suggest that Sayles is a victim of timing as the negative reception[83] of the text in Ireland is part of a much larger development in Irish culture and economy in the 1990s.[84] It is important to note that during the period two significant conflicting factors arose in relation to the Irish film industry in terms of economics and of culture. Firstly, in conjunction with establishing itself as a tourist destination, Ireland introduced tax incentives to attract foreign filmmakers to shoot on location in Ireland.[85] Secondly, in contrast to this process, many cultural critics and filmmakers were seeking representations of a modern Ireland that dispelled the romantic myth of rural Ireland and favoured a growth of a social realist tradition in contemporary filmmaking.[86] In supporting this line of argument, McLoone believes that this 'legacy of Irish-Ireland essentialism and protectionism is still too strong in Irish memory and the lingerings of its worst excesses still too obvious to contemplate going down that road again'.[87]

On one level, McLoone and Barton are justified in their interpretation of the film as many of the images deliberately incorporate the 'touristic gaze'[88] and represent Ireland as 'a rural utopia' that can be marketed to a global consumer.[89] The touristic gaze suggests that the film is not specifically aimed at an Irish audience but at a global viewer. As a result, it is possible to read *The Secret of Roan Inish* as a product of a global consumer industry where Ireland is established as a particular or

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[82] See McLoone, *Irish Film*. For a further discussion of this topic see Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema'. Gibbons documents the various representations of Irish landscape, including romantic sensibilities, a fusion with nature, a prelapsarian idyll, as well as connecting the wild landscape to a wild Irish character. Irish landscape is layered with meaning and often functions as a character in itself.

[83] See also Janette Hamill's critical review of the film in *Film Ireland* 41, (June/July 1994).

[84] For a collection of essays and a detailed analysis of the increased merging of economics and culture in Ireland in the 1990s see *Reinventing Ireland.*

[85] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 201.

[86] Ibid., p. 203.

[87] Ibid., p. 119.

[88] Ruth Barton aligns film viewing with tourism, noting that 'tourists also travel in space to reach heritage destinations, such as Ireland, although they may stay at home and experience these destinations vicariously, through television, film and so on'. See Barton, 'From History to Heritage', p. 241. See Chapter 5 for a further discussion of the touristic gaze in *War of the Buttons.*

[89] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 201.

local site that is different from the rest of the world. This is quite simply because 'diversity sells',[90] and as a result, the full complexity of Irish culture is not represented. However, these images of Ireland in the film, while composing a central feature of the narrative, are merely secondary to the primary focus of an exploration of universal myths in a global culture. Irish culture is employed as a conduit in accessing deeper concepts of origin in folklore and it is used as a means of re-evaluating contemporary society's interaction with and understanding of myth.

Therefore, Barton and McLoone's reading of the text, while valid, is somewhat limited and fails to recognise the complexity of the film. It is not the *real* Ireland that Sayles attempts to explore, but an *idea* of Ireland. The criticism emanates not from Sayles' representation of the nation, but from its depiction within a broader cultural context. This is the challenge faced by many directors who attempt to document forms of rural Ireland for a contemporary audience.[91] In a cultural climate that wants to break from traditional images of rural in favour of urban realist depictions of modern Ireland, Sayles' film was bound to meet with criticism. Indeed, here lies the basic dilemma: while Sayles utilises established concepts of Ireland to explore the idea of myth, he becomes implicated in the very tradition of stereotyping from which he draws. As a result, in terms of reception theory, many critics have conservatively read the use of local images as part of a global tradition of sentimentalising Ireland and have failed to acknowledge the subsequent subversion of many of these tropes throughout the narrative. As is explored below, Sayles' representation is not sentimentalised, as the Conneelys do not view the west of Ireland as a rural idyll, but as an oppressive space from which they wish to escape.

Section 4: Subverting the Myth of the West

Due to the intricate multi-layered nature of the production, 1950s Ireland in the narrative can be read both from a global and from a national perspective. McLoone, in his discussion of rural and urban representations of Ireland, also compares *The Secret of Roan Inish* with *Into the West*, claiming that both films 'vindicate the authentic experience of the west at the expense of the alienating character of the city'.[92]

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[90] See Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity', p. 29.
[91] This also poses the question as to whether it is possible to portray a rural Ireland that escapes established tropes of filmic representations of the nation.
[92] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 20.

However, to apply a dichotomy of modern-urban versus traditional-rural to the film is to reduce the complexity of the text. Although the film draws upon established tropes of Ireland to create the narrative framework, ideas of romantic Ireland are subsequently complicated by the text. This is revealed by Fiona's continued journey westward, from the city to the coast, to Roan Inish. Having established Ireland as a site of nostalgia for a global or a primarily Irish-American audience, the film also acts as site for the complication of the myth of the west within Irish culture.

Fiona's move from an urban to a rural environment can initially be read in terms of the Gaelic nationalist romantic traditions that idealised the west and rural Ireland in opposition to the industrialised urban centres.[93] This is established by the initial flashback sequence of the film. The silent panning shot that reveals the gravestones on Roan Inish and the wide expanses of seascape and landscape fades to a contrasting shot that depicts Fiona emerging through a cloud of steam in a factory.[94] As Fiona makes her way through the enclosed and noisy factory space, she searches for her father asking one of the workers 'where's father?', once again signifying the search for family as a quest for safety and identity. Throughout this sequence the camera remains at Fiona's eye level with the result that only the mid-section of the adults are present in the frame. While emphasising the idea that a child has a particular point of view of life, such a technique also ensures that Fiona is represented as out of place in this environment, an alien in this adult world. She is informed that her father is not in the factory but is in the pub.

As she enters the pub through a haze of smoke, a similar camera angle is maintained to express Fiona's isolation. Two bar taps also frame her, signifying the pub environment which is closing in on her and the inappropriateness of the setting for her. A man at the bar (Eugene McHugh) remarks upon Fiona's unhealthy

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[93] In *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997), Brian Graham sums up the construction of the west, noting that 'the hegemonic image of the West of Ireland as the cultural heartland of the country was an essential component of the late nineteenth-century construction of an Irish nationalism which, in its dependence on a Gaelic iconography, was to prove exclusive rather than inclusive, particularly when its representations became fused with Catholicism. Strongly reinforced by the intellectual elite of early twentieth-century Ireland, the 'West' became an idealised landscape, populated by an idealised people who invoked the representative, exclusive essence of the nation through their Otherness from Britain. The invented, manipulated geography of the West portrayed the unspoilt beauty of landscapes where the influences of modernity were at their weakest and which evoked the mystic unity of Ireland prior to the chaos of conquest' (p. 7). Graham draws from Johnson, N. C. 'Building a Nation: An Examination of the Irish Gaeltacht Report of 1926', *Journal of Historical Geography* 19 (1993), 157-68.

[94] Again, the image of Fiona as she emerges through the mist on the rowing boat corresponds to her 'other-worldly' nature as already seen in the trailer. The theme of existing in a liminal space, caught between two worlds is further reinforced.

appearance; 'Poor creature [...] as pale as a fish's belly, and those eyes!', as the film firmly illustrates the ills of the city and modernisation. The woman behind the bar (Mairéad Ní Ghallchóir) also comments that 'she looks as if she's raised in a tin box'[95] with another man at the bar (Tony Rubini) opining that 'Fresh air, that's the ticket, little sprat like her, breathing the poison fumes that's the air in this town. You have to take her to the country'.[96] The effects of the city on Fiona's health are obvious from this exchange and the negative attitudes toward the city are reiterated throughout the film. Tess laments that 'you can't find a proper hen's egg in that city' while Hugh argues that the city is 'nothing but noise and dirt and people that's lost their senses – couldn't tell the difference between a riptide and a raindrop if you shoved their face in the water'. This approach to documenting the city seems to correspond to stereotypes of the west of Ireland as a rural idyll. The steam and noise of the factory are coupled with the fact that Fiona's father is not at work but is spending his money drinking in the pub, giving the impression that Fiona is not adequately cared for in this city environment.[97] The shots of the city and its confined spaces are in contrast to the open spaces of land and sea that are represented throughout the remainder of the film.

However, this simplistic binary of urban versus rural is subsequently complicated by the text. In the pub, Jim asserts that 'There's no work to be had at home, and we are never going back to the island. That's done'.[98] Leaving the countryside and migrating to the city in search of employment are to the fore of his argument. For Jim, sitting in the pub, the city seems to represent the lesser of two evils and accounts for the depopulation of the Irish countryside in the postwar period. More significantly, rural mainland is not presented as a pastoral utopia by those who

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[95] The bar woman also implies that Fiona's illness is due to not having a mother as she says 'what would you be without a mother's touch?'. This can be read as Fiona's loss of origins in the form of her mother, an event which leads to a personal deterioration. The bar woman suggests a return to her grandparents, not specifying a place, but a people, as she says 'you'd like that, wouldn't you, living with the old people?'. The implication is that it is not so much a geographical area that will restore her health, but a way of life. This way of life is presented as an older way of living, possibly alluding to the knowledge of myth and folklore that Tess and Hugh possess. It is this myth that will ultimately restore Fiona's sense of identity as she finds her brother.

[96] The references to fish in discussing the child reinforce the idea that she is 'a little fish out of water'.

[97] This may also be understood as a reference to the neglect of many children in Ireland throughout the twentieth century as Ferriter notes that in memoirs of Irish childhood sometimes it can be interpreted that 'the greatest blot on twentieth-century Irish society's copybook was its treatment of children'. See Ferriter, 'Suffer Little Children?' p. 70. Ferriter also notes that 'A majority of fathers emerge from the published memoirs of childhood as utterly unlikeable, disreputable, drunken, and incapable of communication' (p.81); Jim conforms to such a representation.

[98] It is ironic that Jim is not working as he makes this statement. It also suggests that the idea that emigrating, or moving from a rural to an urban setting, will naturally result in employment is a type of fantasy or myth.

live there. Tess laments the fact that 'the east is our future and the west is our past', yet the traditional myth of the Irish west as rural idyll is not sustained throughout the text. This is evident in the characters that do not see their present surroundings as satisfying their lifestyle, and constantly long to leave the mainland and return the island.

Fiona's cousin, Eamon, wishes to move back when he gets older, Fiona hopes that she will find Jamie there, while Hugh notes that 'didn't our only cow only give half the milk she gave on Roan Inish'. In particular, rural Ireland is not imbued with a community spirit embedded in traditional values that are uncorrupted by progress and industrialisation. Fiona's grandparents have a desire to leave the Donegal countryside and return to Roan Inish, but they feel that such a wish is unrealistic as there is nobody left on the island and they are too old to live on their own. As a result, they try to survive on the rural west coast with the 'penny pinching' shopkeepers. This is evident in the scene where Tess is shopping and the shopkeeper Flynn (Brendan Conroy) is meticulous in measuring the amount of sugar for her as he says, 'One and a quarter pounds to the grain'. Tess retorts with 'You're a mean penny-pinching creature Flynn', implying that the community in general lacks a spirit of generosity. This is further reinforced by Tess and Hugh's landlord, who wishes to evict them in order to rent their cottage to 'wealthy people from overseas who want somewhere to summer in'. Such a comment allows for multiple interpretations of Sayles' construction of history in the text. While the eviction of the grandparents is an integral part of the original text, the reasons for removing the tenants are very different. In Fry's novella, the landlord asks the family to leave because his eldest son is getting married and needs somewhere to live, while the eviction in *The Secret of Roan Inish* is presented as much more ruthless and the landlord is simply seeking financial gain.[99] Mentioning the landlord, who is absent on screen, alongside evictions in an Irish context is an allusion to rack rents and absentee landlords in Ireland's colonial history with Britain. This is also a reference to selling Ireland as a commodity, to Ireland's tourist industry and to the increasing number of holiday homes throughout Ireland in the 1990s.[100] In this respect, Sayles creates a version of postmodern histories where the past is used to comment upon contemporary circumstances.

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[99] See *Child of the Western Isles*, p. 61.

[100] The reference to the Landlord living in the town of Killybegs also reinforces a sense of divide between rural and urban areas.

The promotion of Ireland as a tourist nation is therefore constructed both internally and externally in the film. The internal motivation is signified by the landlord, while the external propagation of Ireland as a consumer product is represented by the wealthy family overseas. Similar to the creation of the film text, the commodification of Irish culture is created by both internal and external productions of myths associated with the nation.[101] The landlord incident also demonstrates the impact of globalisation on Ireland's rural community. The western mainland of the film is not uncorrupted by progress and industrialisation or imbued with a community spirit embedded in traditional values such as those set out by de Valera in his 1943 St Patrick's Day broadcast, aired approximately seven years previous to the setting of the film. This section also draws attention to the failure of de Valera's aims at economic self-sufficiency, and Ireland's increasing dependence on international investment that began in the 1960s and continued into the Celtic Tiger economy.[102] In relation to de Valera's broadcast Diarmaid Ferriter notes that

> Its reference to 'cosy homesteads' and 'laughter of comely maidens', in particular, have been singled out for aspersion by a generation who paid the price when de Valera's society failed to allow them to live in comfort in Ireland,[103]

highlighting the inadequacy of such isolationist economic policies.

In a reaction to these modernising processes, the Conneelys want neither modern Ireland as represented by the city, nor the traditional Ireland of the western mainland, but something that precedes this Catholic nationalist Ireland. They reject both the urban and the rural lifestyle in favour of an alternative that is still further westward, an island that the film tells us is 'between land and sea', steeped in the Celtic folklore of Selkie myths, a folklore that later becomes a reality when the seals return Jamie, the lost child. The belief in myth and the incorporation of folklore into everyday life is only available on Roan Inish.

The island of Roan Inish thus becomes an alternative realm, an imaginative space where anything is possible, or as the film's trailer informs the audience, 'a place

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[101] This adheres to Robertson's theories of the construction of local particularism through processes of globalisation.

[102] For a discussion of Ireland's changing economic policies under de Valera and Sean Lemass, see my examination of *Daisy Chain War* in Chapter 3 and of *The Boy From Mercury* in Chapter 6.

[103] Ferriter, p. 72.

where myths are real'.[104] Constructing an island space is a common feature of much fiction for children, from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Treasure Island* to *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe)*. In a collection of essays that document various approaches to writing island stories for children, Mary Shine Thompson notes that the islands 'constitute enclosed spatio-temporal microcosms which can draw on or reject outside influences as plots require'[105] and suggests that the islands can act as liminal spaces in culture. Roan Inish corresponds to such a reading, incorporating elements of Irish culture yet simultaneously set at a distance from it. The island in the film acts as a separate space in several ways. The return of Jamie to his family represents the return of a loss of tradition, Jamie functioning as the physical manifestation of this tradition. The rejection of the negative elements of the mainland culture in favour of the myth and folklore traditions of the island are represented as the Conneely's move back and are reunited with Jamie. Drawing upon Halton's theories, it is possible to read Jamie's return as completing and fulfilling the family in the same manner that the return to understanding myth and folklore can satisfy a vacuum that exists in contemporary culture.

In Irish children's fiction the island stories of Eilís Dillon have much in common with the representation of the island community in *Roan Inish*, particularly in terms of storytelling, integrating pagan and Christian lore, a younger generation teaching their elders, the conflicts between tradition and modernity as well as the island functioning as a metaphor for the Irish nation.[106] Ciara Ní Bhroin notes that 'unlike the exotic island representing "otherness" in imperial adventures, the island in Dillon's stories can be seen as a metaphor for Ireland and the community as a microcosm of the larger Irish community'.[107] A similar process is at work in Sayles' text where Roan Inish acts as a site of geographical unity, offering those on the

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[104] The construction of Roan Inish as an imagined space can be read in terms of spatial theory in film studies. The approach to this analysis is based upon the writings of Homi Bhabha, David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, Mike Crang, James Duncan and David Ley, Michel Foucault, Ross Gibson, Edward Said, and Edward Soja.

[105] Mary Shine Thompson, 'Introduction', in *Studies in Children's Literature: Treasure Islands*, pp. 9-18 (p. 12).

[106] For a full discussion of these aspects in the work of Eilís Dillon, see Ciara Ní Bhroin, 'Forging National Identity: The Adventure Stories of Eilís Dillon', in *Studies in Children's Literature, 1500-2000*, pp. 112-119.

[107] Ciara Ní Bhroin, 'Forging National Identity', p. 113. For a further discussion of aspects of islands and Ireland in children's literature see Breege O'Brien, 'Imagining an Island Place: The Island as Setting in Children's Literature in Ireland', (pp.178-186) and Maureen A. Farrell, 'Treasured Islands: The Literary uses of the Island Setting in Some Scottish Children's Novels', (pp. 118-25) in *Studies in Children's Literature: Treasure Islands*. See also Robert Dunbar, 'Introduction', in *Enchanted Journeys*, ed. by Robert Dunbar (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1997), pp. (9-18) p. 10.

mainland a place of self-sufficiency and a way of life immersed in tradition and folklore, away from the ills of modern life. In turn, the island of Ireland as an imagined space in the film thus acts as a metaphor for the wider global community, representing the possibility of a return to mythic narratives which according to Halton 'might be expressions of a deeper relatedness with the powers that move humans than rational consciousness can touch'.[108]

In proposing such an interpretation of the film it is useful to draw upon Martin McLoone's reading of *The Kinkisha* which explores an old ritual in rural Ireland.[109] The film, set in rural Cavan, focuses on the character of Margaret (Barbara MacNamara) whose baby is born at Pentecost. According to superstition, the child will either kill or be killed unless a robin is crushed to death in the baby's hand. Margaret, caught in a loveless and oppressive relationship, eventually captures the bird and performs the ritual after consulting the local priest. McLoone notes that 'her acting-out of a superstitious ritual releases her from the stifling conformity of rural Ireland – she emerges from tradition into modernity by enacting an even older tradition'.[110] The pagan belief and ritual gives Margaret a source of empowerment that is not offered by either Catholicism or modernity. A similar process occurs in *The Secret of Roan Inish* as the Conneely's reject both the traditions of the rural mainland and the modernity of the city in favour of the Celtic folklore of the island, an act that empowers Fiona and gives her the determination to find Jamie. As a result, Sayles is possibly suggesting that Celtic myths contain qualities that, when accessed, can lead to the empowerment of the individual.

The film can be placed within the cultural context of a moment when Ireland was faced with the onset of a rapid modernisation process. Released in 1994, the same year that the term Celtic Tiger was coined, the film may be understood as a transitional text.[111] It represents a moment of change where 'society displays an odd mixture of progressive and reactionary elements' with different alternatives competing for a place in the new Ireland.[112] In essence, it is not just a choice between traditions of Catholic Ireland or modernising globalisation, but there is a possibility for the rejection of both in favour of elements of an older tradition and way of life.

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[108] Halton, p. 272.
[109] Tommy McArdle, Ireland, 1977.
[110] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 103.
[111] See Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Introduction', p. 17.
[112] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 103.

The film suggests that the answers to modern day ills do not lie in the myths of the Irish west, but somewhere beyond the west coast, a liminal space where myths are part of the reality of living. Sayles repeatedly proposes the value of incorporating myth and storytelling into daily life, echoing Joseph Campbell's belief that 'myths are a function of nature as well as of culture, and as necessary to the balanced maturation of the human psyche as is nourishment to the body'.[113] As the myths are no longer present in the west, but somewhere beyond the west, perhaps Sayles is suggesting that there is a need to conduct a more in-depth analysis in order to access myths in contemporary culture, implying that they do exist, but perhaps are difficult to locate and incorporate into everyday living.

This also corresponds to Halton's view that the decline in myth has accompanied a culture of global capitalism, where the rise of capitalism is 'associated with the rise of individualism and the breakdown of traditions as binding forces in society'.[114] Halton continues to argue that a return to myth will give people a sense of identity, a strategy for the future, and a means of coping with the modern world. In *Roan Inish*, the alternative to globalisation is present in the form of Celtic myths and folklore that are continually referred to as 'superstition' but which have a very real part to play in the lives of the Conneelys.

Section 5. Storytelling, Myth and Childhood

Jack Zipes notes the importance of storytelling in children's culture claiming that the storyteller 'is transformer, enlightener, and liberator [...] the storyteller can negate the commodity market by *exchanging experience* for counsel and wisdom'.[115] Storytelling is one of the central features of the narrative as it is ultimately the stories about family and cultural history that empower Fiona with a hope that her brother is still alive. This leads to the eventual return of the child to his family. Storytelling is thus constructed as the vehicle for accessing forms of personal and cultural history in

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[113] Joseph Campbell, *The Flight of the Wild Gander: Explorations in the Mythological Dimensions of Fairy Tales, Legends, and Symbols* (1951) (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 3.

[114] Eugene Halton, 'The Modern Error: or, The Unbearable Enlightenment of Being', p. 264. Similarly Martin McLoone notes that a lot of recent Irish cinema tends to display a 'strong pull towards a more harmonious and more organic past, to rescue some sense of community from this mythic past for a contemporary existence perceived to be drifting towards fragmentation and individualism'. See McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 212. Themes of mythic origins and understanding a personal and a cultural past are also central to John Sayles' *Lone Star*.

[115] Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, p. 134. Emphasis in original.

the creation of an identity of self in the present. By applying Foucault's discussion of a 'body totally imprinted by history' and the intertwining of a personal and a cultural past, it is possible to read Fiona's journey as an uncovering of the multitudinous layers of personal and cultural history.[116] Fiona's mythologised body, like that of Ireland's cultural landscape, is layered with meaning. Through the framework of genealogy, the true nature of Fiona's selkie origins and the heterogeneous nature of Ireland's cultural past are both explored through the medium of storytelling. This technique also signals an attempt by Sayles to recover a lost element of Irish cultural tradition for a new generation in the 1990s.[117]

Storytelling leads to the documentation of the past in two major forms; the political past of British colonialism in Ireland, and the mythic past of selkie folklore. In applying Foucault's ideas of incorporating a genealogical approach to understanding history, the character of Fiona can be read as conduit in the exploration of origins, both biological and cultural. It is only through the child protagonist Fiona, that the older characters in the film can regain access to their own folkloric traditions and island origins. Similar to Ireland, constructions of childhood in the film are also aligned with ideas of origin as the child character is employed as a means of rediscovering the family's past, corresponding to Valerie Krips' alignment of personal and cultural pasts.[118] Fiona's search for her brother leads to an understanding of her own personal history and her family history, thus allowing her to establish an identity. This family history is simultaneously linked to cultural and political history, as the film suggests that both personal and cultural identity can be rediscovered through myth. Many of the stories presented can be read in terms of what John Stephens and Robyn McCallum refer to as 'pre-texts' or the reworking of older tales into modern narratives as they discuss the ideological implications inherent in such retellings.[119] Sayles' incorporation of selkie myths into the text causes the narrative to become a myth in itself, or as Marina Warner notes, 'every telling of a myth is part of that myth; there is no Ur-version, no authentic prototype, no true account'.[120]

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[116] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 83. See Introduction to this thesis.
[117] Seán Ó Suilleabháin discussed this concern that the art of storytelling was being eliminated in conjunction with the decline of the Irish language. See 'Irish Oral Tradition', in *A View of the Irish Language*, ed. by Brian O'Cuiv (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1969), pp. 47-57. Sayles as a filmmaker can also be described as a storyteller in this context.
[118] Krips, p. 24.
[119] See John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), p. 4.
[120] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p. 8.

The Story of Sean Michael Conneely

The story of Sean Michael Conneely incorporates a number of portrayals of the Irish past. Firstly, the scene in which Fiona sits in front of the open fire and listens eagerly to her grandfather's accounts of the family's past constructs Ireland of the 1950s as a site of nostalgia, as is noted above. Hugh sits at the table smoking his pipe while Tess is pictured in the background, seated under a St Brighid's cross as she attends to her sewing. As a result, traditional gender roles are established as the male relaxes in the evening and tells stories while the female continues completing domestic duties. The presence of the St Brighid's cross also conforms to the construction of Ireland in terms of particularism as it signifies the apparent immersion of this family unit in traditional Catholic belief systems. The position of Fiona within the frame as she gazes up at her grandfather also conforms to traditional adult/child power relations as the child waits in anticipation for the adult to impart knowledge.[121] The camera angle reinforces such a conservative reading of the power dynamics as Hugh is shot from below, incorporating the child's point of view into the scene and placing the adult in a dominant position.

Hugh begins his story with an air of mystery as he declares that 'The sea gives and the sea takes away', establishing a sense of foreboding for what is to follow and setting a context for the fantasy elements that later materialise as part of the selkie myths.[122] The child viewer is encouraged to identify with the character of Fiona in this scene, as a child who will listen intently to stories of the past. In establishing a sense of linear time for both Fiona and the viewer, Hugh identifies the time frame of the cultural narrative in genealogical terms; 'This is my father's father now, a Conneely man. He was a few years older than you are now'. In applying Foucault's theories of genealogy and history, it is evident that Fiona and the viewer are encouraged to construct a time frame of public history on the foundation of personal or family history. This past is thus created from the present moment not only by referring to a great-grandfather, but also by drawing attention to Fiona's age and its

[121] See Zornado, p. 103 and Roger Cox, p. 6.

[122] This statement is specifically unreligious as it is in contrast to 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away', and highlights the emphasis on the power of nature and the natural world in the selkie myths. A similar line is documented in Thomson's *People of the Sea* and also in Eilís Dillon's *The Fort of Gold* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) as Billy says 'never take from the sea what is hers by right. If you do, the sea will get yourself later' (p. 21). For a discussion of children's texts and the sea as a site of superstition see Lake, p. 211.

closeness to that of Sean Michael's. Consequently, Fiona is asked to identify with the position of her ancestor and so too is the viewer by the previous identification with Fiona.

The film uses this episode of storytelling to document Ireland's cultural and political past that parallels the loss of culture on the island of Ireland with that on the island of Roan Inish. As Hugh tells the story regarding the cingulum, he notes that 'the English were still a force in the country then'.[123] Such elements in the narrative emphasise Sayles' deliberate transferral of the setting to Ireland as a narrative function in the text, rather than just for economic reasons in the form of tax breaks, as uniquely Irish elements are introduced into the plot. Sayles' description of Ireland as a place of 'loss', which is noted above, is emphasised in the scene where the schoolmaster (Michael MacCarthaigh) enforces English on the students and punishes them for speaking Irish by hanging a cingulum around their necks. As Sean Michael swears at the schoolmaster in Irish saying 'Caith suas do thóin é', which, when translated into English, reads 'throw it up your backside', Tess interjects and reprimands Hugh for using such language in front of the child. However, it is revealed that Fiona does not understand Irish, reinforcing the sense of loss of tradition. Also, this sequence places the director of the film in a superior position to that of the uninformed viewer. For those in the audience who cannot speak Irish the joke is never explained. The viewer is simply placed in Fiona's position as the adult characters fail to translate, thus establishing themselves as more knowledgeable than the child protagonist and reinforcing the stereotypical child/adult power dynamic.[124] This approach leads to the child spectator aligning him/herself with the experiences of the child protagonist, a technique that recurs throughout the film.

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[123] This story is also documented in Thomson's *People of the Sea*, p. 42.

[124] There is also a postmodern reversal of the power of language. In postcolonial terms, the language of the oppressed (Irish) becomes the language of power over the child and over the uninformed viewer. This also leads to the possibility of reading the adult/child power dynamic in postcolonial terms, as that of coloniser and colonised. As Jameson notes 'for most people in the world English itself is not exactly a culture language: it is the lingua franca of money and power', in 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', p. 59. See also Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. However, it is possible to argue for an alternative reading of this sequence. Despite the language barrier, it is possible for a non-Irish-speaking viewer to understand the term as an insult because of the tone used which is also supported by the accompanying image. Similar to systems of myth, it is possible to understand the meaning of the signs and symbols without having a knowledge of the specific language. The student's remark to his teacher reverses traditional adult/child power relations and encourages the viewer to side with the Irish-speaking youth, thus allowing for the text to be read in postcolonial terms; the student as the rebelling colony and the teacher as the oppressive coloniser. For a similar discussion of the power of language see Chapter 5 and the use of the word 'tosspot' in *War of the Buttons*.

The story then moves from Sean Michael's participation in Ireland's cultural and political history to that of its mythical and folkloric history. The tale that documents Sean Michael's accident where his father, uncles, and cousins were all drowned signals the first major acknowledgement of the family's link with the selkies and the forces of nature.[125] Previous to this scene, Eamon has alluded to stories and rumours surrounding Roan Inish that make many fishermen reluctant to fish in the area. Eamon, as a teenager,[126] is silenced by the adult authority figure of his grandmother and Fiona's quest for knowledge is temporarily halted as Tess declares, 'There's an end to it. I'll not have nonsense and superstition in my house'. Once again, it initially appears that the adult characters exert a control over the child characters in censoring specific forms of knowledge.[127] However, the adult's authority is undermined as her subsequent raking of the fire contradicts her assertion that she does not believe in superstition.[128]

The story of Sean Michael allows Fiona access to these selkie myths for the first time. As Hugh continues, it is revealed that Sean Michael was washed up on the shore where the women of the island found him and nursed him back to health by tying him to two cows.[129] When he recovers he asks if he is in heaven and the women laugh, responding in the negative and saying that it is only Teach Duinn. The reference to heaven may be another allusion on the part of the director to align island life with some sort of Edenic paradise, a common feature in island stories.[130] However, the mention of Teach Duinn is somewhat ambiguous in this metanarratve. In Irish folklore, Teach Duinn is an island off the coast of Kerry which, according to superstition, contained the souls of Ireland's dead, in essence a space of the afterlife.[131] If the incident is read in terms of the women mocking Sean Michael for

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[125] Thomson includes this story in *People of the Sea*, pp. 29-31.

[126] Eamon's reference to returning to Roan Inish 'when I'm a man' clearly establishes him as separate from the world of adults.

[127] This can also be read in the wider context of the construction of versions of history for the child viewer by the adult author.

[128] See below in relation to Tess's scene at the hearth.

[129] Thomson also documents this tale as part of an Irish oral tradition. See pp. 29-31.

[130] For a reading of representations of the island as paradise in literature, see Siobhán Parkinson, 'From Utopia to Terabithia: "Island" Literature as Edenic Fantasy', in *Studies in Children's Literature: Treasure Islands* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 119-126.

[131] David Thomson refers to Teach Duinn as an island 'inhabited by the souls of the dead', p. 41. In Eilís Dillon's *The Island of Ghosts* (London: Faber, 1990) the island to which the teacher takes the two boys is believed to be haunted. It is possible to align Dillon's island with ideas of Teach Duinn and the souls of the dead. The novel also deals with aspects of the past informing the present and explores ideas of colonialism and postcolonialism by representing islands and island culture. For a discussion of these

believing he is heaven then their reference to Teach Duinn is a sarcastic response. However, by citing Teach Duinn, the women of the island may also be rejecting Sean Michael's Judeo-Christian faith in favour of the superstitious pagan convictions of the island. Ireland of the period is therefore constructed as a culture that contains both pagan and Christian beliefs. Sean Michael tells the women that a seal saved him from drowning, indicating the selkie element of the family history, where the forces of nature protected the Conneelys. In concluding, Hugh notes that Sean Michael was saved by a seal, two cows, and a woman, thus aligning femininity with animals and nature in processes of nurturing and protecting.

When this mythic episode of Sean Michael's story has ended, Hugh returns to aspects of Ireland's political past as he says that Sean Michael was jailed for smuggling arms to the Fenians. This is also given an air of the supernatural, as if the motivation for Sean Michael's actions go deeper that mere politics as Hugh remarks that 'it's said that some that are saved turned wicked afterwards'.[132] While the entire story moves from personal, to political, to mythical and back to political history, all three forms of history are inextricably linked. This intertwining suggests that the forces of myth and nature inform the everyday life of the Conneely family, and that personal and cultural history cannot be viewed in isolation of the mythic ideologies that influence these experiences.

The reality of these myths and their relevance to everyday life is subsequently undermined by Tess as she cynically addresses Hugh as a 'superstitious old man'. However, this statement is then subverted by her following actions as she walks toward the fire and places a wet sod of turf in the grate. Tess then rakes the fire and blesses it by saying 'I rake this fire as the pure Christ rakes us all, with Mary at the foot and Brighid at the head. May the eight brightest angels from the city of grace preserve this house and all its people to the coming of the day'.[133] She concludes by blessing herself. By placing this ritual directly after her condemnation of Hugh's 'superstition', Sayles encourages the viewer to compare Tess's own belief system of Catholicism with that of the Hugh. This may suggest that selkie myths are just as valid as Christian myths, or that Christian myths have simply become intertwined with or replaced the older pagan myths of selkies and the power of nature.

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themes and of Dillon's use of islands in her literature, see Amanda Piesse, 'Islands, Ireland and the Changing State of Writing for Children'.

[132] This is also cited in Thomson, p. 201.

[133] See Thomson, p. 196.

Alternatively, it may imply that in 1990s Irish culture - which saw unprecedented challenges to the influence of the Catholic Church in society - Catholic stories are as questionable as selkie myths. [134]

Personal Past: Jamie Disappears

For the child viewer, the story of Sean Michael is presented onscreen as Fiona visualises the story that Hugh is telling. The imagined story is presented in darker monochrome colours as if Fiona is basing her imaginative recreations on the colour schemes of old photographs that represent the past. The colour scheme also heightens a nostalgia for the past, as if the story is a picture-postcard image of the past. The second story that Hugh tells Fiona is set in the near past, and reveals the circumstances under which Jamie was taken out to sea. In contrast to the distant past of the previous tale, although somewhat faded in order to distinguish them from the present moment, the visualisation of the events onscreen are in colour.[135] This may result from the fact that the sequence is part of a remembered past in Fiona's life and is not completely imagined. Hugh's opening of the story is similar to the previous tale and is once again shrouded in an air of the supernatural as he begins, 'It was like a dream that day' and the shot fades to an image of the cradle on the beach. The force of nature and its impact on the Conneelys is once again to the fore of the tale as the seagulls attack Jim and his brother in order to distract them as the sea takes Jamie and his cradle away. As the adults chase the cradle a storm rises, preventing the rescue of Jamie. As the story concludes, the diegetic sound of the sea is used to link the shots of Jamie's disappearance with the subsequent shot of Hugh, as the continuity editing of the film bridges the gap between past and present, revealing the direct influence of the past in present circumstances. Hugh recognises the influence of the forces of nature on events, admitting that 'The sea had taken him away [...]. It was angry with us for leaving Roan Inish'. However, his belief in the power of the supernatural becomes contradictory as he rejects Fiona's claims that 'he could still be out there', responding with 'and cows could have wings'. The adult character once again asserts his power over the child by dismissing her claims and denying the possibility that she may be

[134] It is also significant to note that it is a specifically Irish Catholic ritual, hence highlighting the notion of particularism for the global viewer, while also representing for the modern Irish viewer a tradition that is in decline.

[135] For a discussion of the use of colour in creating nostalgia on film see Paul Grainge, 'Colouring the Past: Pleasantville and the Textuality of Memory', in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 202-19.

correct. However, similar to the undermining of Tess above, the point of view of the child character reveals that Jamie is alive and contradicts the adult's assertion, thus subverting the traditional adult/child power dynamic.

It is also significant to note that the cradle originates from the time of Fiona's selkie ancestor, Nuala, who insisted that it be made of driftwood. The presence of the distant past in the story of a recent family history signifies the manner in which traces of the past still inform present circumstances. Throughout these storytelling sequences it soon becomes apparent that the child Jamie, appearing in the cradle, represents both myth and reality. It is not until he arrives home at the end of the film that the audience can be certain of his real existence. As is explored in detail below, children in the text come to signify the 'mythical past' while the disbelieving adults can be read as a static, overly-rational 'present'. The symbolic 'innocent' child, free of the constraints of culture, is represented as closer to myth and nature, while also symbolising a hope for the future. In contrast, the adults dismiss the possibility of myth in their contemporary lives, and are caught in a perpetual present, unable to access myth and unable also to move forward.

Throughout these various episodes of storytelling, Fiona's quest for knowledge helps to re-ignite the Conneelys' interest in their family history. Initially, as is evident from the discussion above, her grandparents are reluctant to tell Fiona about the reality of the selkie myths and folklore. As a result of the painful nature of the circumstances, Tess is particularly disinclined to engage in conversation about the selkies and the disappearance of Jamie. As the adults are hesitant to believe in the truth of the tales, Fiona's unrelenting interest results in the association of folklore with the realm of childhood. While her teenage cousin Eamon mentions the selkie lore, he is reluctant to go into detail for fear of getting into trouble with his grandparents. Eamon's tale of the king of the seals who once a year chooses an island girl as his queen and takes her below the sea to live with him, is the first acknowledgement of an apparent reality of myth in the present rather than in the past. Hugh's stories about the seals were located in the past but the present tense of Eamon's story suggests that the power of the seals exists in contemporary Ireland, particularly when he reiterates his point by saying that 'some stories is true'. What initially appear as abstract tales of folklore are subsequently linked to the Conneely family's present situation as he asks Fiona if Grandfather has told her the rumours that some people claim to have seen Jamie in his cradle. Again, the adult/child power structures are to the fore as the adult

characters hide the information from Fiona, and it becomes the responsibility of the child character Eamon to reveal the truth. Despite telling Fiona about the rumours, he requests that she say nothing of it to her grandparents as they may be angry with him. In this way, the children see myth as alive in the present, while the adults simply view it as belonging to the past.

History as Myth: Liam and Nuala

It is left to her mysterious cousin Tadhg to explain the true events of the family's selkie origins. Although an adult, Tadhg is described as child-like, 'a bit special' and as a 'troubled soul caught between air and water'.[136] It is this childlike quality that allows Tadhg to believe in the fantasy world of selkies, aligning him with Fiona. The character of Tadhg is presented as a mysterious man described as 'one of the dark ones' alluding to his dark eyes and hair which connects him with his selkie ancestors.[137] Fiona instinctively knows that her cousin is one of the few people that understand her search and who may be able to provide valuable information regarding her brother's whereabouts. The construction of history begins with a reference to linear time, and suggests the manner in which the forces of nature aid in an understanding of temporal relations. He responds to Fiona by stating that 'I have no idea of the future, but I can see the past quite well, and the present if the weather's clear'. This direct reference to the past may demonstrate Tadhg's knowledge and understanding of his selkie family origins, his willingness to discuss it, and also an acknowledgement of the continued presence of selkie life in the form of Jamie's guardians. Citing the weather also indicates that the natural elements are playing a role in the present family circumstances of the Conneelys. As a result of his belief in the existence of myth in the present, his links to selkies, and his position as a 'childlike' adult, it is possible to read the character of Tadhg as representing the convergence of multiple binaries of myth and reality, past and present, and child and adult.

While the events surrounding Sean Michael link personal and political history, the story of Nuala and Liam intertwines Conneely family history with Irish mythical

[136] This also reveals the tendency of the adults to dismiss anything which they cannot understand, in this case myth, as mere fantasy or something irrational.

[137] It is also possible to read Tadhg as the wild Irish man that reflects the wild Irish landscape, a concept discussed by Gibbons in 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema'. These wild characters can be found in many children's films that represent Ireland, including the tramp characters in *Shamus*, *The Johnstown Monster*, and *Flight of the Doves*.

history. As is noted above in relation to Thomson's work, stories of selkies and sea people are evident throughout Irish folklore. The story that Tadhg tells has many variations but revolves around the capturing of a selkie's hide in order to have complete power over him or her.[138] Just as Hugh's stories contained elements of Irish and British history in order to validate the verisimilitude of the private history of the Conneelys, the story of Nuala is constructed in a similar fashion. As a result, the mythical history of the tale is established as just as real and valid as the colonial history of the previous story.

As Tadhg's voiceover describes events, Fiona's imagined recreation is presented on screen. The audience are presented with Liam witnessing the transformation of Nuala from a seal into a woman, noting that in her human form 'there was something unearthly about the girl' and 'her Irish was queer sounding. More ancient than their grandfather's grandfather'. The reference to family genealogy again uses concepts of personal history to set the time frame for events of this mythic history. It also suggests that the seals have knowledge of the Irish language, fusing ideas of nature and culture, and signifying the connection with nature as a long established tradition in Irish society.[139] This sequence greatly romanticises Irish island culture, particularly the slow motion shots of Nuala running into the water while wearing a white dress, establishing her 'otherworldly' nature.

The intersection of civilised culture working in harmony with the natural world is repeatedly emphasised throughout this sequence. Nuala insists upon making a fire from driftwood, and creates a seaweed soup, a recipe unknown to the others on the island. A cradle is constructed for the eldest of their children which will rock on the motion of the sea, Tadhg indicating that it 'was more of a ship than a cradle'. Both the recipe for seaweed soup and the cradle have survived, being passed down the Conneely family line. The cradle that Jamie drifts away in is the same one that was constructed by Liam Conneely all those years ago, signifying the presence of the past and selkie influence in Fiona's present moment. Later in the film Tess and Fiona make the seaweed soup that has been passed down for generations through the women

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[138] See Thomson, p. 166. This transformation can also be read in terms of patriarchal control of the female, as noted by Warner in *Managing Monsters*. Warner mentions that 'ungoverned energy in the female always raises the issue of motherhood and the extent of maternal authority; fear that the natural bond excludes men and eludes their control courses through ancient myth' (p. 4).

[139] Thomson also documents a similar story which noted that long ago all the animals and birds had the power of speech. Fiona calling to the birds and wishing that they could speak and respond to her questions further reinforces this idea.

of the island. As a result, the female characters become associated with nature and nurturing. Throughout the story, emphasis is placed on the islanders working in harmony with nature or as Tadhg explains, 'man and beast lived side by side, sharing the wealth of the sea'. Such a reading adheres to Marina Warner's claim that 'Nature, newly understood to be somehow uncontaminated, innocent, nurturing and spontaneous beckons as a remedy to the distortions and excesses of progresses'.[140] Perhaps Sayles is alluding to the fact that in contemporary global culture society has lost its connection with nature and no longer works in tune with the natural world.

As Tadhg's conversation with Fiona concludes, he ends with 'Welcome back Fiona Conneely, we've been waiting', a statement that can be read on a number of levels. While Tadhg may be welcoming Fiona's return from the city, he is also connecting her to her own family history as Nuala's eldest daughter was also named Fiona. The reference to 'we've been waiting' also attaches an expectation to the child's return, as if she is a saviour of sorts that will help regain something that the family has lost, perhaps alluding to the idea that Fiona represents the return of a 'lost' generation of emigrants. As the film progresses and Fiona finds her brother, Tadhg's words gain an added significance as he finally reveals, in relation to Jamie, that 'he isn't lost at all. He's just with another branch of the family'. In this representation, both Jamie and Fiona are no longer portrayed as individuals but become symbolic children, as the idea of the 'child' is used to signify the return of something that was lost.

However, just as the claims of the child Fiona are dismissed, the adult characters also attempt to undermine Tadhg's stories, as traditional power relations between adults and children are played out. Hugh says of Tadhg that the 'poor fella doesn't know whether he's wide awake or dreaming', dismissing the selkie stories as mere dreams, a theme that recurs throughout the film. At certain points, the film blurs the distinction between dream and reality and uses dream as a means of motivating the character's actions in reality. This is evident as Fiona falls asleep in front of the fire in the cottage on Roan Inish and dreams of Nuala beckoning her, signifying Fiona's subconscious mind communicating that a return to her ancestral homeland will help her on her search. After this dream, she spies Jamie picking flowers on the island and divulges to Eamon what she has seen. He is reluctant to believe her but

[140] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p. 55.

finally admits 'I do believe you, but you mustn't tell our grandparents. [...]. They would only think you were dreaming'. On the occasion that Fiona falls asleep in the meadow, her dream incorporates an image of the cradle rocking in the cottage, a vision that motivates her to run to the cottage as soon as she wakens. It is there that she sees Jamie at the table with a seal.[141] When describing these events to Hugh he responds with 'You've gone crazy with some kind of fever', reinforcing the idea that any sightings of Jamie or the selkies must be imagined and have no basis in reality.

However, it is the belief in myth and ritual along with working in harmony with nature that has led to Jamie's return. Within the context of a global consumer society, it is possible that Sayles is suggesting that there is a necessity to believe in myth and incorporate it into everyday life. Myth and storytelling are present in the film in several forms. The tales to which the child Fiona is exposed constitute the larger story of the film narrative for the global viewer. The particular elements of selkie lore and Ireland are constructed in a form that attempts to appeal to the viewer on a universal scale as a reminder of the existence of alternatives to a modern global society. The spectator is encouraged to parallel Fiona's journey by using myth and storytelling in the creation of identity and understanding in contemporary society. This conforms to Campbell's idea that myths 'are the world's dreams. They are archetypal dreams and deal with great human problems. I know when I come to one of these thresholds now. The myth tells me about it, how to respond to certain crises of disappointment or delight or failure or success. The myths tell me where I am'.[142] Sayles also invites the viewer to find her/his way in the world by using myth.

Conclusion

> The kind of difference that defines every place is not on the order of a juxtaposition but rather takes the form of imbricated strata [...]. The revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites and spatial practices [...]. This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depths it is ubiquitous. A piling up of heterogeneous places. [143]

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[141] The sequence where Jamie eats with the seals can also be read in terms of the Greek myth of Persephone. Persephone's eating of pomegranate seeds binds her to the underworld. Similarly, Jamie's meal with the seal may be an allusion to his position in the world of myth and his distance from reality.
[142] Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* (1988) (New York, Broadway Books, 2001), p. 15.
[143] Michel De Certau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 201.

Throughout *The Secret of Roan Inish* both Ireland's cultural space and Fiona's mythologised body can be read in Michel De Certau's terms as they are represented as 'imbricated strata', as spaces that are layered with meaning. Through Fiona's quest to find her brother, she reveals the heterogeneous layers of her personal and family history which are inextricably linked with the cultural history, landscape and environment of Ireland. By accessing her family's past, Fiona uncovers the mythic traditions of Ireland's past and exposes the multiple strata of culture and heritage that lie beneath the surface of her everyday life in contemporary Donegal. This rediscovery of myth leads to the recovery of Jamie and the return to Roan Inish. As demonstrated above, it is possible to read Fiona's journey westward as analogy for the search for origins in contemporary global culture.

The idea of home and origins is a dominant theme in much globalisation theory as is evident in Roland Robertson's remarks that

> There is indeed currently something like an 'ideology of home' which has in fact come into being partly in response to the constant repetition and global diffusion of the claim that we now live in a condition of homelessness or rootlessness.[144]

In establishing a sense of home, Sayles draws upon a series of international texts in the creation of the film, localising the narrative and events in an attempt to explore universal myths of origins in a global culture and to renegotiate the position of myth in the modern world. While Fiona's father represents a particular generation's disbelief in the myths and their potential in supporting a way of life on the island, Hugh and Tess signify the last remaining traces of a generation that once lived with myth as part of their everyday lives. Again this echoes Robertson's theories of 'presence and absence' of trace and disappearance in global culture.[145] Hugh and Tess are reluctant to agree that it is possible to return to the island and live as they once did.[146] It is only through Fiona and Eamon's persistence that they slowly become convinced. The younger generation of children aid in bringing new life to the myths

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[144] Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity', p. 35.
[145] Ibid., p. 4.
[146] This also corresponds to the idea of Celtic Tiger Ireland as the last remaining outpost of a culture that believes in myth. Echoing McLoone's work mentioned above, Ireland in the 1990s underwent a significant transition into a global culture. This transitory nature of Irish culture and society means that the nation symbolises both the trace and the disappearance of myths of origin and identity.

of the island, a revived hope that forces the older generation to realise the value and importance of the stories, and the values that they are trying to suppress.[147] Consequently childhood is represented as bridging the gap between past and present while also forging a new lifestyle for the future. The fantasy can become part of the characters' reality, and the space of Roan Inish suggests that there are other options to modernisation.

Fiona's initial move to her grandparent's home on the mainland reveals the traces of mythic tradition but she must ultimately delve deeper into the traces of her family's past and move farther west to the island. Similarly, Sayles uses ideas of Ireland to represent the simultaneous trace and disappearance of myth in contemporary society, a device that has led to much criticism of the film. By portraying Fiona's move further west, Sayles suggests that Ireland no longer represents a place where myth and folklore are a dominant part of everyday culture and acknowledges the need to identify an alternative place, a liminal space that is free from both stifling forms of traditionalism and from global capitalist consumerism. Through the representation of Fiona and her grandparents, Sayles also proposes that myths are embedded in layers of society, that they exist even if people are unwilling or reluctant to acknowledge them. Therefore, Fiona's journey to Roan Inish can be understood as signifying the need to work harder to access myths, myths that can facilitate the formation of personal and cultural identity.

However, the ending of the film alludes to themes of incest, with a group of people that cannot procreate and therefore will reach an inevitable end in their alternative realm.[148] For the Irish viewer, there is a sense that a modern and globalised Ireland is unavoidable. While the film offers the possibility of an alternative, perhaps this can only ever be a form of cinematic escapism, an imaginary landscape, a fleeting moment of fantasy that ultimately can never become a reality. As a result, the themes of origin that are created in the film can only ever occupy an imagined space. On screen, the home that is Ireland and the past that is childhood do not exist in reality, but as Warner suggests in relation to homecoming in myth, 'the imaginary homeland itself is homeless. There is no home except in the mind, where ideas of home are

[147] This corresponds to Natov's belief that 'in such an allegory, where the childhood is the green world, the retreat from the worldly world is the child himself, the figure of escape, renewal and possibility. The child may lead us into the garden, but also may become the garden, that which blooms, is cultivated, and nurtured' (p. 92).

[148] This echoes themes of incest, or knowing too much, in Sayles' *Lone Star*.

grown [...] home as a place or time of innocence can only be an illusion'.[149] Therefore, representations of childhood and of the Irish past do not attempt to achieve verisimilitude in the film, but function as modes of accessing a search for origins and for the formation of identity in contemporary culture. It is not possible to return to an authentic Irish past or to a child perspective, but it is the attempt to do so that facilitates the processes of self-discovery.

[149] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, pp. 93-94.

Chapter 5

'Re-membering' Irish Childhood: John Roberts' *War of the Buttons*

This chapter examines the alignment of Ireland and childhood in the creation of nostalgia in John Roberts' 1994 film *War of the Buttons*.[1] The analysis positions the film within the context of the British heritage film tradition and explores the power discourses involved in constructing ideas of childhood and Ireland within a global economic framework.[2] Such an approach provides a basis for the examination of the relationship between representations of childhood and portrayals of Ireland in the film. This analysis develops many of the theories discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 and draws upon theoretical work that engages with concepts of history and the construction of versions of the past within the context of contemporary culture.

As noted in the Introduction, the work of Michel Foucault is central to this analysis of *War of the Buttons*, in particular his essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', which questions the modes of production and reception of history, and argues against an empiricist totalising view of history, as Foucault states that 'it is no longer a question of judging the past in the name of a truth'.[3] This approach avoids creating monolithic views of history, but questions the versions of the past being constructed, for whom, by whom, and for what purposes. Throughout this chapter, I combine Foucault's theories with Jean-François Lyotard's ideas of dismantling grand narratives of history which I then link to Frederic Jameson's work on postmodern culture. Jameson views contemporary society as experiencing a 'loss of historicity' where the concept of 'real history' is rejected and the past becomes a collection of images that are commodified and recycled in the present.[4] The idea of nostalgia in film is also central to Jameson's arguments as he identifies nostalgia films as inauthentic in their representation, describing them as 'celebrations of the imaginary style of a real past' and a 'desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past'.[5] Combining these theories with arguments relating to cultural memory, as discussed in Chapter 3, along with approaches to globalisation, as in Chapter 4, it is argued below that *War of the Buttons* adheres to this fabrication of a past on screen using the traces

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[1] John Roberts' other films include *Say Goodbye* (Short) (UK, 1990), *This Boy's Story* (UK, 1992), *Paulie* (USA, 1998), and *Station Jim* (TV) (UK, 2001).

[2] The term 'heritage film' was first used in 1986 by Charles Barr in reference to wartime literary adaptations. See Charles Barr, 'Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia', in *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema*, ed. by Charles Barr (London: BFI Publications, 1986), pp. 1-29 (p. 12).

[3] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 97.

[4] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. x

[5] Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 85, and *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 19.

of a real past in the creation of a 'missing' past to appeal to a global viewer. Such a process creates nostalgia for an era that in reality never existed.

Elements of childness are identified in the text and in the viewing process of the film, and related to these debates regarding the construction of an Irish past. The forms of childness present include the alignment of childhood with the nation, nostalgia and its association with a lost childhood, the position of the child viewer, adult-child power dynamics and issues of past and present, childhood innocence, and the figure of the child on screen. Theories of childness and history are combined and then examined within the context of cultural debates in contemporary Ireland. Such an approach reveals the complex nature of constructing history and locates the text within broader discourses of globalisation, postmodernity and Irish film studies. This chapter provides the first detailed, close textual analysis of the film. The examination of the text in terms of childness expands upon previous readings, aligns it with the British heritage film tradition, and posits that particular interpretations of Ireland and childhood in the film rely upon the position, cultural expectations and knowledge of the spectator.

Based on Louis Pergaud's 1912 French novel *La Guerre des Boutons*[6] and a rewriting of Yves Roberts' 1962 film, also *La Guerre des Boutons*, *War of the Buttons* was released in 1994. The international nature of the feature is apparent from the outset as it is credited as an Anglo-French production, directed by an English man, John Roberts, whose grandmother hailed from Cork. It was produced by David Puttnam who owns a house in Cork. It also features an Irish cast and was shot on location in West Cork. The film is set in an Irish past, sometime between 1950 and 1980, and follows the conflicts and battles of two groups of children, rival gangs from neighbouring villages, Ballydowse and Carrickdowse.[7] The 'Ballys' are led by Fergus (Gregg Fitzgerald) and the 'Carricks' by Geronimo (John Coffey). Those captured during battle are ritually humiliated as the buttons of their clothes are snipped off. The battles finally come to an end when Geronimo destroys the Ballys' HQ and both Fergus and Geronimo are sent to a reformatory. Throughout the film many Irish stereotypes are depicted, with the opening sequence containing shots of beautiful landscapes, horses and carts, and a Catholic priest. As the narrative progresses, many other familiar clichés emerge with the use of hurleys as weapons, tin whistles and

[6] *La Guerre des Boutons* (France: Mercure de France, 1963).
[7] The inability to attach the time period to a particular decade is discussed in detail in Section 2 below.

Irish dancing to celebrate a victory in battle, and shots of whiskey to calm the nerves of a young boy, Little Con (Anthony Cunningham). Emphasis is also placed on Irish nationalist history in the school curriculum, particularly through references to the 1916 Rising and the Battle of Kinsale in 1601. Arguably, the film is a nostalgic and often sentimental view of innocence in a pre-industrial rural Ireland, a representation which seems to have little in common with the Celtic Tiger culture of 1990s Ireland in which it was produced, the term 'Celtic Tiger' being coined the year the film was released. In primarily appealing to a global viewer, the film does not attempt to reflect a 'real' or 'true' version of Ireland, but creates a space on screen that is constructed as an idealised place through the depiction of childhood and heritage.

Section 1 of this chapter explores the construction of nostalgia in the text and examines Roberts' attempts to create a yearning for a lost way of life.[8] In discussing the work of Immanuel Kant, Linda Hutcheon notes that nostalgic people were usually disappointed when they returned home in an effort to cure their homesickness, as 'they did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*, a time of youth. Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to – ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact'.[9] When such theories are applied to *War of the Buttons*, it is possible to read the film as an attempt to return to both an imaginary time of childhood *and* a place of Ireland by using the medium of cinema.

Central to an analysis of the construction of nostalgia in the text is Pierre Nora's writing on collective memory and its relation to the heritage industry as outlined in Chapter 3. It is within contemporary contexts that the heritage industry creates what Nora terms 'Sites of Memory' where the past is not just constituted by knowledge of historical events, but is constructed in part by media and tourism.[10] In this chapter it is argued that *War of The Buttons* does not function as a representation of history, but as a series of 'sites of memory'. Nora's sites of memory are 'objects,

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[8] Nostalgia can be understood through its Greek roots of *nostos*, meaning a return home, and *algos*, meaning pain The term was coined in 1688 by a 19-year-old Swiss medical student in relation to lethally severe forms of homesickness. See Johannes Hofer, *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia, oder Heimwehe* (Basel, 1688), translated in *The Bulletin of the Institute of The History of Medicine*, 7 (1934), 37-91, cited in Linda Hutcheon (1998), *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern*, published online at University of Toronto English Library, Director: Ian Lancashire (p. 2): <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html> [accessed 11 May 2004].

[9] Hutcheon, *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern*, p. 2.

[10] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, Vol. 1, p. 18. Refer to Section 3 for a detailed discussion of heritage and the position of *War of the Buttons* within this industry.

places, memorials, commemorative ceremonies and so on',[11] which are 'plucked out' of history[12] and, as Valerie Krips argues, 'represent and consolidate what remains of a collective memory impoverished by the destruction of *milieux of memory*, the social and cultural structures that are memory's support'.[13] Such is the case in this heritage film as costumes and other elements which signify an Irish past are 'plucked' from history to give a sense of the past rather than an accurate portrayal of a specific decade.

In particular, such a construction of the past associates cultural memory with personal memories, a technique previously discussed in Chapter 3. In theorising notions of collective memory and its relation to the heritage industry, Krips notes that in remembering we exercise a basic component of cognition as 'Our memory – which includes memories of childhood – runs like a thread through our thinking and experiencing. In this sense we are never free of our past'.[14] In his work on collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs also turns to childhood to illustrate his analogies. He observes that 'at the moment of recreating the past, our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu', firmly positioning the process of remembering the past and illustrating that personal memories are informed by social memories.[15]

Section 2 examines the film's construction of the past and its relation to the heritage industry within the context of the British Heritage films of the period. Andrew Higson notes that with such an approach to filming the past, heritage becomes 'a selective preoccupation with the past, it is what a particular individual or group takes from the past in order to define itself in the present, to give it an identity'.[16] The heritage film uses the past to create ideas of identity in the present. Consequently, the use of heritage 'became one of the most powerful imaginative constructs of our time,' not only in film, but also in the broader framework of popular culture.[17] Higson observes that as a result of the greater cultural phenomenon of the heritage industry, this fascination with the past became a dominant feature of many

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[11] Krips, p. 8.
[12] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, Vol. 1, p. 7.
[13] Krips, p. 8.
[14] Ibid., p.15
[15] Halbwachs, p. 49
[16] Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 50.
[17] Raphael Samuel, 'Preface', in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* Vol. 1, *History and Politics*, ed. by Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. x-xvii (p. xii). This also adheres to the idea that the Ireland of *War of the Buttons* is an 'imaginative construct'.

films produced in Britain: 'Such films seemed to represent a particular relationship to the past – hence the heritage label – and as such, seemed symptomatic of so much cultural activity of the period'.[18] Drawing upon such theories, it is argued that Ireland's past in the film is a selective reworking of representations of Ireland that attempts to attach a particular identity to the nation.

Ruth Barton proposes that a cycle of Irish heritage films was also produced in Ireland during this period.[19] Her list includes such films as *The Playboys* (1992), *Into the West* (1992), *Widow's Peak* (1993), *Broken Harvest* (1994), *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (1994), *Circle of Friends* (1995), *The Run of the Country* (1995), *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), *Waking Ned* (1998) and *War of the Buttons*. While Barton's discussion briefly mentions some features and themes that these films share, such as rites of passage, a community spirit, and gender stereotyping, this chapter explores in depth the specific relationship of *War of the Buttons* to British filmmaking traditions.[20] It is argued throughout that the film can be positioned within the broader framework of the British heritage industry because it not only echoes many of the production elements of the genre, but also because Puttnam and Welland previously worked together on *Chariots of Fire* (1981), a prime example of British Heritage film.[21] As is explored in Section 2, *War of the Buttons* contains many elements that are common to such films, including a fascination with the spectacle of the past,

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[18] Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, p. 12. This fascination with the past in the form of heritage can be positioned within wider debates regarding the economic success of the British heritage industry throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the increasing commodification of the past. In his discussion of heritage cinema, John Hill also notes the increased interest in heritage as a consumer item during this period. Approximately 74 million people visited museums and galleries in 1990 while heritage centres with recreations of the past became extremely popular. Consumer spending on bodies such as The National Trust and English Heritage also increased significantly during this period. See John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 73. See also Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 88.

[19] Barton, 'From History to Heritage', pp. 241-284. See also Barton, *Irish National Cinema*.

[20] Barton's examination of the text takes place within the broader context of other heritage films and as a result she does not conduct a close textual analysis of the content of the film.

[21] In *English Heritage, English Cinema*, Higson discusses films such as *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, UK, 1981), *A Passage to India* (David Lean, UK/USA, 1984), *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, UK, 1985), *Maurice* (James Ivory, UK, 1987), *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Charles Sturridge, UK, 1991), *Howards End* (James Ivory, UK/Japan, 1991), and *Carrington* (Christopher Hampton, UK/France, 1995). The global nature of *War of the Buttons* can be compared to such films. It is important to note that many of these films were Merchant-Ivory productions, an international company with members from diverse cultural backgrounds; Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is from a Jewish-Polish background and has lived in India for most of her life, Ismail Merchant is Indian, while James Ivory is an American director. Together, these three have created some of England's most successful heritage films. The internationally collaborative nature of the productions is similar to the production processes of *War of the Buttons*.

issues of colonialism, an emphasis on landscapes and costumes, gender stereotyping, and the construction of a sense of nostalgia.[22]

According to Roland Robertson, the idea of nostalgia has become a major preoccupation in contemporary culture where there is a 'globally institutionalised kind of nostalgia'.[23] The film also adheres to Robertson's ideas on globalisation and 'universalism through particularism'. Expanding on the ideas of Immanuel Wallerstein in *The Politics of The World-Economy* (1984),[24] Robertson argues that the twentieth century has witnessed 'a massive twofold process involving *the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*'.[25] Ireland in the film is a necessary fiction and is represented as having a stable, cohesive identity, in an attempt to use particularism to explore universalism for a global audience.[26] Consequently, the film locates the narrative in an Irish rural past, a pre-industrial world that emphasises the innocence of childhood and conforms to many stereotypical representations of Ireland that have been discussed in depth such as in the work of Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, John Hill and Fidelma Farley.[27]

While theories relating to childhood are employed throughout the analysis of nostalgia and heritage, Section 3 and Section 4 directly explore the representations of childhood in the film. Combining theories of children's fiction with the work of Krips

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[22] This fascination with the past in the form of heritage can be positioned within wider debates regarding the economic success of the British heritage industry throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the increasing commodification of the past. See John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, especially pp. 74-75.

[23] Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, p. 160.

[24] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of The World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[25] Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, p. 100. Emphasis in original. The international nature of the production of *War of the Buttons* and the inability to define it as an Irish film is revealed in an article by David Puttnam: 'As I write this I am on location with my latest production *War of the Buttons* (1994). It's being filmed entirely in west Cork with an all-Irish cast. Does that make it an Irish film [...]? The script is by an English writer, based on a French novel with French and British as well as Irish money invested. So, can I at least call it a 'European' film? Well, not quite, because it's also attracted American and Japanese distribution investment'. See David Puttnam, 'Creativity and Commercialism: Film-making in Europe', p. 81. As Puttnam questions the origins and classification of the production, he reveals the connection between the creative process of the film and the commercial aspects of international investment, as demonstrated in the title of the article, 'Creativity and Commercialism: Film-making in Europe'. The heritage and nostalgia created in *War of the Buttons* are subsequently positioned within a global *economic* framework.

[26] Robertson also problematises universalism in global culture in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, pp. 97-114.

[27] See Rockett, Gibbons, and Hill, *Cinema and Ireland*; Fidelma Farley, 'Ireland, the Past and British Cinema: *Ryan's Daughter* (1970)', in *British Historical Cinema*, ed. by Claire Monk and May Sargent (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 129-143; *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe*; and John Hill, 'The Past is always there in the Present', in *Contemporary Irish Cinema*, ed. by James MacKillop (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

and Nora, Section 3 examines the construction of childhood, a nostalgia for childhood innocence, and the depiction of child/adult relations in the text. Section 4 examines the disruption of this nostalgia and focuses on representation of the children's genders. Applying the theories of Perry Nodelman, Kerry Mallan and Anne Higonnet allows for an analysis of masculinity and femininity while also investigating the sexualisation of the child characters within the cultural context in which the film is produced. This sexualisation appears to contradict the emphasis on childhood innocence which dominates the text and to which the narrative continually returns. Despite these inconsistencies, the overall tone of the film encourages the viewer to yearn for a fictitious past, a period that is distanced from the problems of the present and where a stable social order is promoted through the emphasis on community values and traditional gender stereotyping.

Section 1. Voice-over, Ireland, and Childhood

The opening sequence of the film creates a specific space in which the narrative takes place, combining many sites of memory and introducing the viewer to modes of bridging concepts of past and present. By locating it in an Irish setting, Ireland and childhood are aligned and the nation becomes a reference point for ideas of 'pastness' for a global viewer. The audience are presented with a view of a rural landscape on the edge of the sea. This landscape is represented during the twilight of the day, signifying a half-world, caught on the border between two realms,[28] and corresponding to the 'otherworldly' concepts which the producers wished to emphasise throughout the text.[29] Simultaneously, the words of adult Marie, spoken by Dervla Kirwan,[30] begin with

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[28] Gibbons' comments regarding John Hinde's postcards can be equally applied to the text as it creates a 'feeling that we are getting a last glimpse of a world that is lost'. See Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 40.

[29] In *Film Ireland* (August/September 1994), 27, Shane Barry refers to the following as 'PR gush' that appeared in the press pack for a preview of *War of the Buttons*: 'In a quiet corner of South West Ireland, at the foot of hills so green they hurt the eyes, lies a stretch of tidal water. Glowing at each other across the watery divide nestle the villages of Ballydowse and Carrickdowse: Sleepy, otherworldly places which wake to the sound of fishermen at their nets, to the swish of washing fluttering in the breeze, to the rumble of the early morning post van, and reassuringly to the whooping, yelping crescendo of kids on their way to school'. Barry acknowledges his uneasiness, fearing that the film is 'returning to the land of *Finian's Rainbow* and *The Quiet Man*: a place that only existed in the imagination of scriptwriters and a destination that most sane people are loathe [sic] to visit'. This

> In Ireland, I grew up in a tiny village by the sea. It was here that my best friend – a boy – was fighting with another boy who lived in the next village. It sounds silly, but they were always fighting. Typical of boys.

This technique used to introduce the film immediately draws the implied spectator's attention to the past-present relationships in the film. By using the voice-over to frame the narrative, Roberts dislocates the events of the film from the audience's contemporary setting and positions the story in both the character's recent past and in Ireland's recent past. In the processes of remembering in the film, Marie's voice signifies the close correlation between issues of personal and cultural identity.[31] Her words set the tone for the sentimental and nostalgic view of childhood which permeates the text,[32] while the images which accompany these words construct a nostalgia for Ireland. As is noted in Chapter 3, this corresponds to much of Valerie Krips' and Maurice Halbwachs' work on childhood and heritage and consequently it can be understood that Roberts aims to create a predominantly sentimental version of childhood and Ireland that is absent of 'suffering'. The sentimental remembrance of childhood is then coupled with stereotypical images of Ireland as a pre-industrial realm of landscapes, farmers, traditional music, and close-knit communities. This sets the nostalgic tone of the narrative that follows.

Applying Barbara Wall's theories of narrative voice in children's fiction allows for an exploration of the forms of address that the initial voice-over employs as Marie's words function in terms of 'dual address'. Wall defines dual address as a way of addressing 'both children and adults simultaneously',[33] a process that is evident in Marie's construction of nostalgia. The adult viewer can identify with the position of

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comment draws attention to the complex production values present in *War of The Buttons*. The 'PR gush' reveals the specific elements of the film that are foregrounded for particular marketing purposes and the manner and style in which the film is promoted, as both Ireland and childhood are manipulated as cultural commodities.

[30] In 1993 Dervla Kirwan also played the role of 'Phoebe' in the nostalgic British Comedy *Goodnight Sweetheart* (BBC Television, 1993-1999). The sense of nostalgia associated with Kirwan in *War of the Buttons* continued in 1996, with Kirwan's role in the TV drama series *Ballykissangel* (BBC Television, 1996-2001), which created a nostalgic, sentimental and often stereotypical view of an Irish rural village community. See Barton, 'From History to Heritage', pp. 252-254 for a discussion of *Ballykissangel* as escapist entertainment. Also see Ruth Barton 'The Ballykissangelisation of Ireland', in *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*, 20.3 (2000), 413-426.

[31] For a discussion of the construction of film texts from such a perspective, see Warner, 'Through a Child's Eyes; Internal BFI Seminar, 12 February 1992', in *Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment*, pp. 36-50.

[32] The stereotyping of childhood and gender in Marie's words is discussed in detail below.

[33] Barbara Wall, p. 22.

the adult Marie and reminisce about the past of childhood. When the children appear on screen the child characters act as a site of memory of self, a lost state of adult self, as the adult viewer maps the past of self onto an image of the child in the film.[34] However, the process of constructing nostalgia for the child viewer is extremely complex. Wall notes that nostalgia for childhood is 'a feeling which children cannot share' and examines modes of address in terms of the experience of the narratee.[35] Wall's assertion fails to recognise that the experience of nostalgia is not limited to the world of adults as child viewers are also capable of reminiscing about the past events of their own childhood. However, although a child may understand nostalgia, the experiential differences of child and adult result in the child's understanding of a nostalgia for a past childhood involving a different process from that of the adult viewer. Initially, through Marie's voice-over, the child must project an imagined future adult identity onto a disembodied adult character in an attempt to identify and understand the process of looking back at a childhood. This is doubly confounded by locating that childhood within a cultural past, which results in the child spectator attempting to imagine herself/himself as a future adult remembering a childhood self, while simultaneously recreating a culture of the past that is alien to his/her own contemporary culture.[36] Therefore the adult Marie addresses both child and adult spectators simultaneously, but the processes involved in the construction of nostalgia are very different.

This use of the voice-over can also be understood in terms of the relationship of the past space on screen and the present space in the auditorium where the film is viewed. In 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', Mary Ann Doane uses psychoanalysis to explore the function of voice in cinema describing the voice-over as 'disembodied, lacking any specification in space or time'.[37] The

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[34] In examining the construction of the aesthetic space on screen, the film can also be understood as the creation of a desire for the viewer 'not just to gaze at the scenery but to become a part of the local community' as the child character acts as a point of identification within the landscape. See Barton, 'From History to Heritage', p. 247. This corresponds to Tanya Kiang's suggestion in 'Irish Postcards and Mood Photography' that the presence of an object or a child acts as a means to "get inside the picture", however momentary or subliminal this identification may be'. See CIRCA Art Magazine, 43 (Dublin: December/January, 1989), p. 24.

[35] Barbara Wall, p. 142.

[36] It is also possible to argue that the child viewer identifies with the child character because of their shared status as 'child'. For a discussion of the figure of the child on screen see Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, pp. 20-21.

[37] Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', in *Movies and Methods Vol. II*, ed. by Bill Nichols (Berkley & London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 565-575 (p. 572).

voice of adult Marie is also disembodied, as the adult character is never visible on screen. Therefore her words occupy the non-diegetic space of the film while also the acoustic space of the auditorium, 'lacking any specification in space or time', and thus act as a connection between the absent past of Ireland and childhood on screen and the present moment of viewing in the auditorium.[38] Therefore, Marie's voice-over functions as a means of bridging several gaps; between past and present, between childhood and adulthood, and between the diegetic world of the film and the acoustical space of the cinema.

The autobiographical style of the voice-over is a means of encouraging the audience to understand the idea of 'pastness'. While the adult Marie's voice-over initiates this journey, the child character of Marie (Eveanna Ryan) provides a liminal space that connects the past and the future of self and of nation. The first shot of Marie depicts her coming out of her home and pausing in the gateway, symbolising that she is caught on a threshold between two worlds.[39] The child character therefore functions in metaphorical terms, as a temporal location between the past of childhood and the future of adulthood, the past of Ireland and the future of Ireland. However, the film simply uses these images to create a universal landscape of self and culture, which is not site-specific to either Ireland or Irish childhood, corresponding to Robertson's theories of exploring the universal through the particular.[40] Arguably, such a construction establishes a regional specificity for a global audience and conforms to Phil Powrie's belief that

> spectatorial response can therefore be defined as a *metastasis*; we are displaced from the present into a very abstract place, a utopia – literally a no-place – but we are attracted there by a very specific place, a place whose regional specificity is precisely what makes it attractive.[41]

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[38] Doane sees the auditorium as a type of meta-space which 'binds together' three spaces of the cinema that she identifies as the space of the diegesis, the visible space of the screen as receptor of the image, and the acoustical space of the auditorium (pp. 570-571).

[39] Phil Powrie notes a similar threshold theme in 'alternative heritage' films in Britain. See 'On The Threshold Between Past and Present', in *British Cinema Past and Present*, ed. by Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 316-326.

[40] Childhood in the film is used as a universal reference point, an approach to understanding childhood that is discussed by Jacqueline Rose (p. 10). Similarly, Bazalgette and Staples argue that 'family films have always stressed their 'universality' of appeal, although from a mixture of motives. Ideologies of 'childhood' stress that children are all the same the world over'. See 'Unshrinking the Kids: Children's Cinema and the Family Film', p. 96.

[41] Powrie, p. 323.

In line with Powrie's argument, the spectators are thus invited 'to relocate the past place, and relocate themselves within it'.[42]

During the opening shots Ireland is immediately established as a site of particularism within a global culture. The initial image of a small rural inlet incorporates mountains, green fields, and a seascape. This combination of elements consequently constructs the narrative setting as a rural utopia, seemingly uncorrupted by modern industry and technology. The traditional Irish music composed by Rachel Portman playing in the background associates the landscape with received images of Ireland and reinforces stereotypical representations of traditional culture in rural Ireland.[43] As the voice-over begins, this opening image is linked to the next shot by the sound of horseshoes on a road, before cutting to a shot of a horse and cart making its way through a small village surrounded by mountains. This establishes the tone of the narrative that is to follow as the children's adventures predominantly occur in picturesque rural settings, as is evident during the battle at Murphy's dunes, the search for mushrooms in the fields, the chasing of the fox, the fights in the woods, and the rescue from the steep rock face. Such a depiction corresponds to the tradition of stereotypical cinematic representations of Ireland.

In *Cinema and Ireland*, Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill explore the representations of Ireland on screen arguing that 'due to the Irish state's failure to provide for a native film industry [...] popular representations of Ireland on screen have, with some notable exceptions been left to the predominantly commercial designs of American and British film companies'.[44] They argue that such a process has

> 'set the agenda' for a popular understanding of the Irish. [...] It is difficult to separate these questions from the larger context of Ireland's subordinate status within the world economic and political order [...]. For whether it be rural backwardness or a marked proclivity for violence, the film-producing nations of the metropolitan centre have been able to find in

[42] Ibid., p. 323. Similarly, Wojcik-Andrews claims that 'to return with the hero or heroine to their childhood is to return to one's own past, one's own formative years. In watching the hero or heroine grow up, we relive the growing up process as we experienced it ourselves' (p. 167).
[43] Portman was born in England in 1960, a factor which further reveals the British elements of the film's production. Portman was the first woman to receive an Academy Award for Music when she won 'Best Music' for *Emma* in 1996 (Douglas McGrath, UK/USA).
[44] Rockett, Gibbons, Hill, *Cinema and Ireland*, p. xi

> Ireland a set of characteristics which stand in contrast to the assumed virtues of their own particular culture.[45]

Fidelma Farley also argues that 'in British cinema's representation of Irish history, there is an important sense in which Ireland is always already 'the past'. By this I mean that Ireland and the Irish are consistently placed by British films in an atemporal, essentially pre-social realm, one which lacks the social, political and economic structures of modern advanced civilisation'.[46] In this sense Ireland also becomes a cultural signifier or a 'site of memory' of 'pastness' for a global audience.[47] These images are then combined with concepts of childhood and modes of narrating the past through processes of remembering and, as the narrative develops, the construction of a sentimental form of pastoral Ireland is used to reinforce the representation of an innocent childhood, and vice-versa.[48] Both ideas of the nation and of childhood meet dominant ideological expectations, or in Hans Robert Jauss' term, the fictional text 'even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics and implicit allusions.'[49] However, as is explored in Section 2, in attempting to create a specific form of particularism the representation of 'familiar characteristics' of Ireland creates varying forms of meaning for the implied global spectator. These elements, which include dress, community values, traditional culture

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[45] Ibid., p. xii. This corresponds to Robertson's theories of particularism. The 'set of characteristics' offers an interesting means of exploring the representation of both Ireland and childhood in *War of the Buttons* within a global culture and film industry, particularly in terms of 'rural backwardness'.

[46], 'Ireland, the Past, and British Cinema', p. 129.

[47] A similar process occurs in *The Field* (Jim Sheridan, Ireland/UK, 1990) where, as Rockett argues, Ireland in the film emphasises a distance from modernity as 'for many, Ireland in the Cinema still retains an image of a pre-modern, pastoral society, something which the makers of *The Field* may have wished to trade on'. See 'Culture, Industry and Irish Cinema', in *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe*, pp. 126-139 (p. 139). A similar process is at work in *War of The Buttons* where characteristics of Ireland constructed from established images of the country in cinematic history are amalgamated and commodified for a global market.

[48] Similarly, Natov notes that 'the pastoral, when coupled with the literature of childhood, often elicits a nostalgia for the past – both personal and historical. Memory is moved into the present as if it were a series of tableaux happening before our eyes. The green world suggests loss, and the longing for a return to an earlier state, real or imagined' (p. 91).

[49] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,' in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 23.

and violence, can be read as sites of memory, removed from their social structures and combined within a single text to create ideas of 'Irishness'.[50]

Section 2. Mise-en-scène, Sites of Memory, Cultural Specificity

Costumes

The temporal dislocation of the narrative from contemporary culture creates a version of an Irish past that is immediately identifiable as the 'past' but defies being positioned within a specific year or decade. The sequence following adult Marie's narration reveals shots of the child characters as they prepare for school in the morning. The camera initially focuses on their clothes and household objects as opposed to the children themselves.[51] These various objects include a clock, which establishes the themes of time and temporality that dominate the text. The style of the clothes highlights the fabrication of a past as it is only possible to assign the costumes to a general time period, somewhere between 1950 and 1980. The production notes of the film document that 'Louise Frogley [costume designer] aimed for a timelessness with the costumes which entailed combining a mixture of purpose-made and locally found clothes, dating from the 1950s through to the late 70s and "mixed in a way that you see quite generally in Ireland."'[52] The production designer, Jim Clay, also notes the deliberate attempts that were made to avoid assigning the film to a specific decade[53]:

> Although it is a contemporary piece looking at contemporary values in terms of the sense of community that still exists around Cork, we wanted to keep some of the timeless elements in the story without turning it into a period piece. The way we dealt with it practically was to take away anything that was obtrusively modern and not to replace it with anything that was obtrusively period. It's still going to have all the charm without being over-sentimentalised.[54]

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[50] Gibbons notes that 'from its beginnings in the early decades of the [20th] century, Irish cinema has been dominated by a number of pervasive and interconnected themes: the idealization of landscape, the persistence of the past, the lure of violence [...] and the primacy of family and community'. See Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 117. *War of the Buttons* centres its construction of 'Irishness' on such established themes and received images. Corresponding to this argument, Barton also notes that many recent Irish films 'satisfy expectations that Ireland is a country absorbed by its past and many of them rehearse the signifiers of Irishness that outside audiences expect from Irish fictions'. See *Irish National Cinema*, p. 131.

[51] As is discussed below, the clothes – particularly the buttons – are central to the narrative of the film.

[52] Production Notes, Enigma Productions, IFI Archives.

[53] This is also revealed by the presence of a modern helicopter alongside older costumes.

[54] Production Notes, Enigma Productions, IFI Archives.

This approach conforms to Nora's theories on sites of memory as costumes and other artefacts are 'plucked from history' and removed from their original social contexts in order to give a sense of the past rather than an accurate portrayal of a specific decade. In Krips' terms the importance of the objects that are represented on-screen cannot be underestimated as the objects themselves come to represent the past.[55] The construction of the mise-en-scène to establish ideas of the past adheres to Farley's argument as the film also aligns Ireland with traditions and values that are no longer present in modern global culture, arguably representing Ireland as synonymous with the 'past'.[56] Many of these values are presented with a sense of nostalgia, particularly those relating to a 'community spirit'.[57] This established stereotype of Ireland as composed of a series of small rural communities, is used by Roberts to express an alternative to the individualism and breakdown of communities that is associated with globalisation. As Gibbons notes, 'this recourse to the west in Ireland is impelled by the search for community, a desire to escape the isolation of the self and to immerse oneself in the company of others'.[58]

Community

In highlighting such aspects, the narrative is based around a 'tiny village by the sea', with the rival communities of Ballydowse and Carrickdowse centred around the local church and school. The intimate nature of the Ballydowse community is revealed in several forms in the film such as the children running through the streets and encountering the local priest.[59] The children have stopped the priest in order to sell him a ticket to raise money for the local hospital, an episode which depicts fundraising within a village of fishermen, teachers and farmers, all of whom function as sites of memory and symbols of community. Ultimately, the Irish past is fashioned

[55] Krips, p. 95

[56] However, the anachronistic presence of a modern helicopter toward the end of the film is not in keeping with this sense of 'pastness', an idea which is elaborated upon below.

[57] Barton discusses the community values created in the film. See 'From History to Heritage', p. 270. Also, the presence of the now obsolete 'Post and Telegraph' van, an image which creates a yearning for a site of memory that is traditional in that it symbolises community values, creates a nostalgia for a point of modernisation that has already been replaced. This conforms to Gibbons' idea that it is 'not the past but modernisation itself which has become imbued with longing'. See Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 43.

[58] Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 13.

[59] As a result, the priest is not only represented as playing a dominant role in the society, so close to the people in the parish that he knows their names, but this lifestyle is associated with a culture of the past or a pre-modern world as he is cycling as opposed to driving.

into a heritage that offers 'images of stability at a time of upheaval and a sense of continuity in a time of change'.[60]

Such a construction of a community spirit in an Irish setting receives increased significance when analysed in conjunction with the film's production notes. Prior to this feature, Yves Roberts retained the rights to the novel and would not allow a remake in England or France. The production notes reveal that 'it was only when Puttnam suggested setting the story in Ireland, with its own *strong cultural roots*, that the French director changed his mind'.[61] In discussing the process of adaptation, he continues to emphasise the importance of transferring the events into an Irish setting noting that

> There is no equivalent English-speaking rural community in the world other than Ireland which has villages dominated by the school and the church in close proximity [...]. I felt very comfortable about writing about two small Irish communities.[62]

Consequently, there is a conscious attempt to position the film in a location that allows for a mapping of the original French narrative onto a cultural space that appears to fulfil certain pre-conceived ideas vital to the film, most notably in terms of community, but also in terms of 'strong cultural roots'.

While the representation of Ireland in film may have influenced the decision to set the narrative in Ireland, it can also be argued that the emphasis on 'strong cultural roots' may be a reference to Ireland's Celtic heritage.[63] It is this Celtic heritage which links *War of the Buttons* with Yves Roberts' *La Guerre des Boutons*, and more significantly with Pergaud's original novel. In the opening preface to the novel, Pergaud is adamant that he is a Celt and that it is a Celtic tone which dominates his text.[64] It is also possible to interpret Puttnam's comment as a reference to the specifically Irish cultural elements that are present in the film as the community also

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[60] John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, p. 74-75.
[61] Production Notes, Enigma Productions, IFI Archives. My emphasis.
[62] Production Notes, Enigma Productions, IFI Archives.
[63] For links between Irish and European versions of Celticism see Ernest Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races and Other Essays* (1896), trans. by Willaim G. Hutchison (New York and London: Kennikat Press, 1970) and WB Yeats, *Essays and Introductions: The Celtic Element in Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1961).
[64] See 'Préface' in Louis Pergaud, *La Guerre des Boutons*, where Pergaud states 'je suis un Celte' ('I am a Celt'), pp. 9-10 (p. 9).

reveals a sense of strong cultural roots in terms of its association with Irish dancing, music, recitation, sports and the use of the Irish language.[65]

Traditional Ireland

As Marie waits for her friends by the harbour she practices her Irish dancing, immediately establishing her immersion in traditional forms of culture. During the victory celebrations in the 'HQ', Marie and other children continue to demonstrate their skills in Irish dancing, while others play tin whistles. Once again, the children reveal their knowledge of specific cultural traditions as individual talents are amalgamated for group celebrations and festivities. Furthermore, these areas of expertise are located within an essentialised form of Irish culture. This is also evident as the character of Boffin (Darragh Naughton) concludes the festivities with a poem that celebrates the victory at Bunduff Castle, providing a central artistic role in the community by simultaneously acting as a Seanchaí or traditional storyteller and as a Gaelic bard or poet. In this celebratory sequence, images of Irish culture are collected into one space providing the audience with immediately familiar tropes and established identifiable images. The use of sites of memory or recognisable elements of Irish culture continues as the Carricks use hurleys to beat one of the Bally boys and the teaching of Irish becomes a central component in the classroom as the teacher translates Fergus's note from English into Irish.

The shared heritage of the group is also manifested as the children sing together on several occasions, particularly after victories. All the members of the group know the lyrics to the song 'The Rocky Road to Dublin', creating an image of a collective cultural tradition.[66] The song was written in the nineteenth century and documents the experiences of a labourer who travels from Tuam, in Co. Galway, in the west, to Dublin in the east and finds his way onto an emigrant ship bound for Liverpool.[67] This song of emigration functions on several levels in the film.[68] It

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[65] These elements are discussed in detail below.

[66] The song also functions as a site of memory as it is alludes to Ireland's history of emigration. See Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 383-384 and pp. 423-428.

[67] A slip-jig, writer unknown. See 'Triskelle: Irish history website', <http://www.vincentpeters.nl/triskelle/lyrics/rockyroadtodublin.php?index=080.010.060.050> [accessed 15 May 2006]. Similar to the film, the song depicts its protagonist in stereotypical stage-Irish terms.

[68] Lloyd notes that 'emigration is a slow and individualized national trauma, often sentimentalised and dressed up by the very cultural forms, most importantly music, that have helped the emigrant survive' (p. 103).

acknowledges the formation of an Irish diaspora, many of whom would be a target audience for the nostalgic film, while it similarly draws attention to John Roberts' own familial heritage.[69] Therefore, the film depicts a nostalgic world or rural arcadia yet also acknowledges the mass emigration from such small communities. If the film creates a longing for a lost realm, the inclusion of the song contradicts such a heritage by acknowledging the mass emigration from often harsh realities of agrarian life. As a result, contrasting and contradictory meanings can be derived from particular elements of the film.

Disruption of Nostalgia

While the song acts as a substitute for the victory song that the boys sing in the French version, its presence also breaks the nostalgic effect that the narrative has repeatedly constructed. The need to emigrate suggests that the idyllic nature that is represented is at odds with the harsh reality of poverty and unemployment which plagued such Irish communities. In an allusion to Eamon de Valera's St. Patrick's Day speech, Luke Gibbons notes that 'there would in fact have been no need to leave the countryside and go further afield if life was an idyllic affair of cosy homesteads and comely maidens dancing on the village green'.[70] Furthering this argument, the title 'The Rocky Road to Dublin' also refers to Peter Lennon's 1968 documentary of the same name in which the director states the purpose of his film at the very beginning: 'This is an attempt to reconstruct in images the plight of an island community which survived nearly 700 years of English occupation and then nearly sank under the weight of its own heroes - and clergy [...]. What do you do with revolution once you've got it?'.[71] Lennon's comments set the tone of the film, which criticises de Valera's leadership of post-independence Ireland and the harsh economic conditions that resulted, revealing an Ireland of the period that is in stark contrast to the rural utopia celebrated in *War of the Buttons*.[72]

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[69] As noted above, Roberts' grandmother was born in Cork.

[70] Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 85. In a speech broadcast on radio in 1943, de Valera outlined his vision of an ideal Ireland.

[71] This can be related to the revisionist debates outlined in the Introduction to this thesis.

[72] 'The Rocky Road to Dublin' was also the title of a cartoon short produced in the United States in 1926 and was based upon the original song. Produced by Louis Weiss, Artclass Pictures Company, USA. See The Big Cartoon Database,
<http://www.bcdb.com/cartoon/24846-The_Rocky_Road_to_Dublin.html>
[accessed 13 February 2006]

Irish History

While themes of emigration allude to Ireland's cultural history, the film also constructs a form of particularism by referencing Ireland's pagan past and political past, reinforcing themes of difference but also establishing Ireland as a country steeped in history, myth and legend. In a manner similar to the construction of the past in *Daisy Chain War*, real past events are used to validate the veracity of the past of the film. The portal dolmen, the battle of Bunduff Castle and the references to the 1916 Rising all represent traces of different periods of Ireland's history.[73] They are also used in the film to comment upon the relationship between past and present, particularly the ability to learn from and to utilise history to help with contemporary struggles.[74] As Tim sits on top of the dolmen and waits for the Carricks to approach, the presence of the portal dolmen, an ancient tomb, functions as a site of memory of Ireland's pagan past. The historical remnant provides a sense of an ancient era, but is granted new meaning by its use in a contemporary battle.[75] It becomes a physical representation of the reclaiming of history for contemporary purposes and a metaphor for the way in which the past can inform the present. The dolmen is denied its original cultural meaning as Tim uses it as a lookout post and imposes his own cultural tradition of playing cowboy onto an older physical manifestation of the past. Tim's wearing of a cowboy hat also suggests that this sequence functions as a metaphor for the wider imposition of global culture onto a local landscape, with popular American culture in the form of cowboy films informing the behaviour of a boy in rural Ireland. The cowboy sits on top of the dolmen, perhaps alluding to the increased dominance of US culture in Ireland.[76] This also draws attention to the wider cultural context in which the film was produced and the increasing influence of US culture and economics in Ireland. This is represented in many films with child protagonists

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[73] Paradoxically, Gibbons views this version of a pastoral Ireland as an impossibility because the sites on the landscape function as human markers, as 'raiments of culture [which] repeatedly impose themselves between the outsider and a pristine vision of nature,' in *Cinema and Ireland*, p. 206.

[74] This can be understood in terms of theories relating to Popular Memory, as struggles of the past are used to inform struggles in the present. See Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 of this thesis for a detailed discussion of these concepts.

[75] Gibbons also notes that 'the survival of cultural artefacts from one era to another may transform their meaning, so that the same building 're-located' in a new political era becomes, in a sense, a radically different structure'. See Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 179. A similar process occurs with the use of the Dolmen and Bunduff Castle in the film as they lose their original meanings and the children inscribe new cultural associations onto these remains.

[76] US culture is also present in the form of the HQ which was modelled on an American boathouse. See Production Notes, IFI Archives. Also, the shot of a tin with 'Band Aid' written on it, suggests an Americanism as it is not referred to as 'Plasters', which would be the more common label in Irish culture. See Chapter 4 on *The Secret of Roan Inish* for a further discussion of Irish-US relations.

including Francie Brady's (Eamonn Owens) obsession with American comic books in *The Butcher Boy*; Harry Cronin's (James Hickey) interest in Flash Gordon films in *The Boy from Mercury*; and Tito (Rúaidhrí Conroy) and Ossie Riley's (Ciarán Fitzgerald) love of western films in *Into the West*.

Viewing the film within the context of US culture also draws attention to the parallels between the myth of the Irish west and the American west in the film.[77] Along with Tim's cowboy hat, the myth of the American west is alluded to in the leader of the Carricks who is nicknamed 'Geronimo', after a member of the Chircahua Apache, who was the leader of the last Native-American force to capitulate to the US[78], his surrender in 1886 ending the last Native-American guerrilla action in the US In *War of the Buttons*, Geronimo leads the Carricks into battle accompanied by his sidekick 'Gorilla', possibly a pun on the 'guerrilla' techniques of the Native-Americans. The Irish landscape is transformed into the wild west as Geronimo challenges Tim who sits on top of a dolmen and wears a cowboy hat. In a manner similar to the Native-Americans, the Carricks fight to the bitter end but are ultimately defeated by the Ballys.[79]

Similarly, the Battle of Kinsale that is referenced by the teacher in the school is then used as a source of inspiration by the Ballys as they fight the Carricks at Bunduff Castle, a site of memory and a site of heritage on the Irish landscape. This power that is associated with a particular site on the landscape corresponds to Brian Graham's claims that 'the embodiment of public memory in landscape provides a robust example of the ways in which representations of place are intimately related to the creation and reinforcement of official constructions of identity and power and to the whole question of empowerment'.[80] Having learned in their history lesson about the siege of Bunduff Castle which followed the defeat of the Spanish Armada by the English in 1601, the Ballys adopt the glamour and pomp associated with the battle

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[77] See also Chapter 4 of this thesis in relation to aspects of the American west in *The Secret of Roan Inish*.

[78] See Peter Aleshire, *The Fox and the Whirlwind: General George Crook and Geronimo: A Paired Biography* (New York: Chichester: Wiley, 2000), and *Geronimo: His Own Story*, ed. by S. M. Barrett (London: Cooper, 1975). For a discussion of references to Geronimo in Irish culture see Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others*, pp. 161–190, particularly, pp. 175, 178 and 190.

[79] This is also a feature of *Into the West* as the two boys wonder whether the Travellers are the Indians of Ireland. It is also interesting to note that they watch *Back to The Future III* (Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1990) in the cinema, a film that is set in the Wild West but is centred on the theme of time travel. Once again, this alludes to the conflation of ideas of past and present, and concepts of fantasy and reality. *Back to the Future III* also features an Irish emigrant family, the McFlys, linking elements of Irish and US culture.

[80] Brian Graham, *In Search of Ireland*, p. 193.

and try to enhance their own 'power' in battle. Similar to the O'Driscolls who, as the teacher (Liam Cunningham) informs the children, were victorious during the siege, the Ballys also seek glory in battle. Through their victory, the Ballys inscribe a new local collective memory onto this site. Therefore, in Graham's terms, the memory associated with the castle is no longer part of a timeless tradition but is 'transformed from generation to generation'.[81] As a result, similar to the use of the dolmen, the children remove the original meaning attached to the castle remains, as an artefact of the past is re-used in the present to create a new myth, that of the victory of the Ballys over the Carricks.

While the film itself may not be directly concerned with theories of popular memory, or the use of past struggles to support contemporary campaigns, the processes of such approaches to history are revealed for the spectator. Lessons are also gleaned from Ireland's twentieth-century history as the teacher discusses principles of democracy by referring to the 1916 Rising in class. Determined that Fergus will understand the democratic voting system that exists in Ireland, the teacher points at a poster of the leaders of the Rising and utters 'You live in a free country. Men died to make it so and by God I'll see that you appreciate the fact'.[82] For the child character, such a statement attempts to highlight the importance of understanding history yet also adheres to a traditionally sexist view of Irish history, a conservativism which dominates the narrative. By emphasising the 'men' that have died for Ireland's freedom the teacher oversimplifies the events of the past and suggests a lack of female participation in Irish history.[83] There is an irony in the subsequent sequences as despite the lack of gender equality in the statement, the teacher's comments are used as a basis to establish equality and democracy within the

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[81] Ibid., pp. 193-194.

[82] There is an irony in this scene as Fergus's abusive home-life is in contrast to the ideals that many of the revolutionaries had in relation to improving children's lives in Ireland after Independence. Diarmaid Ferriter notes that 'the desire to improve the manner in which children were treated was a prominent feature of the rhetoric of the Irish revolution (1918-23) [sic], as the rebels piously promised they would make amends for the harshness of their Victorian oppressors. But many of the actual opinions of this revolutionary generation were incompatible with such aspirations. W.T. Cosgrave, Minister for Local Government during the period of the revolution, certainly held out few expectations for the children pining in the work-houses that Sinn Féin was dedicated to abolishing'. See Ferriter, p. 71.

[83] Inglis notes that 'it is important to tell stories which challenge the myth that great men have made Irish history. Part of this struggle involves producing stories about Irish women'. See Inglis *Truth, Power and Lies*, p. 8.

Ballys' gang.[84] This is evident as Fergus encourages the group to pay a tax that will be used to buy buttons to replace those that are lost in battle. These events once again signal the manner in which ideals which have shaped significant historical moments are adopted for present circumstances and adapted to suit the needs of contemporary concerns. The characters in the film are represented as recognising a value in understanding their cultural history as they draw upon such knowledge in achieving goals in the present. In this sense, the events of the narrative function as a metaphor for the wider process at work in the audience's interpretation of the film's content. The nostalgic construction of community values and comraderie in the past may signal a loss or absence of such concepts in a contemporary global culture of individualism. Therefore, this process can be read as Roberts' attempt to encourage the viewer to learn from Marie's memories as depicted in the film, to recognise the absence of such values in their own contemporary culture and reclaim them, similar to the manner in which the children use history in the narrative. The narrative of memory in the film is 'a means of overcoming the limitations of the human condition as it is understood in contemporary culture, by making the past appear once again in the present, despite its temporal, and possibly spatial, distance'.[85]

Violence

However, the use of battles of the past to inform actions in the present becomes problematic when viewed within the context of traditional representations of Ireland in British cinema. Fidelma Farley argues that many British films depict the Irish as having 'a natural proclivity toward violence' where the inhabitants are 'as passionate and unpredictable as their natural environment'.[86] In *War of the Buttons*, the portrayal of conflicts of the past and battles of the present may suggest an inability on the part of the Irish to escape their aggressive history. It is also possible to read events as alluding to the continued conflict in Northern Ireland, as two rival communities who have a long history of wars and feuds. Drawing upon Farley's argument, perhaps Roberts uses the theme of violence as a cultural signifier of Ireland for a global audience.

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[84] There is also a fundamental irony in the teacher's statement as the children do not appear to have 'freedom', particularly when viewed in terms of child/adult relations. Forcing the children to 'appreciate' freedom is also contradictory.

[85] See Middleton and Woods, p. 21.

[86] Farley, p. 130. See also Lloyd for a discussion of associations of Irishness with violence (p. 55).

The cyclical nature of this violence also suggests a continuation of the infantilising of the Irish in British cinema. As the parents gather to search for the boys, they begin to argue, mirroring the behaviour of the children. This reveals the aggression and animosity which is continued from generation to generation and, arguably, implies an inherent violence in Irish society, a representation that ruptures the construction of nostalgia in the text. By aligning the actions of adults with the behaviour of the children, the Irish adults can be read as 'childish'. Such a reading of the text can be aligned with Declan Kiberd's discussion of the tendency of the British media in the nineteenth century to depict the Irish as child-like, as '"broths of boys" veering between tears and smiles, quick to anger and quick to forget – unlike the stable Anglo-Saxon'.[87] In line with Farley's argument, this infantilising of the native culture epitomises the colonial relationship of Britain and Ireland which shaped the Irish as 'a people who were less advanced and less civilised and therefore in need of the benefits of colonisation'.[88] Therefore, it is possible to read the Irish characters in the film as aggressive and atavistic in nature, an approach which reinforces many cultural stereotypes.[89] As a result, the film predominantly relies upon the construction of stereotypes and sites of memory in the creation of a recognisable cultural specificity for a global audience. What results is an amalgamation of sites of memory where diverse and anachronistic elements of Irish culture are pasted together within a single text in an attempt to form a coherent nostalgic narrative of the past, or as Jean Baudrillard asserts in relation to his discussion of simulacra, 'it is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself'.[90]

Section 3. Childhood and Nostalgia

Despite aligning the activities of the adults with those of the children, the film predominantly establishes the child characters as occupying a very specific childhood world that is void of adult interference and is associated with nature.[91] From the early

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[87] Kiberd, p. 104.

[88] Farley, p. 129. Farley notes that such a construction of Irishness is still present in British films that deal with Anglo-Irish relations, as is evident her examination of *Ryan's Daughter* (David Lean, UK, 1970). John Hill explores a similar argument in his analysis of *Fools of Fortune* (Pat O'Connor, UK, 1990). See John Hill, 'The Past is Always There in the Present', pp. 29-39.

[89] For links between issues of colonisation and children's fiction see Zornado, p. xv and Rose, p. 50.

[90] See Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*, ed. and introduced by Mark Poster (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 170.

[91] See Hollindale's *Signs of Childness*, pp. 62-75. See also Zornado, Rose and Natov.

stages of production, those involved in the creation of the film placed a great emphasis on the concept of childhood innocence permeating the text. The production notes of the film begin with a quotation from William Butler Yeats' poem 'The Stolen Child':

Come away O human child!
To the Waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand
For the world's more full of weeping
Than you can understand.[92]

Similar to the use of the poem in Joan O'Neill's novel, these lines are imbued with a sense of nostalgia and 'longing', lamenting the necessity of leaving the world of childhood and becoming an adult. The presence of the poem in the production notes suggests that this sentimental and innocent portrayal of childhood is the underlying concept which informs the portrayal of child characters in the film.[93] It also reveals a very definite attempt to distinguish between childhood and adulthood by establishing childhood as the loss of a past experience which cannot be regained. Such an approach distances adults from children and establishes childhood as a distinctly separate state, a theme which recurs throughout the film.[94]

This separation is revealed from the outset, as adults are represented as having a greater understanding and knowledge of language than children.[95] During the initial confrontation on the bridge, the Carricks jeer Little Con and refer to him as a 'Tosspot', a term which greatly confuses the Ballys. In an effort to discover the meaning of the word, Little Con resorts to asking the teacher about swear words

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[92] Italics in original.

[93] In *Film Ireland,* (August/September 1994), Shane Barry surmises that 'today's 10-14 year olds will find Roberts' version of West Cork more alien than *Total Recall*'s Mars', p. 28.

[94] Lesnik-Oberstein similarly notes the complex construction of childhood from an adult perspective when she claims that 'by defining and discussing the nature of children adults are expressing, formulating, and projecting ideals and ideas about themselves and the not-themselves'. See *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child*, pp. 25-26. Similarly, Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham argue that 'in one way or another [...] definitions of childhood and adulthood will always express the power-differential between children and adults. The texts produced by adults for children – both 'literary' and other media texts – are inevitably bound up in these power-relationships'. See 'Introduction; The Invisible Audience', in *In Front of the Children; Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*, pp. 1-14 (p. 5).

[95] For a discussion of language in children's literature see Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. Not only does this passage in the film reveal the power relations between children and adults but also constructs audience attitudes in terms of what is deemed suitable or 'desirable' for children to know (p. 3).

believing that adults will have the answer as his 'Daddy knows hundreds [of swear words]'. This event places adults in a position of power as it is assumes that they have the knowledge to solve the puzzle, as the text reproduces a hierarchical relationship between adult and child. It also corresponds to the idea of the innocent child who has no knowledge of swear words.[96]

While *War of the Buttons* uses the knowledge of language as a means of separating children and adults, Roberts continues this distinction by using ideas of space and territory to emphasise the division between child and adult realms. The director positions the school and the countryside as the two main settings that the children occupy in the film. While locating many of the events in the classroom allows for the depiction of a child-dominated space, the children must still answer to the adult teacher. Within this space of school, the children attempt to create a space for themselves that the teacher cannot enter. The toilets in the yard become a message centre for the boys as instructions regarding the battles and details of mobilisation of the troops are pinned to the back of the door. In an effort to prevent the teacher from entering their space, Boffin insists that 'those are *our* toilets'. By preventing the adults from acquiring certain knowledge of the activities of the children, the children are attempting to assert a degree of power over the adult characters. The adults cannot control actions about which they know nothing, giving the child a freedom to do whatever he or she pleases. In Yves Roberts' 1962 film the teacher (Pierre Trabaud) notices the poster on the back of the door, a moment which changes the adult/child dynamics as the adults now have knowledge of what the children are doing. The children are oblivious to the fact that the adults know their plans and the power and freedom that the children think they have is undermined by this event. Therefore they appear to have no space that is outside of adult control. However, in *War of the Buttons*, the teacher does not see the poster, and the meaning of the scene changes as the division between child behaviour and adult activities increases. As a result, the children are presented as having a greater autonomy and are able to pursue their

[96] However, it soon transpires that the Ballys are not interested in the meaning of the word, they only wish to know the level of insult inherent in the word 'tosspot'. Not satisfied with the evasive answers from the schoolteacher, Fergus offers Gerard (Andrew Goyvaerts) a lollipop in exchange for addressing the priest as 'tosspot'. The adult priest's subsequent furious reaction allows the children to gauge the level of the insult and devise an attack against the Carricks. Throughout this sequence, the power of language is revealed once the Ballys' acquire knowledge of the term. As a result they formulate an insult that is equally offensive and write 'All Carricks are Assholes' on the notice board on church grounds. For a similar discussion of the power of language in children's film, see Chapter 4 in relation to *The Secret of Roan Inish*.

battles away from the watchful eyes of the adults. Such an approach places the child in a position of superiority and encourages the child viewer to identify with the child characters. Consequently, in these passages the film undermines the traditional ideological construction of 'the adult power over the child'.[97]

This sense of freedom is heightened when the children are in the countryside, surrounded by nature. They appear unrestricted and it is not until the final sequence when the search parties locate Fergus and Geronimo that the adult characters leave the town and are depicted in a rural setting. As a result, the film associates childhood with nature and the natural environment, reinforcing the theme of childhood as innocent and uncorrupted by the concerns of modernity. This is also a common feature in many children's films throughout the twentieth century, as children are represented as having an affinity with animals and the natural environment.[98] Such an association of childhood with an Irish pastoral realm reinforces the construction of a nostalgic representation of Ireland as a rural utopia.

The alignment of childhood with nature and nostalgia is evident in several scenes such as collecting mussels, picking mushrooms, Fergus cooking fish on the open fire, as well as battling the enemy in the woods and in the fields. This is also revealed in the section where Little Con and Tich (Stuart Dannell-Foran) assume the role of animal and bark down the foxhole like dogs.[99] However, the closeness of the children to nature is primarily represented through the truce that arises when a rabbit is accidentally hit by a stone, intended for one of the human enemies, an event which also occurs in the original film. As a result, the two gangs call a temporary truce and combine their efforts to make a small splint for the rabbit's injured leg, reinforcing the concept of the innocent and caring child's link with nature. This was a staple trope throughout the history of children's cinema. Films such as *National Velvet* (1944) and *The Yearling* (1946) associated a nostalgic childhood innocence with animals, a theme that Disney in particular began to exploit in the 1950s with *Old Yeller* (1958) and *The*

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[97] Zornado, p. xviii.

[98] See Merlock Jackson. Similarly, Tucker notes that 'for whatever reasons, the image of the child always learning best from or in nature remains an important literary ideal right up to our own times' ('Good Friends or just Acquaintances?', p. 159). See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the relationship between nature and childhood in *The Secret of Roan Inish*. See below for an examination of the children's relationship with animals.

[99] The killing of the fox is problematic in terms of the construction of an innocent child and is discussed in detail below.

Shaggy Dog (1959). This tradition is continued into the 1990s with films such as *Into The West* (1992) *The Secret Of Roan Inish* (1994) and *Fly Away Home* (1996).[100]

Within this environment the Ballys construct a boathouse which becomes the gang's headquarters. The creation of the 'HQ' can be aligned with other themes relating to the controlling of certain spaces and territories that dominate the film, as is noted above. The HQ not only establishes a safe-space for the Ballys separate from the Carricks, but also actively constructs a place that is distanced from adults and parents. As the boys plan the layout of their new HQ, they suggest items that they can bring from home to make it feel like a real HQ. Little Con proposes bringing a wedding photograph of his parents, but is rebuked by his older brother who asserts that 'This is our place – no adults', once again distinguishing between the world of adults and the world of children.[101]

However, there is an irony throughout as, despite wishing for an adult-free space, the children attempt to distance themselves from childish behaviour. On the initial mission to Carrickdowse, Fergus reprimands Big Con (Gerard Kearney) for allowing his younger brother to accompany them by claiming that 'this is a guerrilla operation – no place for kids'. Similarly, when Riley (Thomas Kavanagh) pretends that he is injured and seeks treatment from Marie she accuses him of being 'nothing but a big kid'. 'Kid' is used in a derogatory sense in both instances. As a result, the children accept their child-status but simultaneously distinguish it from childish behaviour; one does not necessarily imply the other. Therefore, the children are represented as also subscribing to dominant ideologies of childhood, reproducing the 'unconscious relational practices bent on exercising and justifying adult power over the child'.[102] This idea is reinforced as the Carrick and the Bally adults confront each other in what can be interpreted as a 'childish' manner as the exchange mirrors that of children, with one father claiming that 'I could lick you when I was a kid and I could lick you now!'.

It can also be argued that the children wish to distance themselves from the adults because of the manner in which they are treated. This is particularly evident in the portrayal of Fergus, who is a hero among his friends but is violently beaten by his

[100] See Warner, *Managing Monsters* (p. 55), for a discussion of children and nature.
[101] A proposal is also made to include a clock that has stopped, once again introducing themes of time and temporality. The fact that the clock has stopped may also suggest the unconscious desire to pause time and live in a continual state of childhood.
[102] Zornado, p. xviii.

father, a moment which ruptures the film's sense of nostalgia.[103] The children take it as a matter of course that their version of events will not be believed at the end of the film. As they delay returning to the town for fear of what the adults may do to them, Marie reminds the group that 'we didn't do anything' to which Fergus responds with 'Do you think they'll believe that?'. It is apparent that the children do not trust the adults and that the adults do not treat the children as equals. Such a depiction of child/adult relations in the film mirrors the processes at work in the audience's interpretation of the film. For the child characters, child-dominated spaces function as safe realms that are free from adult interference, while, for the viewer, childhood and Ireland are constructed as nostalgic sites of memory, spaces that are free from the concerns of modern culture. As Barton notes in relation to the heritage film, there is a 'notion of innocence with which the Irish are associated', thus reinforcing the idea that a nostalgia for childhood innocence in the film reinforces a nostalgia for an innocent Ireland.[104]

Section 4. Childhood, Gender and the Disruption of Nostalgia

While a distinction between childhood and adulthood is clearly identifiable in the text, there is also a marked difference in the representation of the childhood experiences of boys and those of girls. It is possible to read the film as operating within what Kerry Mallan refers to as 'the crisis in masculinity rhetoric' that pervades both academic and popular discourses. Drawing upon the work of Robert and Pam Gilbert, Mallan argues that 'such a crisis rhetoric laments a kind of "paradise lost," a mythical place and time when the rites of passage to manhood were clear and the masculine idea was an unproblematic goal'.[105] In comparison to the 1962 film, *War of the Buttons* gives the character of Marie a more central role in the narrative as she features regularly throughout the film. Arguably, because of the peripheral position of the character in the original 1962 film, gender differences are not foregrounded to the same degree as in the 1994 text, and the limited onscreen time offers little opportunity for comparative analysis of boys and girls.

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[103] In identifying common themes in Irish cinema in the 1990s, McLoone notes that 'it seems as if, in Ireland, the most dangerous place for the child to be is within a family.' See McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 169.

[104] Barton, 'From History to Heritage', p. 255.

[105] Mallan, p. 15. Mallan cites Robert Gilbert and Pam Gilbert, *Masculinity goes to School* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998), p. 7. This also conforms to John Hill's view that heritage films construct eras of apparent stability.

However, gender differences are to the fore in *War of the Buttons*.[106] The framing of the narrative by using a female narrator not only offers a means of encouraging the female viewer to engage with a text that is dominated by boyhood adventure but also draws upon established stereotypes of associating female spectatorship with the heritage film.[107] The narrator refers to boyhood as a distinct and separate state from her own girlhood, establishing a conservative view of maleness which dominates the narrative; 'It sounds silly, but they were always fighting. Typical of boys'.[108] Perry Nodelman notes that such expressions are problematic in that they suggest that 'aggressive or anti-social behavior is an inherent and unchangeable aspect of maleness' and they fail to acknowledge that 'masculinity is a social construct that connects with but does not necessarily coincide with maleness'.[109] The nostalgic tone of the text and the narration may also be a means of lamenting the loss of a period with seemingly stable forms of maleness. In this sense, the 'imagined' nature of childhood and Ireland that are established also extend to 'imagined' constructs of masculinity.

The stereotypical representation can be identified in a number of scenes, particularly through the portrayal of Fergus as hunter-gatherer as he escapes from the adults. Fergus is depicted as a wild character that is in need of control and civilization and is consequently placed in the reformatory. However, there is also a contradiction in such a portrayal of boyhood as Fergus's behaviour is simultaneously condemned by the adult characters, but glorified for the spectator as a natural part of being male. Nodelman argues that such a contradiction reveals that 'for boys, being anti-social might well be socially acceptable'.[110] It can also be argued that the killing of the fox represents a natural progression from boyhood to manhood and functions as a rite of passage in the film. In early American films for children, the killing of an animal often represented the child's growth and development toward adulthood and away

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[106] For a discussion of gender in Irish cinema, see Barton, 'Feisty Colleens and Faithful Sons: Gender in Irish Cinema', *Cineaste*, Contemporary Irish Cinema Supplement, 24. 2-3 (1999), 40-45.

[107] Higson notes that 'the heritage film could equally be classed as a modern variant of the woman's picture' (*English Heritage, English Cinema*, p. 167).

[108] Zornado claims that 'relationships of violence and power reproduce individuals who participate spontaneously in violent relationships.' Such a theory would suggest that Fergus' fighting is not something 'typical' or innate, but arises from the relationships to which he is exposed. This is evident in the beatings he receives from his father.

[109] Nodelman, p. 2.

[110] Ibid., p. 5.

from the childhood state.[111] This is evident in films such as *Old Yeller* and *The Yearling* where death of the animal is paralleled with increased self-awareness in the child. This also corresponds to Powrie's boy-centred alternative heritage films, where 'those with boy protagonists tend to be associated with violence'.[112]

Throughout these sequences, it is evident that the conservative views of the nation outlined above are mirrored by the conservative constructions of childhood and gender in the text. In contrast to the boys' aggressive killing of the fox, Marie's reaction adheres to traditional feminine stereotypes. After the fox is killed and the boys reveal their disappointment that it is a male and not a female, as they would get more money for a female, the scene cuts to a shot of Marie standing and watching with tears streaming down her face. Upset by what has happened, she tells the boys that 'it was beautiful and you killed it' and thus conforms to stereotypes of girls as caring and sensitive. As a result, the feminine perspective of the situation questions the boys' machismo and undermines their achievement of killing the fox. This differs from the original 1962 film as Marie does not condemn the killing and the boys celebrate. In *War of the Buttons* Roberts questions the boys' actions by placing Marie as a witness to events. However, by utilising the female character in such a way, Roberts succumbs to conservative representations of the female as Marie is confined to traditional roles such as shopping, tending to domestic duties within the HQ, and carrying out first aid on Riley. Marie is also presented as a 'damsel in distress', standing helplessly in front of the HQ as Geronimo drives the tractor towards her.[113] She is then rescued by Fergus, the hero, who pushes her out of the tractor's path. However, the traditional role of the female is momentarily broken as Marie attacks Riley and tries to choke him. Having witnessed her portrayal as a caring sensitive female throughout, the comedy of this episode arises from a contradiction in her behaviour as it deviates from audience expectations.

The masculine performance of Fergus is also momentarily broken as, following a defeat in battle, he cries by the side of the road.[114] While picking flowers,

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[111] See Merlock Jackson, pp. 119-121.

[112] Powrie, p. 319.

[113] Similarly, Wojcik-Andrews believes that 'children's films are works of art that entertain but also sites of ideology that indoctrinate young viewers into traditional class and gender roles', (p. 123).

[114] See Judith Butler's discussion of gender as a performance in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993). For a discussion of performativity and identity in children's fiction, see Rosemary Johnston, 'All the World's a Stage: Children's Literature as Performance', in *Children's*

Marie overhears his sobs and offers comfort. In this sequence, it is evident that Fergus is embarrassed to reveal his sensitive side and thus the film suggests that crying is not a desirable component of male identity. Following this defeat, the Ballys' tactics in battle become more elaborate and their displays of masculine power more obvious. John Roberts' use of battle sequences to depict maleness in terms of control and dominance thus conforms to Kerry Mallan's argument that 'war has provided an ideal mise-en-scene for the staging of masculinity'.[115] Fergus and his friends use Irish history as an inspiration in 'staging their masculinity' particularly during the battle at Bunduff Castle. Having learned in history class about the O'Driscolls' defeat of the English, Fergus enters the battlefield on horseback while his fellow troops are clad in makeshift armour and carry colourful banners in an effort to intimidate their enemies. This corresponds to Mallan's discussion of war in picturebooks, where 'the warring male body signifies the masculine ideal of control, dominance, and mastery, and battle becomes the ultimate test of manhood, summarily sorting out the weak and the cowardly from the strong and the heroic'.[116] Therefore, Fergus's earlier defeat is associated with femininity as noted above while his victory is linked to aggressive displays of masculinity.[117]

Masculinity is also aligned with the body of the male child as is demonstrated by the capture of Gorilla. Brandishing a knife in front of Gorilla, Fergus turns to Little Con and asks what should be cut off. Little Con responds with 'his willy, cut off his willy!', reinforcing the idea that Gorilla's loss in battle mirrors a loss in his masculinity and the removal of masculine power associated with the phallus. However, instead of cutting off his penis, Fergus removes Gorilla's buttons, which consequently function as a metaphor for masculine power and authority for the remainder of the film. The association of the male body with power continues as the Bally boys run into battle naked, their exposed male bodies frightening off their enemies. It is also possible to interpret such a sequence in terms of Nodelman's argument that 'masculinity is taken to be somehow natural and free – the state that

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Literature and Childhood in Performance, ed. by Kimberley Reynolds (Staffordshire: Pied Piper, 2003).

[115] Mallan, p. 18.

[116] Ibid., p. 18.

[117] In retaliation for the defeat at Bunduff Castle, Geronimo stages a greater demonstration of masculinity by using the tractor to destroy the Ballys' HQ as he shouts 'beats your feckin' horse Fergus!'.

one achieves by resisting societal norms and being one's true self',[118] as the removal of clothing may act as a metaphor for the discarding of the constraints of civilization imposed upon the young males. Such a representation succumbs to stereotypical views of maleness and suggests that this wild and aggressive masculinity can be identified as an innate and natural component of boyhood.

This representation of the naked male children on screen is also problematic because of the sexual tension between male and female characters as well as the cultural context in which the film is viewed. The nudity in the film can initially be interpreted as corresponding to the nostalgic association of childhood with innocence. Anne Higonnet notes that 'childhood innocence was considered an attribute of the child's body, both because the child's body was supposed to be naturally innocent of adult sexuality, and because the child's mind was supposed to begin blank'.[119] However, Fergus's body becomes sexualised as a result of his interaction with the three girls on the bridge. Having chased the Carricks toward the river, the naked Bally boys retreat on seeing the three girls. Fergus pauses momentarily and smiles at them while one of the girls, Helen (Helen O'Leary), puts on her glasses and glances approvingly at his naked body. On one level, such a scene creates a comic moment for the viewer, but also introduces a sexual tension between the male and female characters, thus transforming Fergus' adolescent body from a site of innocence to a site of sexual desire.[120]

The controversy that surrounded the release of the film also led to a sexualisation of the children's bodies within a contemporary cultural context. The release date was delayed as the result of a court injunction brought by the parents of one of the child extras as they objected to their son appearing naked in a section of the film.[121] Three seconds were finally cut in order to appease the parents. This incident conforms to Higonnet's argument that 'more and more sexual meanings are being ascribed to photographs of children both past and present, whether because of what is

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[118] Nodelman, p. 2. See Nodelman's discussion of masculinity in the representation of a naked Peter Rabbit, pp. 4-7.

[119] Higonnet, p. 8.

[120] Nodelman discusses the differences between depicting a boy as naked and depicting a girl as naked and argues that 'a naked girl is a sex-object' (p. 6). As discussed below, a naked boy can also become a sex-object.

[121] For a further discussion of this case, see *Evening Herald*, 4 August 1994 (p. 17); Ciaran Carty in *Sunday Tribune*, 7 August 1994 (IFI Archives, File: *War of the Buttons*, no page number given); and *The Irish Times*, 26 February 1997, <http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/1997/0226/archive.97022600036.html.> [accessed 6 June 2006]. The children were not actually naked as they wore body stockings.

in the photograph or what is in the eye of the beholder',[122] as the meaning of the nudity is distorted because of the cultural context in which the film is viewed.[123] The numerous revelations of child sexual abuse, particularly involving members of the clergy, which emerged in Ireland in the early and mid 1990s heightened awareness of issues such as paedophilia and child pornography.[124] Therefore, the themes of childhood innocence that the film promotes are continually ruptured by an informed audience's reading of the child's body within a particular cultural context.

Contemporary cultural concerns in Ireland in relation to child abuse also influence the interpretation of the final scene of the film which depicts Geronimo and Fergus in a reformatory, an institution not normally associated with providing generosity and kindness for the children staying there. The film ends with the boys having a playful pillow fight, a scene which is in complete contrast to the images of abuse within Irish institutions that dominated Irish cultural texts from the early 1990s, such as in *The Butcher Boy* (1997), and *Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003). The most notable, however, was Cathal Black's *Our Boys,* made in 1981, but not screened on RTE until 1991, which documented the horrific institutional abuse in a Christian Brothers' school in Ireland. Therefore, while *War of the Buttons* attempts to establish childhood as a site of memory that connotes innocence and freedom from the concerns of the adult world, such a sentimental representation is continually shattered by elements of the content, such as Fergus's beating, but also by the cultural context in which the film is viewed. However, the voice-over returns at the end of the text with the traditional heteronormative closure of many children's films, as adult Marie tells us that she married one of the boys, thus attempting to conclude a seemingly homogenised linear narrative.[125]

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[122] Higonnet, p. 10.

[123] Viewing the child's body as a sexual object is a long established tradition in film criticism. One of the most notable accounts is Graham Greene's review of Shirley Temple in *Wee Willie Winkie* (John Ford, 1937) which led to 20th Century Fox and Shirley Temple taking a libel action against Greene and the editors of *Night and Day*, the offending magazine in which the review appeared. See Ian Wojcik-Andrews, pp. 32-33.

[124] See Ferriter. For a discussion of many of these aspects, see Finola Kennedy, p. 251 and Rockett, *Irish Film Censorship*, pp. 293-315.

[125] In relation to Disney films, Zipes notes that 'heterosexual happiness and marriage are always the ultimate goals of the story'. See *Happily Ever After*, p. 93. In this sense, *War of the Buttons* adheres to the stereotypical ending of the family film genre.

Conclusion

John Hill notes that the production of heritage is very often in response to circumstances in the present, a retreat into an idealised past in an attempt to avoid contemporary anxieties. In this sense, heritage culture provides 'satisfactions which the present does not provide or compensations for what it lacks'.[126] Such are the features of a contemporary postmodern society where the increase in globalisation and global culture has led to a fracturing of self and of cultural identity. Similarly, in *War of the Buttons* there is a fetishisation of elements of the past creating a spectacle of heritage and offering an opportunity for the viewer to gaze voyeuristically at a past, although fictitious in many regards, thereby providing a sense of a coherent national identity within an ever-changing global culture and economy.[127]

In its creation of a nostalgic past, *War of the Buttons* can thus be defined as a heritage film functioning as an ideological construction of the nation, with the narrative of the past reinvented for the screen, a project that finds its roots within heritage culture as a whole and, more precisely, within the British heritage film tradition. Andrew Higson argues that the British heritage film is a specific genre of filmmaking which 'reinvents and reproduces, and in some cases simply invents a national heritage for the screen'.[128] As Higson notes, cultural commentators saw 'a potent marketing of the past as part of the new enterprise culture, a commodification of the museum culture' which leads to 'a highly commercialised consumption of the past'.[129] Ruth Barton acknowledges that a similar commodification of the past occurred in Ireland in the 1990s and links the heritage, tourist and film industries.[130] By utilising particular sites of memory that are deemed marketable, John Roberts similarly manufactures a fictitious Irish heritage as a cultural commodity through his manipulation of an imagined Irish nation and Irish childhood in the construction of an ideological space of community and childhood for a global viewer/tourist.[131]

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[126] John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, p. 74.

[127] See Barton, 'From History to Heritage', pp. 245-248.

[128] Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1995) p. 26.

[129] Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, p. 1.

[130] Barton, 'From History to Heritage', p. 241. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the touristic gaze in *The Secret of Roan Inish*.

[131] See Barton, 'From History to Heritage', p. 282. Barton discusses the intersection of a 'tourist theory' with cinema as a vision of Ireland is created to satisfy the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer/tourist. Barton similarly acknowledges that 'Irish cinema has always satisfied a tourist impulse, particularly in

Therefore, childhood and Ireland can also be understood as 'sites of memory' that are manipulated to evoke ideas of nostalgia.

In relation to children's films, such received images of the nation are found in UK productions such as *Shamus* (1959), *Flight of the Doves* (1971) and *The Johnstown Monster* (1971) which contain elements that conform to such stereotypical and 'touristic' representations of Ireland in British cinema. During *Shamus*, a furious leprechaun (Tiny Littler) puts a spell on the orphaned boy, Shamus (John Francis Rooney), and attaches a monkey's tail to the boy's rear. Throughout the film Shamus is consequently portrayed as primitive and uncilivised.[132] The film adaptation of Walter Macken's *Flight of the Doves* ends with shots of the archetypal thatched cottage as Derval and Finn (Helen Raye and Jack Wild) reach the west of Ireland, again echoing stereotypical images of Ireland.[133] Also, the opening sequence of *The Johnstown Monster* begins with the voice-over of an English boy, Jock (Simon Tully), as he establishes the setting of the film in Ireland:

> If you're mad on photography as I am, or wild about chasing butterflies as my Dad is, you could do worse than spend your summer holiday in Ireland. The place is teeming with seascapes and landscapes, rum customers who roam the countryside, ghostly ruins like Johnstown house. And if you are very lucky you might even get the chance to snap a monster.

Ireland is again represented as a rural paradise, 'teeming with seascapes and landscapes'. This construction of the narrative is accompanied on screen by images of the children running through barren landscapes and the ruins of an old church and

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the Irish-American context. Ireland has also signified, in terms of British cinema, a quaint otherness, which, when it is not threatening, is both absurd and enviable. However, such images are created by non-indigenous industries'. Examples include films such as *Circle of Friends* (Pat O'Connor, Ireland/UK/USA, 1995) and *Waking Ned*, the latter shot on location in the Isle of Man, as a place outside of Ireland was used to create a fictitious Irish landscape. Ireland is transformed into a rural paradise where accepted and already commodified images of Ireland create a local site of community within a global culture and economy. Corresponding to such a view, Debbie Ging also claims that a marketable vision of Irishness was created in the 1990s. See Debbie Ging, 'Screening the Green: Cinema under the Celtic Tiger', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 177-95 (p. 177). A similar approach is evident in *Daisy Chain War* and the marketing of a memoir-style narrative of Irish childhood to satisfy particular expectations.

[132] This 'uncivilised' nature is reflected in the children in *War of the Buttons*. By the end of *Shamus*, the English family that he has befriended agree to adopt him and the daughter of the family asks 'can we keep him mummy?', suggesting that Shamus is a type of stray, uncivilised animal. It can also be argued that Woody Allen uses a similar structure to that of *Shamus*, of an uncivilised Irish boy being adopted by an upper class English family, in *Match Point* (Woody Allen, UK/USA/Luxembourg, 2005).

[133] However, although *Flight of the Doves* contains many stereotypical images, it is also one of the earliest films to represent a multicultural Ireland, particularly through its portrayal of the Irish Jewish community.

graveyard, as well as shots of a 'beggarman' wandering through the woods while singing. This creates a primitive society, yet one steeped in an ancient culture. Jock's narration continues to accompany images of local children on screen as he notes 'the natives are hostile', establishing themes of colonialism and assigning a position of inferiority to the Irish inhabitants.

As explored above, Roberts draws from such representations and *War of the Buttons* echoes many elements of these films. Consequently, the text establishes a notion of an Irish past that is an amalgamation of diverse and contradictory elements from the heritage industry.[134] As a result, a postmodern representation emerges for the child audience in which they are presented with, what Frederic Jameson's terms, 'an identical copy of which no original has ever existed'.[135] The film is not a representation of Ireland but of 'Irishness' and the established cultural associations inherent in received images of Ireland, with no attempt to reflect the complexity of Irish culture. As a result of such processes, Kevin Walsh notes that 'before long, a generation will exist whose heritage lies with the heritage industry'.[136]

However, it is important to note that in terms of the reception of the film and the construction of meaning from the text, it is also problematic to establish simplistic dichotomies of Irish viewer and global spectator, or of child audience and adult audience. While different spectators may comprehend the film in varying ways depending on their cultural ideologies and dominant expectations, it is more useful to discuss the process of understanding in terms of the 'informed' viewer, that is the viewer who has knowledge or experience of the reality of Ireland's past. Therefore, while the film attempts to construct both childhood and Ireland as romantic realms of pastoral innocence, elements of the narrative can also be read as a disruption of such sentiment. For the informed viewer, child or adult, the presence of a song of emigration and a reformatory interrupts the predominantly nostalgic tone of the text, as these factors allude to the harsher realities of Irish history and culture. However, for the uninformed viewer, the text simply reproduces and consequently reinforces

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[134] This corresponds to Fredric Jameson's discussion of the nostalgic mode in film where 'we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach'. See 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodernism and its Discontents*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (1988) (London: Verso, 1993), p. 20.

[135] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 18.

[136] Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World,* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 99. This can be read in terms of Jean Baudrillard's discussion of simulacra and concepts of the 'hyper-real' where signs of the real are substituted for the real itself. See 'Simulacra and Simulations' (1981), in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, pp. 169-187.

dominant ideological constructions of the nation and of childhood, and rather than dismantling hegemonic metanarratives, the film firmly maintains the status quo.

Chapter 6

Escape from Fantasy Ireland: Martin Duffy's *The Boy From Mercury*

This final chapter explores the representation of 1960s Ireland through the lens of childhood, and analyses Martin Duffy's depiction of the past in terms of postmodern histories in *The Boy From Mercury*.[1] The remembered past of elements of Duffy's childhood, as revealed onscreen, acts as a vehicle for the examination of broader cultural changes and influences in Ireland in the 1960s. The cultural events of the period are not merely presented as 'objective' facts but are framed by a child perspective, that of the point of view of the child protagonist Harry Cronin (James Hickey). By prioritising this child perspective of Irish culture, Duffy allows for the simultaneous representation of and subversive commentary on Irish society. This occurs primarily through the use of elements of the fantasy genre in the film as the boundaries between issues of time and space, and fact and fiction become blurred. The representation of various forms of fantasy encourages multiple interpretations of the past which may otherwise be excluded from a traditional realist format that emphasises verisimilitude.[2]

The viewer is presented with the character of a young boy, eight year old Harry Cronin, growing up in Dublin in the 1960s and greatly influenced by the film serial *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (1940). As the narrative develops it is revealed that Harry believes he is from the planet Mercury and has been sent on a mission to Earth where he must endure a range of childhood experiences and problems, such as being bullied at school and coping with family life. As a result, throughout the film the spectator is continually introduced to themes of past and present, fantasy and reality, and childhood and adulthood. The exploration of these themes centres on the analysis of Harry's relationship with his widowed mother, May (Rita Tushingham), and his teenage brother, Paul (Hugh O'Conor). May, Paul and Harry's eccentric Uncle Tony (Tom Courtenay), worry that Harry has immersed himself in a world of fantasy, assuming that his behaviour emanates from the recent death of his father. As a result, themes of father and son relations are alluded to throughout the film.[3]

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[1] Other films directed by Martin Duffy include *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* (USA, 1999) and *The Testimony of Taliesen Jones* (USA/UK, 2000). His children's novels are *Mothership* (Dublin: Aran Publishing, 1992) and *Once upon a Universe* (Dublin: Kildanore Press, 1990). *Mothership* is reviewed by Robert Dunbar in *Children's Books in Ireland*, 8 (May 1993), p. 24.

[2] This idea is discussed in depth in relation to the conflation of space and time in the narrative along with concepts of postmodernism and the fragmentation of history.

[3] This is evident in the Flash Gordon films and also in Sean's (Sean O'Flanagain) relationship with his father.

As outlined in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the methodological foundation of this chapter lies in the use of concepts of childhood to explore the construction of Irish history in *The Boy From Mercury*, where the representation of childhood in the text can offer a means of understanding the complex nature of the Irish past. Such a method of analysis is based on the writings of Michel Foucault and his concept of 'History of the Present' and the adoption of a genealogical approach to the construction of history; his problematisation of modes of representation, particularly from a contemporary standpoint; and the examination of the role and function of memory in the creation of fragmented representations of the past. In this sense, Foucault argues that history is not simply the eruption of an event followed by an ideal continuity, but is a series of conflicting discourses of power, a play of dominations. As is demonstrated below, the representation of the past in Duffy's film operates in a similar way, as the linear development of history is ruptured in the exploration of contemporary Irish culture and politics. These ideas are combined with the work of Hollindale and his theories of childness in children's texts and the construction of the text as a site of negotiation of child-adult relations. Such an approach allows for an in-depth examination of the intertwining of childhood and history in *The Boy From Mercury*. Several forms of childness present in the film are analysed here, particularly in terms of the adult author's childhood memories, the experiences of the child character, the child as metaphor for the nation, the association of fantasy with childhood, and the use of a child perspective as a subversive technique.

The imagined childhood that Duffy creates is inevitably from an adult perspective and conforms to standard norms of representations of childhood in society, but also within the genre of 'children's' or 'family' films. This corresponds to Hollindale's view of a child's text as the representation of childhood in Duffy's film initially 'embodies implicit judgements on what is desirable in child behaviour, how children and adults manage their relationships and how they ought to do so'.[4] This provides a basis for the examination of the figure of Harry and an analysis of his childhood identity as he interacts with friends and family.

Duffy attaches a childhood identity to Harry's character and brings to the fore a series of representations that are traditionally associated with childhood and with

[4] Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, p. 18.

dominant images of children in culture, an approach which is examined in detail in Section 1. Specifically, this section documents Duffy's attempt to construct a 'universal' concept of childhood which allows for a nostalgic reading of the text and facilitates a means of accessing the past for both child and adult viewers. Drawing upon the theories of Althusser, childhood in the film can be understood as an ideological construction.

This particular ideological construction of childhood, where the child is represented as a universal point of identification for the viewer and the concept of childhood is given priority over the individual and complex experiences of children, corresponds to Rose's argument that childhood is often used as 'a term of universal social reference'.[5] The generic construction of childhood also allows for a reading of the film in allegorical terms as Harry, as a child, can be read as a metaphor for the Irish nation, his childhood experiences reflecting broader changes in Irish culture in the 1960s. Section 2 explores this idea and aligns Harry's circumstances and influences with the increased modernisation and internationalisation of Irish society.

However, while understanding childhood as a universal concept may facilitate both a nostalgic and a metaphoric rendering of the text, such readings may be limited and fail to recognise the complexity of the construction of childhood in the film. Although Duffy initially represents a traditional form of childhood that conforms to dominant expectations and ideological norms, where the child is established as a 'subject' within adult ideological discourse, he simultaneously exposes the constructed nature of adult-child relations.[6] This is primarily achieved through his innovative use of aspects of the fantasy genre to deconstruct traditional adult-child power structures.

As explored in Section 3, *The Boy from Mercury* can be understood as a 'Domestic Fantasy', corresponding to Louisa Smith's definition of the genre by introducing 'a touch of magic – a magic that appears in a realistic setting within a realistic family'.[7] This approach provides a broad framework for the exploration of the multiple forms of fantasy and allows for the incorporation of Colin Manlove's

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[5] Rose, p. 10. See introduction to this thesis.
[6] Fiske notes that 'the individual is produced by nature, the subject by culture', p. 288.
[7] Louisa Smith, 'Domestic Fantasy: Real gardens with Imaginary Toads', in *The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, pp. 295-302 (p. 447).

theories relating to the genre.[8] Manlove defines fantasy as 'a fiction involving the supernatural or the impossible', a broad definition that accommodates his subsequent categorisation of various types of fantasy: secondary world, metaphysical, emotive, comic, subversive, and children's fantasy, all of which can be applied to a reading of *The Boy from Mercury*.[9] Rosemary Jackson also offers a definition of the fantastic by stating that

> The fantastic is predicated on the category of the 'real', and it introduces areas which can be conceptualised only by negative terms according to the categories of nineteenth century realism: thus, the im-possible, the un-real, the nameless, formless, shapeless, un-known, in-visible. What could be termed a 'bourgeois' category of the real is under attack. It is this *negative rationality* which constitutes the meaning of the modern fantastic.[10]

I will argue that Duffy establishes ideas of 'real' and 'unreal' only to dismantle such binaries.

Section 3 proposes that fantastic elements feature in many forms throughout *The Boy from Mercury*, such as the intertextual references to the Science Fiction films of Flash Gordon, and Harry's belief that the Mercurians are contacting him.[11] However, fantasy is not limited to the world of childhood as Duffy blurs the distinction between adulthood and childhood by suggesting that adults also subscribe to certain fantasies. Drawing upon the work of Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, Edward Branigan and Eric Rabkin allows for an examination of the manner in which Duffy conflates ideas of real and imagined.[12] By using such a subversive technique, the director encourages the viewer to deconstruct the traditional adult-child dialectic that

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[8] Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England* and *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983).

[9] Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, p. 3.

[10] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) (London: New York, 2003), p. 26.

[11] While Science Fiction films are often viewed as part of the fantasy film genre, there are both similarities and differences in film form, as outlined by Gwyneth Jones in *Deconstructing the Starships: Science, Fiction and Reality* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 11. For a discussion of children's literature and science fiction see *Lion and the Unicorn*, 28.2 (April 2004).

[12] See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989); Eric Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976); and Edward Branigan, *Point of View in Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (Berlin and New York: Mouton, 1984). Branigan identifies the point of view shot as when 'the camera assumes the spatial position of a character in order to show us what the character sees; the camera lens, so to speak, becomes the eye of the character [...] with the result that our sensory perception is restricted to that of the character' (p. 6). Branigan also explores the complexities of such processes involved in the narration and narrative of the film and examines the manner in which point of view can be constructed to encourage various readings of film content. See also Warner's discussion of child perspective in *Managing Monsters*, p. 41.

is established in the film. As a result, this deconstruction can also be applied to certain ideological constructs and wider cultural debates in the 1960s, particularly in terms of family structures, religion and modernisation. These elements are explored in detail in Section 4 where it is argued that Harry's childhood perspective of Irish culture facilitates a reading of the text in terms of postmodern realities, as ideas of past and present, and real and imagined are conflated. As a result, childhood in its varying forms can be read as means of accessing and exploring Irish history. It is argued throughout that Duffy engages with debates about the Irish past and the Irish present with a complexity that has heretofore been unacknowledged by film academics and critics. Through a detailed textual analysis, this chapter reveals the significance of Duffy's film within Irish film studies and challenges many previous readings of the text, thereby demonstrating the significant contribution that the study of children's films can make to wider political and cultural discourses in Ireland, particularly in relation to issues of abuse, the Church, and modernisation.

Section 1. Childhood Stereotypes and Memory

As noted above, many critics have argued that the construction of childhood in Western discourse has relied upon the creation of a power dialectic between children and adults. Whether viewed in terms of Developmentalism or Romanticism, the child is placed in a subjective position within an ideology which tends to reinforce adult projections and stereotypes of children.[13] Joseph Zornado claims that this subjugation of the child was a significant feature of Victorian Imperialist culture where 'the child learned that the world was divided between those who physically dominate and those who were dominated. Moreover, power – as in adult power – was always allied with moral authority [...]. Resistance to moral authority was a sign of one's otherness, and therefore justified even sterner civilizing measures'.[14] Such value systems are often reproduced in children's fiction and can function, as Charles Sarland notes, as a 'product of the views held within the adult population about children and young people themselves and their place in society'.[15] Roger Cox believes that the relationship between children and adults is at the centre of such constructions and that

[13] See Susan Honeyman, 'Mutiny by Mutation: Uses of Neoteny by Science Fiction', in *Children's Literature in Education,* 35.4 (December 2004), 347.
[14] Zornado, p. 103.
[15] Sarland, 'Ideology', p. 41.

'even the earliest and most intimate relations between child and adult are, in some sense, relations of power'.[16] This section explores the manner in which, on one level, *The Boy from Mercury* can be read as adhering to such stereotypical constructions of childhood, conforming to dominant expectations of the conditions of childhood, and encouraging the audience to understand the child character as a site of universal experience.[17] It is possible to understand the representation of childhood in Duffy's film in terms of universalism, as reiterated by Diog O'Connell in her analysis of the film as she states that 'the universal desire for story is still fuelled by the child within us all'.[18] Such an approach allows for a nostalgic reading of the text where childhood, created from the director's memories of a personal past, becomes a universal reference point and is used as a means of accessing and exploring a cultural and national past. [19]

Traditional forms of behaviour and experiences of childhood are established throughout the film, as Harry is firmly positioned within an identifiable environment of childhood existence. These include economic dependence as Harry is reliant on his family for food and sustenance; escapism and retreating into the realms of fantasy as represented through his trips to the cinema and also by the hallucinations he experiences; a closeness to animals which is revealed through Harry's relationship with his dog[20] Max whom Harry also believes is a Mercurian; being bullied, a misfortune experienced by both Harry and Sean (Sean O'Flanagain); Harry's attempts to live up to his mother's expectations and conform to certain modes of behaviour that the adult deems appropriate for the child; Harry arguing with his older brother Paul; and playing imaginative games with his friend Sean. Such a listing, which is discussed in detail below, merely offers a general overview of some of the main areas which contribute to creating concepts of childhood in the text that conform to expectations of childhood in culture. Significantly, the depiction of Harry's childhood

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[16] Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood*, p. 6.

[17] The simultaneous subversion of such ideological constructions is explored in Section 3, below.

[18] Diog O'Connell, 'The Boy From Mercury: Educating Emotionally through Universal Storytelling', in *Keeping it Real*, ed. by Ruth Barton and Harvey O'Brien (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), pp. 121-31 (p. 121). Section 3 explores the problems with the idea of 'universalising' childhood.

[19] This idea is explored in Chapter 5 in relation to *War of the Buttons*. Incorporated into this analysis are Barbara Wall's theories of dual, double and single address in relation to the effects of a narrative of nostalgia for a child and for an adult audience.

[20] As noted in previous chapters, childhood on film has a long tradition of suggesting that innocent children are close to animals and nature, such as in *The Wizard of OZ* (Victor Fleming, USA, 1939), *Lassie Come Home* (Fred M. Wilcox, USA, 1943), *The Yearling*, *National Velvet*, *Old Yeller* (Robert Stevenson, USA, 1958) and more recently in films such as *Into the West*, *Free Willy* (Simon Wincer, France/USA,1993), *Fly Away Home* and *The Mighty Celt*.

experiences are closely paralleled with many images reminiscent of *Cinema Paradiso* (1989)[21] and *My Life as A Dog* (1985), echoing ideas of childhood wonder and innocence as well as establishing the child character as an outsider.[22] As a result it is possible to read childhood in the film as an amalgamation of received images. Throughout the text it becomes apparent that one of the more significant received ideas of childhood is the subjugation of the child to adult authority.

In Harry's school environment, the power of the adult over the child is determined from the opening establishing shot of a Brother patrolling the corridors with a strap in his hand. In the classroom, Brother Dowdall (Ian McElhinney) acts both as an adult teacher and a disciplinarian. The child is positioned as subordinate to the adult, lacking both knowledge and power. While the Brother teaches a poem by Padraic Colum, the children recite the verses in a dutiful chorus, obeying the Brother's every word.[23] In addressing the teacher, the children always refer to him in respectful terms as 'Brother', using the title in such a way that imbues the teacher with a superior status. This sense of unquestioning respect is not reciprocal in the child/adult relationship as the Brother refers to the boys by surname, a form of address that is applied in a derogatory manner.

The sense of the Brother's dominance is heightened by shooting the character from below as he looms over his pupils, the camera angle providing a child perspective that reveals the relationship between children and adults and echoes the idea of 'threat' evident in the approach of Harry's mother at the beginning of the film.[24] Therefore adults is constructed as something that the child fears. The use of Padraic Colum's poem, *The Old Woman of the Road* also aligns the child - adult relationship with that of the colonised and the coloniser, as Brother Dowdall explains that it was as Colum helped in his father's workhouse that he first 'saw the poverty

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[21] The autobiographical link to *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, Italy/France, 1989) is also important to note, as Duffy worked as a projectionist (similar to the character of Salvatore) in the Kenilworth Cinema in Harold's Cross. See '*Cinema Paradiso*, Harold's Cross' online at <http://www.duffyberlin.com/CinemaParadiso.html> [accessed 1 March 2005]. During my interview with Duffy, he also noted the importance of establishing the child character as 'outsider', a feature of both these films as well as an autobiographical element in *The Boy From Mercury*. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.

[22] In attempting to pitch the film to potential producers, Duffy described the narrative of *The Boy From Mercury* as 'The Snapper meets My Life as a Dog'. See his production Diary, *The Road to Mercury*, p. 6, published online at <http://www.duffyberlin.com/roadtomerc.html> [accessed 8 February 2004]

[23] The use of a poem by Padraic Colum also alludes to themes of emigration as Colum emigrated to the USA in 1914.

[24] See below for a detailed analysis of May's approach to Harry's bedroom.

and ruination of centuries of English rule'.[25] The use of the work of Padraic Colum, a writer of the revival, can also lead to the fusion of concepts of Ireland and childhood as noted by Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland* as 'most writers of the Irish Revival identified their childhood with that of the nation'.[26] This idea of aligning the child and the nation becomes particularly relevant at certain moments in the film, such as Harry's visit to the graveyard, where the child character can be read as a metaphor for the nation, as is explored later in this chapter.[27] These particular representations of power relations and the authoritarian positions of the Christian Brothers emanate from Duffy's own lived experience as he uses a personal narrative to explore elements of a cultural past through processes of memory, conforming to Hollindale's argument that in writing a text for children, childness is created through the adult's memory of childhood.[28]

Hollindale applies the term 'childness' to encompass multiple concepts of childhood from diverse and varied perspectives including 'the adult's recall of childhood and desire to refresh the roots and keep a sense of continuous identity; and the adults hopes and beliefs and desires about childhood, what it is and what it ought to be'.[29] The emphasis placed upon adult desires reiterates the process at work in Duffy's film as childhood is explicitly 'composed of the grown-up's memories of childhood'.[30] The composition of childness in the film is therefore a complex process and is not merely constructed through the presence of children on screen but also, as is evident throughout an interview with Duffy, through Duffy's own personal

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[25] As noted in Chapter 1, it is possible to apply Zornado's theories of postcolonialism to understand the complex child/adult power dialectics that are evident in *The Boy From Mercury*. See also *Voices of the Other: Postcolonialism and Children's Literature*, ed. by Roderick McGillis (New York: Garland, 1999).

[26] Kiberd, p. 101. Colum is also author of the children's story *The King of Ireland's Son* (1916).

[27] Within this school environment, the viewer is also presented with stereotypical scenes of childhood and bullying. The representation of bullying as a natural experience of childhood can also be found in *The Testimony of Taliesen Jones*, another feature film directed by Martin Duffy. The child character of Taliesen has a belief in spiritual healing and many of the characters see this pastime as fantastic or imaginary. This results in Taliesin being excluded and bullied at school. Both *The Boy from Mercury* and *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* end with a revelation that the bully is not as powerful as he would like to assume. See the discussion below which argues that Harry's use of fantasy allows him to invert many of these traditional power structures.

[28] Duffy remarks that 'powerlessness and guilt would be the two things that I would associate with anything to do with the Catholic Church. They made you feel that you had no power, that they had all the power'. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix. The autobiographical nature of the film is emphasised throughout the interview.

[29] Hollindale, *Signs of Childness*, p. 42.

[30] Ibid., p. 49. This also corresponds to Foucault's ideas in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in terms of using genealogy as a mode of understanding history.

memories.[31] The influence of memory in creating the narrative is also revealed in an interview conducted by Hugh Linehan, as Duffy exposes the autobiographical nature of the film by stating that 'A lot of it *is* me. When I was a kid I thought I was from another planet, which is the starting point for everything in the film. It brought back a lot of things from my childhood that I realised were quite sweet and precious'.[32] Linehan echoes this fondness for the past by stating that the film is 'an affectionate depiction of suburban Dublin life in the early 1960s, based very closely on Duffy's own childhood memories'.[33] The concept of memory operates as an important force in the construction of the narrative, as it links concepts of past and present as well as theories of childhood and the nation.

Similar to the processes of memory discussed in relation to the work of Joan O'Neill,[34] in the search for origins or continuity of self and culture, Duffy draws upon personal memories of childhood that are located within the shared public memories of Ireland of the 1960s. This is represented through the new housing developments, the screening of *Flash Gordon* films, and the presence of various elements of popular culture. Duffy uses memory to create a story of his own past and a story of Ireland through the lens of the 1990s.[35] Framing the private experiences within the public and collective memories indicates the extent to which 'the private activity is [...] dependent on public conditions'.[36] In producing this personal version of childhood, Duffy supplied designer Tom Conroy with photographs of his own family to use as source material that would inspire the production design of the film.[37] Indeed, Duffy maintains that the production design reflects many of the issues of his own childhood, remarking that 'there are little things throughout the film that I associate very strongly with my own life – the absence of a father, the brother's being away.'[38] The film thus becomes a snapshot of the private experiences of one Dublin family in the 1960s as

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[31] See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.
[32] See Interview by Hugh Linehan in *The Irish Times*, 6 December 1996, p. 13.
[33] Ibid., p. 13. For a further discussion of the autobiographical nature of the film, see Duffy's production diary, *The Road to Mercury* published online at <http://www.duffyberlin.com/roadtomerc.html> [accessed 8 February 2004]. See also *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.
[34] See Chapter 3.
[35] As outlined above. Martin Duffy elaborates upon this idea in his interview where he lists many autobiographical elements of the narrative and locations in the film.
[36] Bommes and Wright, p. 259.
[37] See Interview by Hugh Linehan in *The Irish Times*, 6 December 1996, p. 13.
[38] Ibid., p. 13.

the family photo that is located in the present becomes a visual reference point in reshaping and reimagining the experiences of that family in an Irish past.

Therefore, the family photo from the period is given the opportunity to come to life as these private moments and struggles become framed by collective memories of 1960s Dublin.[39] As noted above, the use of a child protagonist in a film set in the past explores the concept of the past on a number of levels. It is possible to argue that 'children's fiction marks the pressures and realignments of dialectic engagement as it responds to adult memory and to childhood understood in terms of a personal *and* a collective past'.[40] Childhood in the film is but one site of memory[41] that is used to activate this sense of the past. In conjunction with ideas of childhood, the audience can identify the past through various sites of memory such as the depiction of popular culture, religion, education, emigration and modernisation in the 1960s.

Harry's trips to see the serials of *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* in the Grand Cinema represent a wider collective experience of children attending the cinema on Saturdays and introducing themes of 'macro' and 'micro' into the narrative as Harry's experience becomes emblematic of the larger world of Irish culture in the 1960s.[42] From the shots of *Flash Gordon*, the camera cuts to a mid-close-up of Harry, framed by other children in the cinema. By presenting the initial shot as Harry's point of view, the film thus establishes the private story within a public sphere. [43] As Flash appears on screen the audience are presented with a long shot that reveals the entire interior of the auditorium as the audience are shot from behind and the camera pans along the back row. The spectator of *The Boy From Mercury* is consequently positioned within the audience of the *Flash Gordon* film, as the scene disrupts the individual point of view of Harry with a more collective point of view. Therefore, individual experience is framed by collective experience. Not only does *Flash Gordon*

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[39] The private recollection cannot exist without the public memory as 'without the prop of collective memory, how can individual memory be constituted at all?'. See Krips, p. 19.
[40] Krips, p. 25. My emphasis.
[41] For a discussion of many aspects of *lieux de mèmoire*, see Nora, *Realms of Memor*, Vol. 1, pp. 14-20. See Chapter 5 for an analysis of *War of The Buttons* in terms of sites of memory.
[42] See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix, where he discusses the collective ritual of children attending Saturday screenings in Dublin. The environment that is established on screen is a world for children, free from adult interference. As the scene opens with images of *Flash Gordon*, the private world of Harry and his fantasies is connected to the larger public memory of the serial. As Flash appears to save his friends, the child audience erupts in delight with shots of Harry punching the air as he mimics the fight sequence occurring onscreen. The adult usher (Paddy Nalty) has no power in this child domain.
[43] See Branigan.

act as a site of memory, but so too does the auditorium and the perspective of viewing the film within the cinema.

A similar method is used when establishing television programmes as sites of memory in the film as the medium of television serves as both a site of public and private memory with the film containing extracts from *Tonight: Prof Stephen Horwitz*, *Sunday Night Play*, and *What's My Line*.[44] The music of *Apache*[45] by 'The Shadows' and *Shakin' all Over* by 'Johnny Kidd and The Pirates' also serve as representations of popular culture of the period and act as sites of identification for the viewer. Similar to television, music encourages the spectator to identify a specific period. These elements of the media are used in conjunction with the costumes and props to create a collective sense of the past for the audience. However, the viewing experience of such a memory differs greatly for child and adult spectators. Applying Barbara Wall's theories on narrative voice, the use of memory in the film results in the creation of a particular form of address.[46] The child's view of 1960s Ireland functions in terms of dual address as the child character acts as a site of memory for the adult viewer while simultaneously functioning as a point of identification for the child spectator. The film establishes sites of memory that the adult viewer (who has experience of living in 1960s Dublin) can then position within the wider context of his/her own personal memories of the period. In contrast to this, the child spectator cannot view the past of the film within the broader context of personal memories, and so the past on screen becomes the child's only reference point in constructing a memory of Irish culture in the 1960s. Therefore, while the adult may be able to contextualise the cultural memory of the film, the child viewer, while possibly situating the representation within the context of other received images of the period, cannot compare the representation to his/her own lived experience of the past. As a result of differing knowledge, varying degrees of memories are constructed for child and adult viewers.

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[44] Duffy acknowledges that he found these extracts in the BBC television archives (BBC Worldwide Television). *What's My Line* ran from 1951 until 1962. The television programmes are viewed in private homes, as is demonstrated by the Cronin family, however, the nature of the media results in such an occurrence happening on a public scale. Viewers share the collective experience of the content, yet differ in the individual viewing environments. The individual practice of watching television is set in contrast to the environment of excitement created in the cinema. Again, Duffy notes in his interview that he deliberately chose television programmes that were 'boring' in order to highlight the vibrancy of the collective cinema-going experience. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.

[45] Music by Jerry Lordan (EMI;1960).

[46] See Barbara Wall, p. 9.

The representation of the child character in environments and experiences that are traditionally associated with childhood results in the child denoting a biological past within a cultural past. The construction of this collective past through universal concepts of childhood encourages the viewer to identify with Harry's circumstances and perspective. As a result, it is possible to interpret the film as 'a winning slice of nostalgia'[47] or as an 'obvious but generally effective meditation on childhood escapism set in early 1960s Dublin'.[48] Indeed, Duffy was encouraged to identify the film as nostalgic and was advised that 'the best selling point for *The Boy From Mercury* was the nostalgia market'.[49] This nostalgia for the past becomes aligned with a yearning for childhood, a simultaneous desire for the past of self and of culture, suggesting a reading of the past as a coherent linear narrative.[50] However, this is but one reading of the construction of childhood in the film and, as the following section documents, it is also possible to understand the child character as a metaphor for the nation.

Section 2. Child as a Metaphor for Nation

In his analysis of Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997), released one year after *The Boy from Mercury*, Martin McLoone notes that the bomb that goes off in Francie Brady's head can be read in metaphoric terms as 'the cultural explosion of de Valera's imagining, [that] went off in Ireland in the early 1960s with the beginning of a process of modernisation which continues at a more advanced level today'.[51] McLoone continues to read the film in terms of the clash between tradition and modernity and the impact of American popular culture on Irish society. Similarly, as mentioned

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[47] *Hot Press Magazine*, December 1996, (IFI Archives, File: The *Boy From Mercury*; no page number given).

[48] 'Harvey's Movie Reviews' website, <http://homepage.eircom.net/~obrienh/bm.htm> [accessed 12 July 2004]. As is explored in relation to *War of the Buttons* in Chapter 5, it is also possible for the child viewer to engage with the processes of nostalgia.

[49] See Martin Duffy, *The Road to Mercury*, p. 5.

[50] In her discussion of the construction of ideas of the 'child' during the Romantic period, Roni Natov links childhood and history by stating that 'as the child was linked closely with the past, and retrieving the past with the potential of the creative realm, the study of childhood also served to illuminate the nature of adult fear and desire in imaginative literature written by adults about children'. See *The Poetics of Childhood*, p. 4.

[51] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 217. It can also be read in terms of the concept of real and imagined versions of Ireland as is explored in Section 3 and Section 4. The increase in the internationalisation of Ireland's economy and culture is reflected in the work of Fintan O'Toole as he states that in the 1990s, 'three quarters of Irish manufactured exports are from foreign-owned multinationals, which import most of their inputs and export most of their profits'. O'Toole, *Black Hole, Green Card: The Disappearance of Ireland*, p. 11.

above in relation to Kiberd's theories where child and nation are aligned, it is possible to read the child character and experiences of Harry Cronin as a metaphor for Ireland, and the conflicts between tradition and modernity in the 1960s. Therefore, this way of reading expands upon Hollindale's notion of childness, and proposes another dimension at which childness and a narrative of childhood can be read in a children's text.

The Boy from Mercury resonates with many of the themes found in Irish cinema during the 1990s, particularly in terms of representations of a family with an absent father such as in *35-A-side* (1995), *Last of the High Kings* (1996), *I Went Down* (1997) and *This is My Father* (1998).[52] This theme is also to the fore in the *Flash Gordon* films that Harry views. As the opening sequence ends with a close up of Harry's face the audience hear voices from the *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* serial that is about to appear.[53] The voice of Flash's father says 'It's a tremendous achievement son. The world will be waiting to give you and Professor Zarkov the finest welcome in the history of mankind'. The image of Harry fades out and is replaced by the black and white film of *Flash Gordon* raising themes of paternal relations that become significant as the narrative develops. Unlike Flash Gordon, Harry is unable to participate in a father-son relationship.[54] However, the visits to Mr Cronin's grave reveal that despite Harry's father being physically absent, he still plays a role in Harry's life.

Harry's visits to the cemetery have become a ritual. As he attends his father's grave, his mother encourages him to talk to his dead father and tell him what a good boy he has been. Meanwhile, Harry's older brother Paul has no interest in this ritual. The events take place during a historical period when Ireland was experiencing the transition from the isolationist economic policies of Fianna Fáil leader Eamon de Valera toward a process of modernisation under the economic strategies of Sean Lemass. Highlighting the 1960s as a significant period of change in Irish society, Tim

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[52] For a further discussion of this topic see McLoone, *Irish Film*, pp. 168-183. In *War of the Buttons* Fergus is also represented as having paternal issues as his mother's partner refers to him as a 'bastard' and claims that he is not Fergus's father. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix, for his views on fatherhood.

[53] *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (USA, 1940).

[54] The American science fiction fantasy that Harry watches in a Dublin cinema also has an Irish significance as the character of Professor Zarkov is played by Irish-born actor Frank Shannon, 1874-1959. See Internet Movie Data Base website <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0788284/> accessed 9 March 2005. This theme of Irish diaspora is further explored later in the film as reference is made to the problem of emigration in Ireland during the 50s and 60s. This is evident in Paul's conversation with Harry as they sit on the roof and talk about their brothers who live in England.

Pat Coogan believes that 'compared to the stagnation and decay under de Valera, Lemass' brief tenure in office (1959-66) was astonishingly, refreshingly productive'[55] while Terence Brown notes that 'Irishmen and women believe now, as they believed then, that those five years represented a major turning point in Irish fortunes'.[56] Duffy explores these changes through the medium of childhood and family.

The graveyard scene highlights the absence of a patriarchal figure in Harry's family structure, a representation which can subsequently be read in metaphoric terms of change and transformation in Irish society. Accompanying the shot of Michael Cronin's headstone is the voice of May Cronin reciting 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit'. The allusion to the Holy Trinity and to the reference to 'father' and 'son' acts as a foil to Harry's own situation and the absence of a father or father figure in his life. The shot then cuts to a long-shot of May, Harry and Paul surrounded by Celtic crosses with a young family passing in front in the foreground. Meanwhile Harry responds to his mother's prayer with 'as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen.' This statement, accompanied by the image of the young couple and their baby highlights the difference of the Cronin family structure to traditional concepts and representations of the family. The words of the prayer connote a world without change, 'as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be'. However, Harry's situation contradicts such a theory; life changes and family structures alter. The presence of the young family functions as a juxtaposition to the Cronin family, highlighting this idea of transformation. The adjustment in perception of traditional familial structures is accompanied by the representation of change in larger societal structures. The tension between tradition and progress can thus be read on both a micro and a macro level in Irish culture.

On the other side of Harry, separated by the cross, which can be read as traditional religion, is his brother Paul who, obsessed with pop culture, possibly symbolises progress and modernity. Harry's mother, uncertain of the correct course to take yet wanting the best for her child, is constantly torn between pushing Harry toward the rigid rituals of the past and urging him to progress like his older brother. Harry, like Ireland, is caught in a type of paralysis, constantly told to keep his links with the past, a past that is now dead, while simultaneously encouraged to become like his globalised brother Paul. This influence of global culture is evident in Paul's

[55] Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, p. 419.
[56] Brown, p. 241.

obsession with rock 'n' roll, as he pretends to be a rock star, and also in Harry's passion for *Flash Gordon* films and comic books.[57] Similar to Francie Brady in *The Butcher Boy*, these elements of popular culture offer an escape route from the problems posited by reality. However, the characters' immersion in global culture reflects the wider changes occurring in Irish society and the move away from de Valera's policies of self-sufficiency.[58] Harry's engagement with popular culture and outside influences can thus be read as a metaphor for the nation.

The impact of popular culture is evident in Harry's retelling of *Flash Gordon* stories and his belief that he has superpowers. He draws upon these fictions in times of crisis, particularly when threatened by the school bully. As Harry looks up in expectation of the arrival of a spaceship, Maguire (Kevin James) becomes distracted. Consequently, Harry seizes the opportunity to thump him and run. In the end, the imagined Mercurian spaceship does not actually land and rescue him, but it is his belief in the fantasy that has saved him. However, the imaginings that he has conjured up through his interaction with American culture can only ward off the bully on a temporary basis. It is only when he accepts the aid of his big brother that he can permanently fend off the bully Maguire and move on with the reality of his life at school. Therefore the films suggests that immersing oneself in a realm of fantasy can be useful to a degree but will only delay the inevitable. Like the fantasy elements of films such as *Pete's Meteor* (1998), the child character is relying on outside assistance, but support arrives from within in the form of his family and friends. Unlike Francie Brady, Harry's descent into a world of fantasy is halted. As the film concludes, Harry accepts his mother as his biological mother, addressing her as 'Mam', and signalling a return to his Dublin reality.

If the metaphor of the child as the Irish nation is continued then perhaps this sequence can be read as a comment upon Ireland's economic situation in the 1960s; Harry, for which read Ireland, is in need of assistance, is rescued by his brother Paul, representing modernity and progress. It is possible to interpret this version of events in terms of Ireland's changing economic policies. However, while Lemass' policies moved away from the stifling protectionism of de Valera, there was a subsequent danger of the Irish economy becoming solely dependent upon international markets,

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[57] Martin Duffy describes the character of Paul as 'a Cliff Richard clone'. See *The Road to Mercury*, p. 35.

[58] This was a period of profound economic change where 'the state policy [...] was to attract over 350 new foreign-owned companies to Ireland [...]'. See Brown, p. 242.

similar to the way in which Harry has become completely dependent upon a fantasy provided by U.S. culture.[59] The film can thus be read as a comment on the need to strike a balance between these extremes by addressing problems within Ireland as well as developing economic links abroad.[60]

Therefore, it is possible to interpret the construction of childhood in *The Boy from Mercury* as a means of accessing a cultural past through a personal past while also examining the nation in metaphoric terms. This is predominantly achieved through the representation of an apparent 'universal' concept of childhood, which, as demonstrated above, is useful in providing certain readings of the text. In effect, to read the construction of childhood in the narrative in such a manner is to understand childhood as a unifying form that 'conceals all the historical divisions' and suggests that by aligning a continuity of self and of culture, the adult viewer should understand the text as a homogenised and coherent linear narrative of the past. However, to read the film solely in terms of universalism fails to recognise the complexity of the construction of the past and of childhood in the text. While it is evident that Duffy draws upon universal concepts and traditional expectations of childhood experience, he simultaneously questions such representations and, through the medium of fantasy, exposes the constructed nature of these hegemonic ideologies.

Section 3. Child Perspective and Fantasy

The representation of childhood in the film, as outlined above, is based upon adult constructions of childhood, corresponding to the theories of critics such as Zornado, Hollindale, and Rose who see childhood as represented in children's literature as a distinct and separate state from adulthood. As Declan Kiberd notes in relation to the construction of childhood in the poetry of Yeats, many representations of childhood

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[59] The risk involved in the Irish economy becoming too dependent on foreign trade is evident in Coogan's writing as he notes that when the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson placed a 15% import levy on Irish goods it became apparent how 'dangerous it was for Ireland to be utterly dependent on her British trade'. See Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, p. 452.

[60] Corresponding to this view, Barra Ó Séaghdha commenting on the work of media critics notes that O'Toole is aware that modernisation has helped 'the process of freeing Ireland from ruralism, nationalism and Catholicism. But he is also aware that it is turning us into a cultural and political colony of the United States'. See 'The Celtic Tiger's Media Pundits', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 143-59 (p. 149). See Section 4 for a discussion of globalisation and economic dependence. For a further discussion of Harry as a metaphor for the Irish nation see my essay 'Escape From Fantasy Ireland; Martin Duffy's "The Boy From Mercury"', in *Film History and National Cinema*, ed. by John Hill and Kevin Rockett (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 106-16.

are 'surrounded by a *cordon sanitaire* of nostalgia and escape' and the representation of childhood in literature results from adults' 'desires'.[61] The idea of 'desire' is central to an understanding of child/adult relationships in Duffy's film as, in Manlove's terms, desire fantasy can be understood as 'a longing for another or a lost world'.[62] It is therefore possible to use theories of fantasy to explore concepts of longing and desire in the narrative as Harry's fantasy of Mercury is paralleled with May's Catholic beliefs and Paul's love of popular culture. By applying the theories of Manlove, Rabkin and Žižek it is evident that many forms of fantasy are constructed throughout the narrative, and that Duffy continually blurs the boundaries between child and adult worlds by conflating ideas of fantasy and reality. Such a technique encourages the viewer to identify and recognise accepted cultural norms not as reality but what Slavoj Žižek terms as 'unconscious illusion' or 'ideological fantasy', where 'reality' is 'a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the real of our desire'.[63] As a result, Duffy's manipulation of fantasy through a child's perspective exposes for the viewer the ideological construction of many culturally accepted norms, including that of 'childhood'.

The opening sequence of *The Boy from Mercury* firmly positions the character of Harry in a world of his own and, through a representation of child/adult relations, establishes the varying degrees of fantasy that are incorporated into the narrative. As Stephen McKeon's original music plays on the soundtrack, the audience is presented with images of the child character, Harry, in his bedroom, late at night, separate from the realm of teenagers and adults.[64] A world of quiet and solitude is created in the sanctuary of Harry's bedroom, an atmosphere that is heightened further as Harry gazes up into the night sky, awaiting the approach of the Mercurian spaceship. At this point in the film, Duffy blurs the distinction between primary and secondary worlds and it appears that the presence of spaceships is a real possibility in the film's diegesis, establishing the idea of a secondary world fantasy for the spectator.

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[61] Kiberd, pp. 103-104.
[62] Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, p. 91.
[63] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 35.
[64] Stephen McKeon also created the soundtrack for other child-centred Irish films, such as *35-Aside* (Damien O'Donnell, Ireland, 1995) and *Sweety Barret* (Stephen Bradley, USA, 1998), which deals with the relationship of an infantilised adult (Brendan Gleeson) and a young boy (Conor King).

The scene then cuts to a close-up of Harry checking the time on an old alarm clock, introducing ideas of temporality into the narrative.[65] This shot is closely followed by the creation of a visual divide between Harry's world and that of the rest of his family, as the camera pans down the exterior of the Cronin home in a jib shot that reveals the kitchen situated below Harry's bedroom. The director plays with ideas of primary and secondary worlds of space aliens and earth, as well as realms of childhood and adulthood as during this transition a visual divide is established as the roof of the house momentarily forms a black strip across the screen, signifying the separation of Harry's world from that of his brother. Simultaneously, the non-diegetic music of the soundtrack is interrupted to allow for the diegetic music of *The Shadows* performing 'Apache' on the radio, reinforcing this sense of divided worlds.

As the camera continues to pan downward, the audience are provided with a shot of Paul engaging in his own type of role-play fantasy as he mimes guitar actions with a sweeping brush, while dancing to the beat of 'Apache'.[66] The shot of Paul is taken from outside the kitchen window and the character is viewed through a net curtain, creating a somewhat voyeuristic perspective for the audience. Such an approach enhances the idea that the spectator is gaining an outsider's glimpse of a snapshot of family life in the 1960s. The scene then returns to Harry as he lies across his windowsill and gazes into a fantasy world. This re-establishing shot is subsequently replaced by a point of view shot that allows the audience to participate in Harry's fantasy world as he searches for a Mercurian spaceship. This technique of establishing Harry and then providing a point of view shot is repeated throughout the film, with Harry's view of the world providing the audience with both a representation of an Irish past and a commentary on it. As a result, the film can be read in relation to Edward Branigan's theories of the construction of point of view as it provides the spectator with both a primary and secondary point of departure. This occurs as Duffy frames Harry within a recognisable reality of 1960s Ireland and subsequently questions the very concept of 'reality' by providing a view of Harry's relationship with that reality. Therefore, the opening shots establish a reality that is composed of varying degrees of fantasy: Harry and Mercury, and Paul and popular culture.

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[65] As is discussed below, the blurring of space and time in the narrative becomes a major technique in discussing both the past and the present of the individual and the culture as a whole.

[66] See below for a discussion of teenagers as a distinct subgroup in society.

Harry's stargazing is then interrupted by the approach of his mother. As Harry scrambles into bed on his mother's entrance, May Cronin suddenly appears as a dark silhouette in the doorframe, pausing on the threshold between child and adult world, the back light from the hall transforming her into a looming shadow. Once again, it is not clear for the viewer if May is a human or an alien, and the parameters of primary and secondary worlds are once again blurred. However, there is a sudden change in the soundtrack and as she steps into the light, the camera shoots Mrs Cronin from below, establishing Harry's perspective of his adult mother, a technique which is similar to that used to show Brother Dowdall's dominance in school. The arrival of the adult character has ruptured this childhood world of fantasy. As a result, this scene also establishes the divisions between adult and child worlds and the inability of the adult characters to understand and participate in the child world of fantasy and imagination, a common feature in domestic fantasy fiction.[67] Subsequently, the film moves from Harry's world to his mother's perspective of childhood, which can also be read as a fantasy. Seen from May's point of view of Harry, the audience are presented with an image of him as a small child in need of protection, a view reinforced by a shot of May adjusting the blankets on his bed. This can be understood as a form of desire in the adult, who wishes to see the child as vulnerable in order to establish herself in the role of protector.[68]

Therefore, just as Harry constructs a version of adulthood as threatening, this sequence also alludes to the possibility that May's adult perspective of childhood is simply her own version of reality. In Manlove's terms, it is possible to read the construction of childhood in culture as a form of 'emotive fantasy' as 'the 'child' is partly shaped by adults who wish to preserve a province they recall as childhood, or have designs on those inhabiting it'.[69] As the camera shifts to reveal May's point of view, the extreme change in camera position draws the viewer's attention to the idea of perspective and that the child's view of life is not that same as the adult's. By juxtaposing adult and child perspectives, Duffy exposes the differing viewpoints or

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[67] See Louisa Smith, p. 449.

[68] It is also useful to refer to Rabkin's writing on fantasy in relation to this sequence as it constantly plays with the 'ground rules' of audience expectation. Rabkin notes that 'we enter a narrative world with the preconceptions of our armchair world intact, and these preconceptions only change as the narrative reconfigures them' and that 'the fantastic is a direct reversal of ground rules, and therefore is in part determined by those ground rules'. See Rabkin, p. 10 and pp. 14-15.

[69] Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, p. 6. Corresponding to Kiberd's work above, Manlove also draws on the work of Yeats to illustrate his theory of 'emotive fantasy' (p. 93).

fantasies which can occupy the same space of real time. As the adult character leaves, Harry, and consequently the spectator, return to the world of Harry's fantasy as he states 'Goodnight Earth mother' and the boundaries between fantasy and reality become blurred once again. As a result, the film continually shifts from child perspective to adult viewpoint, constructing different degrees of fantasy for the viewer a process which encourages the questioning of accepted norms of 'reality'.[70]

Having established Harry's child-status throughout, much humour is derived from events that depict Harry in a traditional adult role, such as the writing of a will. This is achieved through the obvious juxtaposition of child and adult experiences and the deviation of Harry's behaviour from expected norms.[71] The copybook that is traditionally associated with a culture of childhood is used for an adult concern of writing a will. However, this scene can be read as yet another type of fantasy in the narrative, this time in terms of role-playing. In contrast to Harry's imaginary role-play in the playground as he visualises himself as a space-man, this role-play of adulthood occurs within real space and time and is not a feature of his imagination.[72]

As discussed in Section 1, this division between child and adult is reinforced throughout the film, but can also be viewed in terms of the negotiation of conflicting fantasies within real space and time, particularly if May's belief in the afterlife is viewed as culturally accepted fantasy, or an 'ideological fantasy'.[73] As Harry, May and Paul visit the grave of Harry's father, the relations between the three characters become apparent to the audience, highlighting issues of power based on child or adult status. May, as the adult mother, becomes the voice of authority in this sequence, with the teenager and the child responding in different ways. Harry as a child conforms to traditional expectations of childhood and does as his mother requests, obediently going to the graveside and engaging in her fantasy. May instructs Harry to tell his father that he has been a good boy and he is subsequently prompted to talk about

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[70] While the film continually offers the audience a child perspective of situations and events, the adult characters do not appear to have an insight into the child's view of life.

[71] This corresponds to Rabkin's claim that 'the truly fantastic occurs when the ground rules of a narrative are forced to make a 180° reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted' (p. 12).

[72] For the informed spectator, the writing of the will allows for a reading of the child character as naïve and melodramatic, knowing that Harry will not be killed at school.

[73] It is also possible to read May's fantasy as a 'metaphysical fantasy'. See Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, pp. 64-89.

school, a typical childhood environment.[74] His role as child is further reinforced as he is placed alongside his teenage brother Paul, who is not quite an adult and is still answerable to his mother. The distance between Harry and Paul thus establishes him as almost twice removed from the adult world.[75]

Paul's fantasy of being a Rock star is closely aligned with his status as a teenager, as Duffy documents the emergence of a distinct subculture in the 1950s and 1960s.[76] Thomas Doherty notes that 'in postwar America and in "Americanized" foreign countries, the teen years become a unique transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, in some sense an autonomous and in most cases a privileged period in an individual's life'.[77] Therefore it is possible to read the character of Paul as representing a form of 'rebellion'[78] against parental authority. The fantasy of Rock 'n' Roll and global culture that he subscribes to is in contrast to his mother's fantasy of traditional values.[79] When viewed in comparison to Harry, Paul's status as teenager positions him between childhood and adulthood while also allowing him to participate in adult culture.

While Harry and May stand by the graveside with hands in prayer position, Paul is set apart from them, with hands in pockets, attempting to assert an independence from his mother. His question, 'Now can I smoke?' challenges the authority position of May as he does not hide the fact that he is smoking and demonstrates his unwillingness to participate in her fantasy. However, the need to challenge the relationship indicates Paul's subordinate role to his mother. Therefore, childhood in this context is thus not simply a matter of biology, but of social and familial conventions. Paul will always be his mother's child and is subsequently treated as subservient to her. Therefore, Paul is depicted as both child and adult and acts as a foil to Harry, who has no power in deciding what fantasies he should partake in. This is demonstrated by his agreement to say 'Goodbye Daddy' while Paul refuses

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[74] Harry's details of school reinforce the child's traditional subservient role in society, highlighting the power dialectic between children and adults as he chooses to note that he was slapped.

[75] It is also possible that the character of Paul is used to highlight the pre-sexual and innocent nature of Harry. This is evident in the scenes between Harry, Paul, and Sarah (Joanne Gerrard) where Paul's sexual advances are constantly interrupted by the entrance of Harry. For a further discussion of establishing the child as pre-sexual see Rose, pp. x-xiii.

[76] For a further discussion of the emergence of 'teenager' as a concept, see Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston and London: Unwin Hyman Inc, 1988), pp. 71-99.

[77] Doherty, p. 44.

[78] See Doherty, p. 51.

[79] See Doherty, p. 81, for a discussion of teenagers and Rock 'n' Roll.

to do so, responding with 'I will in me Granny'.[80] While Harry is willing to subscribe to May's fantasy, Paul refuses. Therefore, child/adult power dynamics in the film can be understood as a negotiation of conflicting fantasies.

The separation of the child Harry from the world of adulthood continues throughout the scene as Harry is informed that 'one day you will be a big man just like him [his father] and your brothers in England (pause) and like Paul'. At this moment, childhood becomes a process of development that will take time, as Harry is represented as always en route to becoming a future adult. Paul's position as an adult role model is questioned by Harry as he says 'Like Paul?', again problematising his adult status. This moment in the narrative reveals the possible reasons for Harry's retreat into the world of fantasy. Susan Honeyman notes that science fiction often offers 'emancipatory models'[81] for children that counter the rigid rhetoric of Developmentalist and Romanticist accounts of childhood, which 'hinge on development perceived as a process moving in a linear, temporal pattern (either child as link to past, or child as link to future)'.[82] She suggests that the genre of science fiction 'proposes that neoteny, which interprets children as evidence of evolutionary advancements, provides the key to child power'.[83] Drawing upon such theories, it is possible to read Harry's fantasy in terms of neoteny. His questioning of maturing like Paul suggests that he views the prospect of adulthood with suspicion. As a result, greatly influenced by the science fiction of *Flash Gordon*, Harry 'fantasizes an alternative to the limitations of human (adult) intelligence' and believes he has superpowers.[84] Through this fantasy, the child character is provided with an outlet where he can usurp and surpass adult culture as opposed to passively inherit its

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[80] It is also possible to read Paul as the central axis between modernity and tradition, and adult and child. His rejection of religion and challenging of authority is evident in this statement which acts as a refusal to say goodbye to his father. The use of the word 'Granny' thus signifies a shift from the literal 'father' to the metaphorical 'Granny' as he rejects his ancestry and heritage and embraces international trends. It is therefore possible to read Paul as representative of 1990s Ireland, demonstrating the effects of the rapid onslaught of modernity and the influence of global culture. Perhaps Duffy is suggesting that Celtic Tiger Ireland is similar to a teenager, rebelling against tradition and embracing global capitalist consumerism. Rather than focussing on the character of Paul and speculating about what he, or Celtic Tiger Ireland, might become, Duffy centres the narrative on the child Harry. As the film ends Harry sees Paul as a role model, possibly suggesting that Harry, read as 1960s Ireland, will in time become like his teenage brother Paul, who represents 1990s Ireland. Therefore, in this sequence, family history and national economic and social history converge.

[81] Honeyman, p. 348.

[82] Ibid., p. 352.

[83] Ibid., p. 348.

[84] Ibid., p. 353.

limitations. Consequently, his Mercurian fantasy offers a means of imagined empowerment for Harry, whose childhood reality is dominated by adults in power.[85]

However, by the end of the film, Paul assumes a parental role, replacing Mr Cronin, and acquiring the duties and responsibilities of adulthood as he protects his younger brother. As Harry watches Paul turn away in the schoolyard, Paul becomes coupled with Flash Gordon, Harry's hero, as his back is aligned with the subsequent shot of Flash's back on screen. As a result, the hero from Harry's fantasy is transposed from the science fiction film to the reality of his family setting. Harry tells Sarah that Paul is a hero, and decides that the Mercurians have fixed it so Paul won't emigrate like his other brothers; 'You see, the Mercurians wanted me to grow up on this planet, so they can't just keep coming down anytime something goes wrong. So now they know that Paul will always come to the rescue'. [86] As a result, Harry does not reject the entire idea of fantasy, but there is a move from fantasy toward reality. This primarily results from his admiration of Paul which is in contrast to the previous rejection of Paul as a role-model. Applying Honeyman's theories, the recognition of Paul's positive qualities does not make the prospect of adulthood as unattractive as it once was, and Harry can move toward accepting the reality of his family life. However, the retention of an element of fantasy acts as a realm of safety to which Harry can retreat if circumstances change.

The traditional association of fantasy and imagination with concepts of childhood is a dominant theme in cultural texts that explore childhood. Diog O' Connell in her analysis of *The Boy From Mercury* claims that 'the engagement with imagination, it can be said, is typical in childhood and psychologically normative; children often believe fanciful realities that are misunderstood or not understood at all

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[85] Harry's belief that his mother is not his real parent can be read in terms of Sigmund Freud's theories of 'Family Romance'. Reuben Fine notes that 'this term referred to the common wish of children to have different parents, more exalted and generous than the parents they knew'. Freud notes that it is a common stage where 'the child's fantasy is engaged with the task of getting rid of the parents, of whom he now has a low opinion and who are as a rule to be replaced by others, usually of a higher social rank'. See respectively, Reuben Fine, *A History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 425 and Sigmund Freud (1909) in a discussion included in Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909) trans. by Gregory C. Richter and E. Thomas Lieberman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 50.

[86] Emigration to England also acts as a point of collective memory as Tim Pat Coogan notes that the state did little to prevent it: 'The prevailing official attitude towards emigration for most of the state's existence can most charitably be described as one of ignorance'. Paul's decision to stay in Ireland may be representative of the general decline in emigration in the early 1960s as Coogan notes that 'Emigration fell (from approximately 44, 000 in 1961 to around 12, 000 in 1964) [...]'. See *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 424 and 444.

by the adult world'.[87] However, it is evident that while the film represents traditional adult-child power structures in the text, including the assumption that fantasy is part of childhood and not adulthood, Duffy simultaneously subverts such simplistic binaries by drawing attention to the aspects of fantasy that exist in the lives of both adults and children.[88]

As a result, the film acknowledges that adults also engage in such 'fanciful realities', which are often treated as real, but as Žižek notes, are simply unconscious fantasies structuring social reality.[89] By equating accepted adult norms with Harry's fantasy world, Duffy undermines the authority of the adult characters, blurring the distinction between childhood and adulthood, and encouraging the viewer to recognise the constructed nature of dominant ideologies. Consequently, all ideologies are called into question in the film, including May's view of Harry and the representation of childhood from an adult perspective. Therefore, the film operates on a metafictional level, as the viewer is encouraged to deconstruct the very process of representing a 'universal' childhood on screen. A paradox is established as Duffy simultaneously constructs and deconstructs such ideologies of childhood. As the idea of childhood fantasy is used to subvert the authority of the adult, this process of subversion consequently extends to the wider cultural fields in which adults participate, including religion and modernisation. Manlove argues that 'there is a growing sense that 'reality' and 'fantasy' cannot certainly be distinguished, a feeling that reaches its most developed form in the postmodern view of 'reality' as a series of texts and fictions'.[90] As is discussed in Section 4, in its creation of multiple 'realities', *The Boy from Mercury* can thus be viewed in postmodern terms as a commentary on Irish society as a whole.

Section 4. Postmodern Perspectives of Irish Culture

Raphael Samuel notes in *Theatres of Memory* that 'memory is time warped, history is linear and progressive', indicating that use of memory can signal the fragmentation of

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[87] O'Connell, p. 123.

[88] Manlove distinguishes between subversion fantasy and satire by noting that 'subversion is different from satire, which is usually an attack on some perversion of a settled reality or value'. See *The Fantasy Literature of England*, p. 143.

[89] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, pp. 32-33.

[90] Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, pp. 132–133.

a series of aspects in the narrative.[91] As a result, *The Boy From Mercury* can be read as a text that conflates ideas of child and adult, self and nation, and past and present. Therefore, this section examines the manner in which childhood memories do not form a coherent and homogeneous view of history in the narrative, but, applying Foucault's theories outlined above, act as fragmentary traces of the past in the present where 'a tapestry of diverse subject positions' offer the viewer a version of the past that differs from and challenges traditional historiographies that adopt concepts of linear time and space.[92] Consequently, by blurring the distinction between fantasy and reality, Duffy introduces moments of 'discontinuity' into the narrative as *The Boy From Mercury* allows for a more synchronic rather than diachronic approach to history.

The examination of the method of structuring the past can be used as a means of understanding the perspectives of the past, and the relation between the past and the present. Ultimately, through the manipulation of childhood memories, Duffy employs a child perspective throughout the narrative, not simply to provide the 1960s society as a backdrop to Harry's story, but as a means of encouraging the audience to read the cultural context of the narrative in a particular way. This context is shaped by the construction of childness in the film, as in a postmodern sense it makes 'overt the fact-making and meaning-granting processes' predominantly through the use of a child's perspective of modernisation, religion and education.[93]

Modernisation and Family Structures

Duffy optimises the use of fantasy in his exploration of the effect of modernisation, particularly in relation to new housing developments.[94] Such a methodology leads to a postmodern analysis of the film where, to adopt Jean-François Lyotard's term, the totalising grand narrative of Irish history is dismantled and the process of representing history is acknowledged for the spectator.[95] As Harry is invited to visit his friend Sean in Walkinstown, he adopts the guise of an anthropologist as he researches the living

[91] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Vol. 1, p. ix.
[92] Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 40.
[93] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 77.
[94] Coogan notes that 'the post-war housing drive had reached its peak in the mid-fifties, with Dublin Corporation managing to build 4,784 houses in the year 1956-7'. See Coogan *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, p. 448.
[95] See Lyotard, p. xxiii and p. xxiv. See Introduction to this thesis for a further exploration of these ideas.

habits of Earthlings and reports his findings to his home planet. The use of soft focus creates a dreamlike quality, literally blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, as from Harry's perspective Sean's life is a fantasy. Once again, Duffy plays with ideas of primary and secondary worlds as Sean's home-life appears as a fictional romanticised form of the potential of modernisation and urbanisation. This sequence not only idealises property developments of the future, but also aligns a particular family lifestyle with such developments. While Harry is in awe of what he sees, the representation is ultimately conservative and is rooted in the portrayal of family life in American cinema of the 1960s, reflected in Harry's comments that 'It was like real families, the ones you see in the pictures'.[96] This is Harry's fantasy of how 'reality' should be, while the soft focus presents it to the viewer as a fantasy world. As a result, Duffy signals that Harry's idea of what is 'real' comes from received images in the cinema. Consequently, in metafictional terms, Duffy encourages the audience to identify the constructed nature of film representation.

The idealised structure of the McCarthy family highlights the elements that are absent from Harry's own family life, revealing the different sites of primary worlds from which fantasies depart. Sean's life is only a fantasy from the perspective from which it is viewed, through Harry's eyes. For those who subscribe to that world, it is not a fantasy but is viewed as their reality. The McCarthys are comprised of a traditional two-parent family where the children have their own rooms, while Harry comes from a single parent family and must share his room with his brother Paul. The representation of the McCarthys in this sequence is in stark contrast to Harry's home-life, as he views his family as somehow lacking as it is not like a 'real' family. His voice-over narrates events as the audience are told that Mr McCarthy is 'really friendly' and that 'Everyone is happy all of the time and no-one ever gives out'. This is an idealised view of home-life, with scenes set in slow motion, and featuring dazzling bright colours. While Harry is over-awed by his trip to Walkinstown, his mother feels threatened by his positive reaction to the experience as revealed when Sean pays a return visit to the Cronin home. In contrast to the McCarthys, the Cronins do not have carpets on the floor and May is presented cleaning the house, contrary to the relaxed nature of Mrs McCarthy. Mrs Cronin appears to feel particularly

[96] For a discussion of the idealised home in suburban America, see Lynn Spiegel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

threatened while pouring tea for the two boys. Serving adult tea in an effort to impress Sean is completely inappropriate as Harry comments that they received cake and lemonade at McCarthy's. A slight competition develops as May places her son in his best clothes with his hair combed back, striving to make a good impression when Harry goes to stay overnight in the McCarthy home. Therefore, as Mrs Cronin engages with an ideal, the film suggests that she is attempting to subscribe to a particular fantasy of how children should appear and behave when visiting friends.

Harry is placed between this juxtaposition of his mother's association with tradition and Sean's idyllic family life and the embracing of modernisation. Once again the film directs attention toward the influence of global culture in ambiguous terms. If the urbanisation of Walkinstown is viewed as the possible future of Ireland through progress and development, Harry's visit to Sean's house firmly positions the Americanisation of culture within that future. In a sense, the traditional 'myth of the west' as an idealised representation of Gaelic and Nationalist Ireland is subverted.[97] The western suburb of Walkinstown replaces the west of Ireland as a mythical space as the film represents Ireland's aspirations toward modernisation in a global culture.

Religion

In representing these cultural changes, Duffy uses his own genealogy and memories of childhood and of Dublin to comment upon Irish culture of the past, and also of the present. The homogenised versions of the past found in traditional historiographies is challenged by such an approach and, in Hutcheon's terms, contests 'the entire notion of *continuity* in history and its writing. In Foucault's terms discontinuity [...] has become a new instrument of historical analysis and simultaneously a result of that analysis'.[98] This leads to an understanding of multiple histories as opposed to a singular grand narrative of history, such as the public history of a culture as well as the private histories of the individuals within that culture.[99] It is through a child perspective of cultural events that Duffy's film documents the effect of public policies

[97] See the discussion of the myth of the west in Chapter 5 in relation to *War of the Buttons* and Chapter 4 in relation to *The Secret of Roan Inish*. For a discussion of links between the Irish west and the American west see Herr, and Gibbons, *Transformations*.

[98] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 66.

[99] This is evident in *The Boy From Mercury* as Duffy provides the viewer with a representation of a past that documents the everyday experiences of a Dublin community, a past that is usually excluded from traditional historiographical accounts. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of a private history within a public past.

of Church and State on the private lives of children.[100] Ireland in the 1960s is also presented as saturated by Catholic iconography and rituals, both in the private world of the Cronin family and in the public sphere of the State education system.

Throughout the film, the dominance of the Church in Irish culture appears to have a significant impact on Harry's behaviour. As a result of the death of Mr Cronin, Diog O'Connell believes that 'the key emotion of *The Boy From Mercury* is grief'.[101] There is an assumption on behalf of the adult characters that grief is the cause of Harry's imaginings, and such an argument can be substantiated by his obsession with *Flash Gordon* films which fill an absence in his life, as discussed above. However, although O'Connell emphasises the central theme of the narrative as Harry 'coming to terms with the death of his father', I believe that the hallucinations and eccentric behaviour may originate in Harry's immersion in fantasy but are motivated by feelings of guilt rather than grief.[102] This guilt is founded in the belief that, according to May Cronin, Harry's father is now omnipresent.

This sense of Mr Cronin watching every movement arises from his mother's explanation in the initial graveyard sequence as she states that 'your Daddy is going to see you growing up, even though you won't see him'. This can be viewed as another type of fantasy, in this case a culturally normalised adult one.[103] It is this moment which shapes Harry's behaviour throughout the film as Harry consequently believes that his father knows that he has murdered his friend Sean.[104] These manifestations of guilt and fear arise from the representations of Catholicism in Harry's life and illustrate the impact of such teachings on his personal development. The child perspective of events continues to represent the Church as an oppressive force in Duffy's past and in Ireland's past.[105]

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[100] See Inglis, *Moral Monopoly* (pp. 2-3), for discussion of the need for continued critiques of the influence of the Church in Ireland.

[101] O'Connell, p. 127. For a representation of child perspectives on death and dying see the short animated film *Things You Think* (Karsten Killerich, Ireland, 2003).

[102] O'Connell, p. 127.

[103] See Manlove's discussion of 'Metaphysical fantasy', in *The Fantasy Literature of England*, pp. 64-89.

[104] Harry mistakenly thinks he has killed Sean, but his friend has merely fallen on a piece of glass. The incident is an accident experienced by Martin Duffy as a child, as he notes that it happened 'when I wanted to show off how to be shot and fell off a wall landing on glass'. See *The Road to Mercury*, p. 14.

[105] Duffy also notes that the feeling of guilt was a central feature of that era: 'Guilt and control is all in that era. I can't say what it is like now as I am completely disengaged from it. Yes, I was completely driven by guilt and would have had a very keen sense of guilt and I think that was very much part of the process. Powerlessness and guilt would be the two things that I would associate with anything to do

The dominance of religion in the education system is revealed through the establishing shots of Harry's school that present Celtic crosses on the roof and the sequence in which Harry is threatened directly by his teacher.[106] Brother Dowdall taps the strap in a threatening manner, and later warns Harry that he will get a slap for every town on the map that he cannot name.[107] As he looms in the foreground and menacingly remarks 'you don't know?', a crucifix hangs on the wall behind, aligning this form of discipline with religion.[108] The child is placed in a vulnerable position as the Brother comes to represent the repressive nature of traditional Irish Catholicism and Nationalism.[109] Catholicism and Nationalism are paralleled in this sequence through the use of the Colum poem, and function as oppressive forces in Harry's life and in Irish culture. Later in the film, Brother Dowdall refers to the figure of Jesus on the cross in order to unearth the truth regarding a threatening note left in the school bully's desk, and is shot with a crucifix in the frame while telling the children that 'whoever lies in the name of God will have a dirty black mark on his soul'. Harry's subsequent sense of guilt and hallucination of Jesus moving on the cross reinforces this process as he consequently admits to writing the note left in the Maguire's desk.[110] Such a representation of the Church is coloured by Duffy's own childhood experiences as he admits that he was 'abused and systematically beaten by a "Christian' Brother"[111] and notes the similarities in appearance between Ian McElhinney and his abuser, remarking that 'I had originally shied away from Ian because he's actually quite similar in appearance to the Christian Brother who had abused me as a child'.[112] In the school sequences, different forms of fantasy, including that of religion, are established. Simultaneously, the Catholic Church becomes aligned

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with the Catholic Church. [...] They could make you feel guilty for whatever'. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.

[106] Inglis acknowledges that the Church had almost total control over the Irish Education System throughout the twentieth century. See Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, pp. 4-5. The exterior shots of the school are of the school that Duffy attended as a child. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.

[107] Brown notes that 'the general profile of the education system bequeathed by the departing colonial power remained, even as late as the early 1960s, essentially unchanged. A system of church-controlled state-supported National Schools offered basic education to the mass of the population'. See Brown, p. 248. The use of the anti-colonial poem by Padraic Colum thus becomes ironic when positioned within a system that continues an oppressive coloniser's approach to education.

[108] There is also subsequent scene in the school corridor where a Brother drags a pupil along by the ear.

[109] Brown notes that teachers during the period were 'a peculiarly resonant symbol of society where authoritarian control forced ideals of nationalism, religion and language'. See Brown, p. 249.

[110] Martin Duffy comments that as a child he once wrote a note to a school bully and also signed it 'Mercury Man' as does Harry in the film. See *Martin Duffy Interview*, Appendix.

[111] Martin Duffy, *The Road to Mercury*, p. 7.

[112] Ibid., p. 16.

with images of oppression as well as with the feelings of guilt and fear experienced by Harry.

Subsequently, as a result of his belief that he has actually killed Sean and the accompanying guilt that arises, Harry is unable to tell his father that he has been a good boy. Eventually he does say that he has been good all week, an untruth that motivates the following imagined scenario as Harry visualises the headstone cracking and the grave exploding, as a secondary world is constructed through religion. Further misunderstandings of the child character are evident as Harry fears he will be killed by Maguire if he goes into school noting that 'I'm going to die if I go to school'. May believes that this obsession with death arises from his father's absence as she explains to Uncle Tony 'He thinks he's dying' and 'I think he is dwelling on his Daddy'. Realising the possible effects that the visits to the cemetery have had on Harry, she tells him that he is no longer under pressure to converse with his dead father, saying 'you don't have to talk to your Daddy any more', and therefore is not required to subscribe to her fantasy. There is a subsequent sequence in Harry's bedroom where a thunder and lightning storm is accompanied by various hallucinations shot from Harry's point of view, including monsters at the window, shadows at the door, a glowing sacred heart picture and a hand coming through the door. Harry eventually sits up in bed screaming 'Daddy, Daddy, I'm sorry I told a lie!', thus revealing the source of his anxieties. Although the religious imagery of the sacred heart is but one symbol used to illustrate Harry's disorientation, the fantasy of religion becomes firmly associated with guilt.

Religion is presented again as a dominant force in the Cronin family life as Harry writes his will by lamplight with a crucifix positioned within the frame. The following morning, his mother plays along with Harry's fantasy and tells him that 'I can't have you go off and die until the priest hears your confession and gives you last rites'. May plays a role in order to connect her own fantasy with that of Harry's. However, the priest does not come but Paul arrives instead, signifying the substitution of tradition with modernity. However, Duffy's most interesting criticism of the Church lies in his blurring of fantasy and reality and the tribute he pays to films that deal with the moving statue phenomenon that engulfed Ireland in the 1980s, most notably Margo Harkin's *Hush-a-Bye-Baby* (1989), a film on which Duffy worked as editor. The reference to moving statues in Harkin's film are echoed in *The Boy from Mercury* as religious iconography becomes a set of symbols of the fantastic.

At the risk of over-simplifying the complex position of moving statues in Irish culture, it may be useful at this point to place this within the historical context of events in 1980s Ireland.[113] In 1985, many moving statues of the Virgin were reported around the country, attracting huge crowds of both believers and cynics. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford notes how conservative commentators at the time believed that 'Our Lady was grieved and angered by the terrible events of the previous year [1984], including [...] fifteen year old Ann Lovett dying as she gave birth to her illegitimate child in a grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary'.[114] Butler Cullingford states that 'Ireland's sexual morality, according to the conservative reading of the miracles, needed to be restored to its former purity'.[115] Rather than questioning the repressive role that the Church may have played in the circumstances leading to Ann Lovett's death, some religious leaders saw the phenomenon of the moving statues as criticising the young girl's behaviour rather than their own.[116]

In *Hush-A-Bye-Baby*, the statue of the Virgin Mary appears in the fevered dreams of a 15 year old pregnant girl, Goretti. Later as Goretti and her friend Dinky walk by a statue of the Virgin, Dinky issues a warning to Our Lady 'Don't you fucking move, I'm warning you!', signalling that religion does not function as a source of solace in this time of need, but acts as an oppressive force whose omnipresence perpetuates a feeling of guilt. It is constantly regarded with apprehension as opposed to awe.[117] It is possible to read Duffy's representation of religious iconography as a source of guilt and as a means of criticising the Church, as the concept of moving statues is aligned with the rest of Harry's fantasy world and, consequently, religion is presented as yet another fantasy.

The theme of a young boy in mid-twentieth century Ireland having visions of religious icons is common to many films in Ireland in the 1990s, particularly *The Butcher Boy* and *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (Barry Devlin, 1994). However, *The*

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[113] See also Liam McGrath's documentary on the moving statues in Ireland; *Seven Days - A Journey with Paulo Coelho.* TX Ireland, RTE 1,4 June 2002. See also *Would You Believe: 'Still Moving'* . a documentary commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the moving statues at Ballinaspittle, Co. Cork. TX Ireland, RTE, 13 March 2005 (Produced by Alan Robinson, RTE, 2004).

[114] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, 'Virgins and Mothers: Sinead O'Connor, Neil Jordan, and *The Butcher Boy'*, in *The Theatre of Irish Cinema, The Yale Journal of Criticism* 15.1 (Spring 2002), 189, ed. by Dudley Andrew and Luke Gibbons.

[115] Ibid.

[116] For a discussion of the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society see Inglis, Kenny, and Finola Kennedy.

[117] Neil Jordan expands upon this idea in *The Butcher Boy* in his ambiguous representation of the Virgin Mary, played by Sinead O Connor, who also starred in *Hush-A-Bye-Baby* (Margo Harkin, UK, 1990).

Boy From Mercury is the only film that uses the male figure of Jesus as opposed to the female figure of Our Lady. Such an approach reinforces the dominance of the patriarchal order in creating an oppressive society as opposed to the possible representation of the female figure as a source of maternal comfort and warmth as in the other two films.[118] In the context of *The Boy from Mercury*, these religious icons that dominate Irish culture are represented as domineering forces whose greatest function is instilling guilt and anxiety into children. By associating the images with other fantastic elements in the film, Duffy suggests that belief in moving statues is just as absurd as the belief that one is from another planet. As a result of the point-of-view shots, which establish Harry's perspective throughout and mediate the narrative through the lens of childhood, religion is presented as yet another type of fantasy within Irish society.

Conclusion

Such a simultaneous representation of elements of Irish culture from the 1960s and the 1980s can be read in terms of Foucault's ideas of 'discontinuity', as outlined above. In exploring the Irish past, *The Boy From Mercury* recognises the impossibility of representing a 'truthful' version of history and self-consciously acknowledges the process of historical representation by fusing images of fantasy and reality through Harry's hallucinations, while simultaneously exploring past and present concerns in Irish culture. Therefore, *The Boy from Mercury* not only addresses issues of Ireland's past in the 1960s but also links these experiences to a recent Irish past of the 1980s, disrupting a linear narrative of history in the text.

Therefore, it is also possible to read Duffy's film as an allusion to some of the contemporary debates in Irish culture in the 1990s, particularly in relation to the Catholic Church[119] and issues of child abuse.[120] Diarmaid Ferriter notes that as a result of the substantial production of works dealing with childhood and abuse, 'it is strongly tempting to conclude from an engagement with these texts that the greatest

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[118] This is coupled by Brother Dowdall's warning that telling lies while swearing on the body of Jesus on the cross will lead to the blackening of the soul.

[119] For a discussion of many of these issues relating to the Church see Finola Kennedy, p. 251.

[120] Such an approach once again applies Foucault's idea of 'history of the present'. As noted in previous chapters, similar critical representations of the Church were dominant in many films and television programmes produced in Ireland from the early 1990s, such as the screening of Cathal Black's *Our Boys* in 1991, *Song For a Raggy Boy* in 2003, the short film *Little Boy Blue* (Mongey Ray, Ireland, 2004) as well as in many memoirs of the period.

blot on twentieth-century Irish society's copybook was its treatment of children'.[121] The autobiographical nature of *The Boy From Mercury* allows for a possible reading of the film in terms of a memoir where, through the child perspective of the protagonist, the adult writer can raise issues that he may not have been encouraged or allowed to as a child.[122] This creates a space in the present where Duffy can explore the oppressive structures of religion that dominated his childhood in an Irish past.[123] Similarly, the cultural debates of education and modernisation that are presented from a child's perspective can also be read as allusions to continued cultural concerns in Ireland in the 1990s.[124] The global influences and increased modernisation of the 1960s can be understood in terms of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy in the 1990s and the danger of the State's over-dependence on foreign markets and 'reliance on multinational capital', similar to that in the early 1960s, as outlined above.[125]

Through an analysis of elements of childness, representations of Ireland and childhood in the text can be understood on a number of levels. It is possible to argue that by placing the child within a culture of the past Duffy creates a point of universal identification for the adult viewer, as the child character becomes a symbol for the past of the individual self. Hence, on a superficial level, the film can be read as a simple nostalgic representation of growing up in Dublin in the 1960s, where childhood acts as a unifying force in creating a coherent linear narrative of the past. Cultural and personal divisions are overlooked as the narrative of childhood provides a cohesive dimension to the past of a nation.

However, although Duffy's film may initially present the past as a stable narrative of childhood, his use of fantasy and child perspective encourages a comprehension of the film in postmodern terms. The past that is established is identified as fractured, as Duffy draws attention to the overt manner in which he creates meaning on screen. By employing concepts of childhood and childhood

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[121] Ferriter, p. 70.

[122] Such an approach to writing corresponds to Tucker's argument that 'the ability to write about childhood can itself act as a process of therapy and understanding where past experiences are concerned. Children's authors can therefore become their own psychologists when reconstructing their own childhoods and that of the imaginary character they invent'. See 'Good Friends or just Acquaintances?', p. 156.

[123] As a result it is possible to read the film in terms of the many memoirs of childhood that were written in Ireland in the 1990s as Ferriter notes that 'it is almost as if the process gave the authors a forum to raise the questions they were not encouraged or allowed to ask as children' (p. 101).

[124] In terms of education see Joseph Dunne, 'Citizenship and Education: A Crisis in the Republic', in *Reinventing Ireland*, pp. 69-88.

[125] See Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 'Introduction', pp. 5-6. See also McLoone's reference to globalisation in the 1960s and the 1990s as discussed in Section 2.

fantasy, the boundaries between ideas of real and imagined worlds are continually blurred. Consequently, the audience are invited to deconstruct the various ideologies at work in child/adult power structures as well as question the culturally accepted fantasies of Irish society. Through a fantasy of subversion, dominant ideologies are challenged and reality is represented as a composition of competing fantasies in which both children and adults participate. The film illustrates that belief systems may be defined as either 'fantasy' or 'reality' depending on the perspective from which they are viewed.

The postmodern nature of the production is also evident in Duffy's memoir approach to the film. In constructing childhood on screen, Duffy employs a series of techniques which, in a postmodern sense, draw attention to the self-conscious manipulation of the past in the film. Therefore, in common with *The Butcher Boy*, *The Boy From Mercury* can equally be read as a text about contemporary Ireland, particularly in terms of problematising a cohesive narrative of continuity between past and present as well as the role of memory in this process. Drawing upon a similar perspective in his discussion of *The Butcher Boy*, McLoone notes that

> the film is not ultimately about the historical moment *per se*, but about how it is remembered and interpreted in the present [...] it is a profoundly contemporary film and is most interesting for the ways in which it intervenes in the contemporary cultural debate in Ireland.[126]

This is a postmodern history of both self and nation that is created from a contemporary perspective.

Conforming to Foucault's ideas of discontinuity, Linda Hutcheon also indicates the complex process involved in recreating and representing the past in the present noting that

> there is an intense self-consciousness [...] about the act of narrating in the present events of the past, about the conjunction of present action and the past absent object of that agency. In both historical and literary postmodern representation, the doubleness remains.[127]

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[126] McLoone, *Irish Film*, p. 217.
[127] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 71.

The memories of childhood also indicate the 'doubleness' of the childhood experiences of Duffy, as they exist both within the past and the present. Consequently, Duffy's film surpasses simplistic notions of a nostalgic childhood and exposes the complex processes involved in the construction of a narrative of the Irish past through multiple representations of childness. By merging concepts of childhood and Ireland, and examining the past of self and nation from a contemporary viewpoint, Duffy uses elements of the fantastic in an attempt to access and represent accounts of Irish culture, both past and present.

Conclusion

In their examination of modern Irish culture, Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin propose that a 'new culture' developed in Ireland in the 1990s, a culture that was closely aligned with Ireland's economic success.[1] They argue that versions of the past produced during the 1990s resulted in the essentialising of national historiographies to create the image of a 'coming of age of an enlightened tolerant and liberal Ireland',[2] and claim that this new culture was 'characterised by an adulatory and uncritical tone, which often fail[ed] to trace its historical development or to identify the forces that [had] shaped it'.[3] This thesis engages directly with these discourses concerning the production and representation of history in late twentieth-century Irish culture. By positioning my analysis of children's texts within such cultural debates, I have revealed that while some novels and films revisit stereotypical representations of Irish culture and history that may satisfy certain ideological expectations, many texts investigate conservative and homogeneous accounts of the Irish past and challenge the *status quo*. In this way, analysing the varying forms of childness in the texts has accessed diverse approaches to writing about an Irish past from a contemporary perspective. This methodology has revealed a range of modes of representing Irish history during the Celtic Tiger period. By merging the diverse theories of Foucault and Hollindale this analysis has adopted a genealogical approach to the study of the past and consequently has facilitated an examination of the relationship between the representation of childhood and Irish history in novels and films of the period. It is evident that constructions of childhood and history interact in distinct and diverse ways in the novels and films discussed throughout this thesis.

Siobhán Parkinson's work uses concepts of childhood and ideas associated with processes of child development to question and deconstruct metanarratives of Irish history. The character Amelia continually challenges the ideological forces of the public sphere that impinge upon her private life, particularly in relation to gender inequality, class struggles and the representation of violence as a legitimate mode in achieving liberation. This results in the construction of postmodern histories in the narrative, a method that is similar to that used by Martin Duffy in *The Boy from Mercury*. Through the use of child perspective and elements of the fantasy genre, Duffy examines the constructed nature of dominant ideological belief systems as well

[1] Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin, 'Introduction', p. 2.
[2] Ibid. p. 2.
[3] Ibid. p. 2.

as child/adult power dynamics. Similarly, Mark O'Sullivan's *Melody for Nora* explores a specific moment in Irish history through the character of a child. O'Sullivan uses a traumatic experience of childhood to explore the trauma of the nation, both in the 1920s and the 1990s, signalling the continued controversial position of the Civil War in contemporary Irish culture. Consequently, I have shown, the works of Parkinson, Duffy and O'Sullivan employ forms of childness that challenge metanarratives of history and refuse to accept many dominant ideological constructs. A central theme to their writings is the method by which apparent 'facts' are constructed from events. Child development, child perspective and childhood trauma are utilised as modes of interrogation to deconstruct narratives of the past and relate them to contemporary Irish culture. I have demonstrated that these texts do not correspond to Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin's comments above, as they do not essentialise Irish history but rather engage with the conflicting ideologies of Ireland's past and actively trace its development.

Whereas Parkinson, O'Sullivan and Duffy actively engage with processes of deconstructing grand narratives of history, Joan O'Neill adopts a much more conventional approach in her manipulation of concepts of childhood to represent aspects of Irish history. O'Neill employs a memoir of childhood to explore 1940s Ireland which allows for the criticism of many policies of the Church and the State. However, the sentimental overtones that dominate the text overshadow such criticism and despite briefly mentioning some of the negative experiences of growing up during the period, O'Neill's account is predominantly nostalgic. Part of the novel's marketability lies in this idea of nostalgia and the longing for a lost way of life. Consequently, childhood is not only used as a means of accessing the past and establishing past-present relations for the child reader through aspects of memory and genealogical processes, but it is also manipulated as a commodity for a global market. Childhood and Ireland are aligned and commodified. This combination of nostalgia for Ireland and for childhood also dominates *War of the Buttons*, as both texts attempt to create linear and homogeneous accounts of the past. Although there is a rupturing of this nostalgia for the informed viewer of *War of the Buttons*, aspects of childhood are continually used to foreground themes of family and community, values which appear under threat in a modern global culture. Therefore, retrospective childhood in both texts signifies a loss of a personal past and a cultural past.

John Sayles, on the other hand, uses childhood and Ireland as sites of personal and cultural origin for a global audience. By using a child character as a conduit to the past to access Irish myths of origin, Sayles also employs the figure of the child as a sign of hope and possibility for the future, suggesting a potential alternative to global culture. Sayles' approach is much more complex and subversive than the approaches of O'Neill and Roberts; ultimately, however, O'Neill, Roberts and Sayles all draw upon dominant ideological constructions of childhood to signify loss or origins and use them to reinforce particular ideas of Ireland and Irish history.

While the texts may be divided along the lines outlined above, there are also a number of continuities in other areas. My analysis reveals the manner in which texts about Irish history relate to the Irish present, particularly in terms of the processes of memory. As Keith Tribe notes memory can be understood as 'the trace of history in the present'.[4] This 'trace' manifests itself in several ways in a number of texts and can be understood as a form of childness where the adult writer brings his/her own memories of childhood to the novel or film. O'Sullivan draws upon stories of his grand aunts which he had heard as a child and incorporates them into a public history. Martin Duffy also uses aspects of his own childhood to analyse the position of the Catholic Church in Irish society, while O'Neill transfers memories of her childhood to a 1940s setting and documents Irish cultural concerns during World War II. While O'Sullivan's text exposes the limitations of both a constructivist and a positivist approach to representing the past, and Duffy utilises fantasy to subvert elements of personal and cultural memories, O'Neill's text signifies the fallibility of memory and its unreliability in accurately representing the past. Like Parkinson, O'Sullivan, Duffy and O'Neill use private experiences to document wider public concerns.

In this respect, it is also significant to note the differences between literary and filmic representations of the Irish past in terms of public and private histories. While the novels explore private histories in relation to public political discourses, the films tend to focus on predominantly private experiences within an Irish past with little or no reference to wider political debates of the period in which they are set. The characters Amelia Pim, Nora Canavan, and Lizzie Doyle all have knowledge of political and cultural debates, mentioning politicians and activists by name, while Fiona Conneely, Harry Cronin and the children in *War of the Buttons* make no

[4] Tribe, p. 11.

specific references to wider social concerns. However, although the child characters in the films do not actively comment upon social debates, there are often allusions in the texts to cultural concerns, such as emigration in *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *War of the Buttons*, and criticism of Church policies in *The Boy from Mercury*. Despite *War of the Buttons* noting Irish battles in history, the films do not directly engage with the specifics of Irish political history. It appears, therefore, that in this context novels for children tend to highlight elements of public political history. Usually for economic reasons, the films are reluctant to risk alienating an implied global audience and address these issues directly. In the case of *War of the Buttons* and *The Secret of Roan Inish*, this may result from the international nature of the productions where it is possibly perceived that the implied global spectator has no interest in or knowledge of Irish political history. However, as discussed in my analysis of *War of the Buttons*, dichotomies of local and global audience or child and adult spectator can prove problematic and it may be more useful to talk in terms of informed and uninformed viewers/readers of texts.

In relation to local and global perspectives of the nation, my analysis has also demonstrated the differing approaches to and representations of Ireland and Irish identity at the close of the twentieth century. In the main, Irish writers and filmmakers have chosen to examine conflicts within Irish society as opposed to focusing on the traditional binary of British–Irish relations. The work of Siobhán Parkinson and Mark O'Sullivan explores the contradictory ideologies of Ireland's revolutionary period, highlighting the relation between past ideals and the failure of contemporary Ireland to engage with or acknowledge many of the philosophies of 1916 and 1922. In this way, they challenge hegemonic narratives of Irish history and draw attention to continued struggles in the present moment, inviting the reader to consider discourses surrounding suffrage and a united Ireland within the context of contemporary cultural debates about women and Northern Ireland. Similarly, Martin Duffy's film focuses on internal issues such as the competing forces of tradition and modernity and encourages a reading of such debates within the context of modern day culture.

Daisy Chain War links aspects of local particularism which can be read in universal terms for a global market. The narrative of childhood explores local issues and functions as popular memory in documenting elements of Irish culture such as songs and playground rhymes that are excluded from traditional historiographies. However, this popular memory is sentimentalised and marketed as part of a wider

project of the commodification of Irish childhood memoirs which occurred during the late 1980s and 1990s. Both childhood and Ireland can be understood as commodities for a global market, a concept which is also central to *War of the Buttons*. Roberts' film uses stereotypes of the nation in an attempt to appeal to an implied global viewer. The Ireland of the film has little relation to the concerns of rural or urban Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period. *The Secret of Roan Inish* also manipulates received images and ideas of Ireland for a global audience. Sayles does not interrogate concerns of Ireland in the 1950s or in the present but subverts stereotypes by signalling that Ireland represents the simultaneous trace and disappearance of myths of origin in a global culture. While *The Boy from Mercury* satisfied the desire that many Irish critics had to see urban representations of the nation, the international productions relied upon rural settings to satisfy the expectations of an implied global audience. In this way the rural location of both Roberts' and Sayles' work thus corresponds to Martin McLoone's arguments relating to rural and urban representations of the nation in the 1990s as these international filmmakers continue the tradition of portraying the nation in rural terms.

My approach to analysing texts for children in Ireland at the turn of the twenty-first century has revealed the multiple modes of representing history and childhood for a child reader/viewer. This analysis has incorporated a wide range of theoretical debates relating to childness, childhood and children's fiction, historical representation, film analysis, and Irish cultural studies. Consequently, I have explored many debates related to Irish history and childhood throughout the twentieth century and have positioned such discourses within the context of contemporary cultural criticism. This method of examining children's texts has allowed for the investigation of a wide range of issues such as gender, postcolonialism, postmodernism, child/adult relations, narrative voice, child perspectives, memory, and globalisation. In this way, the diverse and multifaceted approaches to constructing Irish childhood and history become apparent and the multiple internal and external representations of Irish identity at the turn of the twenty-first century emerge. As a result, it is evident that the representations of history in the novels and films under discussion are reliant upon the construction of concepts of childhood within these texts.

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Boy Eats Girl (Stephen Bradley, Ireland, 2005)

Boy from Mercury, The (Martin Duffy, Ireland, 1996)

Broken Harvest (Maurice O'Callaghan, Ireland, 1994)

Bumblebee Flies Anyway, The (Martin Duffy, USA, 1999)

Butcher Boy, The (Neil Jordan, Ireland, 1997)

Cal (Pat O'Connor, UK, 1984)

Carrington (Christopher Hampton, UK/France, 1995)

Chariots of Fire (Hugh Hudson, UK, 1981)

Cinema Paradiso (Giuseppe Tornatore, Italy/France, 1989)

Circle of Friends (Pat O'Connor, Ireland/UK/USA, 1995)

City of Hope (John Sayles, USA, 1991)

Country (Kevin Liddy, Ireland, 2000)

Crooked Mile, The (Stephen Kane, Ireland, 2001)

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Sunday Tribune

The Irish Times

Appendix

Siobhán Parkinson Interview*

24th April 2003

Siobhán Parkinson and Pádraic Whyte

PW: In relation to the *Amelia* books, what made you decide to write about Irish history in the first place? Was it a conscious decision?

SP: No. I have no particular interest in history and I am not a historian. To me they are more period pieces, not really history. I just see the past as a setting for the stories. I was thinking in terms of the kind of books I used to read myself as a child. I used to love those Edwardian novels, Nesbit in particular, also books like *What Katie Did*, books from that period. That's probably why I was attracted to write about that time. That's a very bad reason, you know.

Then once I had decided to set the book in the past, I had issues to deal with, like the suffragettes. First of all I decided to make the family Quaker, because I knew a bit about the Quakers. It just gave me things to talk about. Then the suffragettes seemed to be the obvious thing, because the Quakers had been so much involved in progressive movements like that. That was really where the suffragette thing came from. Well I suppose they were symbiotic, it wasn't that one precedes the other, but those ideas came together, the idea of the Quaker family and the political engagement of the mother in *Amelia*.

PW: Why did you decide to use the Quaker family in the first place?

SP: Well, I wanted to do something different. I was just bored by the usual treatment of the past and how it is presented to Irish children, a very uncritical kind of nationalism. It's perfectly valid, a nationalist point of view, but I was just bored by it.

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* All of those interviewed were given an opportunity to read these transcripts and make any minor adjustments if they so wished. The transcripts have been approved by those interviewed.

So I wanted to write something from a different point of view. And the Quakers were interesting in themselves. I knew it was a thing that a lot of kids wouldn't know anything about, because at the time I wrote the books, Ireland was so mono-cultural. A huge mono-catholic culture. I wanted to open up other ideas, ways of seeing the world, to children. This was also something that appeals to a liberal mind, the whole Quaker ideal. That's really why I chose the Quakers.

I deliberately set *Amelia* before the outset of the outbreak of the war, because I didn't want to have to deal with war. That was fine, but then there was this demand from children for a sequel. And being very naïve and not used to writing at this stage, I went 'oh, they want a sequel', and then of course my whole lovely plan of avoiding the war fell to pieces, so I had to deal with war. And *then* of course it was very convenient that I had made the family Quaker. You see, I hadn't got a plan for the second novel when I wrote the first one at all. Then the fact that I had a Quaker family and now we had a war to deal with, in fact we had two wars to deal with, it made the whole approach to war much more interesting – to write about it from the point of view of the pacifists, their perspective. That was just serendipity really, I was just lucky I had chosen the Quakers for the first novel, it came in very handy when I went on to do the sequel.

PW: The Quakers are really interesting like you say, because of the very idea that is not Catholic-Protestant, that it avoids that binary.

SP: It avoids it, yes, exactly.

PW: I found it interesting in terms of the portrayal of the nationalism in it, the character of Mary Ann and her brother Patrick and the viewpoints that come in, and the representation of nationalist ideology that comes through that. It wasn't the violence that was associated, but the ideas that could be explored....

SP: And also because it's girls as well, because the main characters are girls. We are only getting the violence and the war and even the political ideas through secondary characters. That gives you a very different perspective as well, particularly, not so much on the Irish situation but on the European war. It's very much at a distance, happening somewhere else and this is the homefront. And here's this kid and she's

knitting socks. She's living a normal life, when all this stuff's going on, and yet every now and again it impinges on her rather selfish, vain little consciousness that there is this other thing going on. So I think it is partly the Quaker perspective, but also partly the female perspective which gives you that kind of distance, from action I suppose; the action of the war.

PW: Yes, as you say, it is only through the secondary characters, through reports from Frederick and then how that impinges upon them. And then when Patrick does actually enter in with his wounds, it's the only real time they have to face....

SP: And of course, he is wounded, but he is still a heroic character. He's not real. They never have to deal with the actual engagement of the war. They hear the shooting and explosions in the distance, I think they do, and when somebody comes in from the front so to speak he's the hero, and he's her brother as well, so that's kind of nice, non-combative. And he's afraid to shoot in case he hurts somebody. Well, I think that was actually quite common at the time. A lot of people went to war or went to fight at that time. They had the ideology, they didn't have the military backup. And they were, they didn't want to be fighting, a lot of them didn't. I mean that's why Pearse called a halt to it in the end, in case people might get hurt. It's kind of touching isn't it?

PW: Yes, it's funny now. It's almost this naïve approach to the whole thing.

SP: Yes, yes. Well it's kind of this Yeatsian idea that it's all just a ritual taking place onstage, that kind of sacrificial thing and really it's not going to impinge on the rest. Women and children are not going to be hurt, the horses aren't going to be frightened.

PW: I love that bit about it, in the second one. There's so many references to the poetic ideals of war. Amelia's image of Frederick at war, this brave young man fighting and then there's Mary Ann's image of the rebels and how she comes to live up to the idea of Queen Maeve or Granuaile, and all that's undercut by Mary Ann saying 'This is not a poem we're in'.

SP: Yes. But that's probably far too insightful for Mary Ann really (she laughs).... And also, she has to be much more practical, Mary Ann, for economic reasons as

well. She's had to face reality much earlier than Amelia. Even with the things that have happened to Amelia, she's still pretty protected from real life, whereas Mary Ann hasn't that.

PW: Yes, she doesn't have that protection. Were there particular sources that you used, did you have to go off and research then when you actually had to broach the war?

SP: I did a certain amount, but I did very little, I wasn't that interested in the war itself. I was much more interested in the emotional impact on the lives of these kids. So, I didn't really want to get into it.... And anyway, we all grew up with it, as kids in school. It wasn't as if I was pushing out the barriers in research into 1916.

There were a couple of things. I read about Markiewicz's life. One account of 1916 that I read that was interesting was by Tom Clarke's wife, Kathleen Clarke, I can't remember what it was called now, 'A woman in the Rising' or something like that. [*Revolutionary Woman: Kathleen Clarke 1878-1972, an autobiography*] It was interesting because it was from a woman's point of view. But it was from an adult point of view. Also, a very very engaged woman, politically very engaged.

I didn't read anything extra about the Quakers, I kind of already knew about them through people I know.

Anyway, I didn't do a lot of research, because it's all public domain kind of stuff, common knowledge. It didn't need researching really for the kind of books I wanted to write, which are much more domestic in their concern, with political events confined to the background.

PW: I suppose it is interesting to see whether it was coming from a particular vantage point, or something.

SP: No, not really. Though, what you say about coming from a *modern* vantage point, is absolutely true. I was dealing with issues that are of concern today. I certainly didn't do that consciously, but when I read that, when I read your - I said that is absolutely spot on.

PW: So the idea of Foucault, that made you laugh did it?

SP: It did yeah. Well the word 'Foucault' even makes me laugh. I think, 'oh god, I'm a parrot' [she laughs]. Yes, it is funny when you see yourself being put in the context of the big ideas.

PW: Yes, it can be funny placed within Irish children's writing.

SP: Yes, because it has been treated in such a blasé way, so unseriously. Even still. It is taken more seriously now, but even still, it's not really been given much academic attention. So it is kind of gratifying to meet somebody who is taking it seriously.

PW: Have you seen a progression or development over the last number of years, since you wrote the *Amelia* books, where people start to take it more seriously?

SP: Yes, in the last year or two.

PW: Really? And how is that?

SP: Yes, well it wasn't taught at all in the universities untll a few years ago. Nobody was doing it, that I know of. Robert Dunbar taught a diploma course in CICE, and that was probably run about ten years ago. And that was mainly for teachers. And it was for a diploma rather than a degree. It was only after that that it began to be taught in Trinity, it began to be taught in the MA in Drumcondra. So that's all very new. I'm talking here about children's literature in general, not just Irish children's literature.

I'm not a teacher, and I have no connection with the whole child world, the whole world of pedagogy. It doesn't interest me really. And yet as a writer for children, you keep getting dragged into that and being asked your opinion. So, for me, it's been – problematic isn't quite the word – but I have always felt uncomfortable with being lumped in with teaching, schools, education and that whole project. Well obviously the writing project is a completely different thing, it is a much more expressive thing. And now, of course, the curriculum has changed and there is more emphasis on real books in schools. We children's writers begin to lose our little edge of subversion and are acclimatised and assimilated into the great and the good in the classroom. I mean, it's great in lots of ways, but it's also a bit discomfiting I think.

PW: There is the risk of becoming a text book.

SP: Yes. It means that more children are exposed, which is very very good. But there is also the risk – I don't mind becoming a text book, I don't mind the stuff being analysed in the classroom – but there is the risk that children's books are seized as part of the education project. I go into schools to find that they are drawing maps of Dublin to show the route that Amelia has taken to school. Or they will be doing some kind of cross-curricular stuff and I get quite uneasy, I suppose, about it. Even I suppose in the way that it uses history. I mean I think that the idea of using Amelia to teach history is absolutely mad, because I know nothing about history and I'm not a historian. What is in there is only the most basic facts about how the battles were going on at the time. And the idea of it becoming a history text book does really bother me. It's not, it's a novel, it's an imaginative reconstruction. I hope it is not inaccurate historically, but it is not intended to be an historical source. And yet, I know it is used in that way.

PW: Have O'Brien Press released a teacher's pack to go with it? Do you have any input into what goes into them?

SP: No, I don't.

PW: Have you seen the teacher's pack?

SP: I've seen some of them, yes.

PW: I was talking to Gerard Whelan about that, the whole idea of having teachers packs with your work.

SP: I mean, it's a sales gimmick. I can see why it's done. Some teachers don't have the literary training to actually engage with the text. And they are at a loss to know what to do, and they do need guides. So I can understand a) why it is produced and b) why it is used. I don't want to be all kind of authorial and removed, but at the same time it does make me uneasy. Ten questions about horses and carriages and Dublin in 1910 or something.

PW: Do you find it takes away from your actual novel?

SP: Well, I don't know whether it does or not. Maybe I am being a bit precious about it. Maybe it does bring children closer to the books. That's being positive. But it does make me uneasy. If I was reading a book, the last thing I would want to do is draw a map of whatever it was, or research something or other, write a letter to the character, or whatever it is. That is not the way you read a book.

PW: I suppose there are different goals for the teachers at the end of it.

SP: Yes, it's not being treated as a text, that's my problem with it. It's not being taught as a *book*. It's being treated as a tool to teach something else. I don't like that. They can analyse it till the cows come home, I don't mind that part, but I want them to analyse what I have written and how I have written it, not press it into service to teach history. I would be worried if I were a historian and I thought novels were being used to teach children history.

PW: With this emphasis on children's books being placed within the education sector and within teaching; do you see that it is actually moving out of that in terms of people's interest in it in Ireland, or is it still stuck within education?

SP: I have my doubts. I think it is still quite trapped. I mean I don't want to be too negative about it, because it is obviously a route to children, that's where children are, in schools. Even from a purely economic point of view it is a good thing for a writer, their books are being used in schools. Obviously that is one good thing. And also it's better that they are using good books, because texts books – a lot of them are very badly written actually. So, that's a good thing too. But I still do feel that it is kind of trapped, and there are negative aspects to it. Although, children don't seem to have that attitude, so maybe I shouldn't be too concerned about it. Children still come up to me with shining eyes, saying 'I loved your book, I did it in fifth class'. That's great, because they haven't been touched by that. The feelings of unease that I have about it, they haven't experienced. Then I suppose they are the kind of children who read anyway, they're the kids who would love a book anyway, no matter how it was introduced to them. They're the ones who would come and talk to me, you see, the readers. So, in a way I am not getting a cross section.

PW: Do you have much contact with the children? Do you do talks in the schools? Do you enjoy that?

SP: Yes, I do. I do enjoy it up to a point. Well, to be honest about it, I always hate it in prospect, but I often find I have actually quite enjoyed it in retrospect.

I don't like the idea of being thought of as an entertainer, and I don't like being considered as some sort of celebrity, and children do have that idea. I find it difficult to disabuse them of that notion, that you are like some kind of popstar, that people are trailing you on the streets, looking for your autograph. I want to talk about books and writing, and they want to talk about how much you earn and how famous you are. Very little and hardly at all – but they don't want to hear that.

The problem for me is that I know that it is always going to be the same kind of experience, very rarely is there anything new. It can be very tedious. Always the same. And yet sometimes, there's something that does lift you and you say 'oh yes, that was worth doing'. So, I have a million opinions about it. I think it is probably a good thing for the kids, but I don't think it does me any good. I mean it does sales-wise, but I don't learn anything from it. I don't gain from it. You might as well do one hundred as do one. It's all the same. You'd never get anything more from it than you did the first day you did it.

PW: That's interesting, because when I was speaking to Gerard about it, he was sort of saying that by talking to the children and going around the schools, it has helped him as a writer.

SP: Yes. He has always said that, and I have never understood that. I don't find that at all. Maybe it's the way I engage with them, maybe I am talking to them from a different place from he is. That could be it. I'm coming at it from my perspective I suppose, as a writer, and I'm trying to tell them what the experience of being a writer is like. That's really what I'm doing.

I get lots of feedback and reactions, that's true. Children respond and sometimes really well, with real enthusiasm and it is nice I suppose to get that. But I never hear anything new, that's what I'm saying. Teachers always say afterwards, 'didn't they

ask such wonderful questions', and you've heard exactly the same questions last week and the week before. In one way it can be quite enlivening because you do see the enthusiasm. Personally, that's very gratifying. But intellectually, up here in my head, I get nothing from it, nothing new.

Except when you are doing writer in residence, which is a new thing they are doing in schools now, where you go into a school and do a series of sessions with the same group of children, over maybe about eight weeks and that's a writing residency where you are doing creative writing, so it is completely different from the once-off visits. That's fantastic, a completely different experience. Because you are not expected to perform, instead you are working with them and getting stuff out of them which is much more interesting. It's interactive, and it touches into something real.

PW: Have you done much of that?

SP: Yes, I've done three or four. I did two last term and one last year, and am doing another one starting next week. That's really good. I do really like that. And I learn from that, definitely.

PW: So, they are coming to you with their ideas.

SP: Yes. In the two that I did last term one of them was with a special needs class. That was really exciting because first of all it was a very small class which is great. But the best thing was the children had no idea that they had any imagination. To them the idea of writing was pencils and copybooks. They were all tensed up, ready to make mistakes. I just said 'put away your pencils, put away your copybooks, just talk' and that was so liberating for them and they had a great time, did great things for their confidence. The other one that I did last term was with teenagers at second level, and in that case it was a creative writing group who were self-selected, they chose to be in the writing group, they were there by choice. That was very exciting as well because they were really keen. So, there are two completely different ends of the spectrum and very very satisfying interactions. I really enjoyed doing those. What I'd really like is to concentrate on those longer-term residency projects and not do so many of the once-offs.

PW: How long have you been writing and when did you decide to start in children's literature? Was it a conscious decision?

SP: No, I kind of fell into it. A lot of children's writers do. I began by writing for my own child when he was about five or six. So, that's how it happened. I got one or two things published and the publishers said 'keep doing what you are doing, we like what you are doing', so I kept doing it and then I got interested and thought, 'oh, yes, I like doing this'. But I had always wanted to write, in the abstract, just write.

PW: Do you feel that you get cornered into the category of the children's writer and how do you feel about that?

SP: Yes. I would rather just be called a writer and then as a qualification, I write mainly for children…

PW: The whole category of children's literature, does that make sense to you?

SP: Yes, it does. It is permeable at the edges. It does of course, yes. I wouldn't like to define it, but I know it when I see it…

PW: What would you see as the turning point in your work?

SP: *Amelia*. Because it is the first novel. The others, the books for younger children, I was just playing around with. With *Amelia* I got serious about it.

PW: Did O'Brien Press approach you for a sequel then?

SP: Actually, I think they approached me to write *Amelia*. They did, actually, now that I come to think of it. I'd been writing for younger children and they thought there was an older children's writer trying to get out. I said I didn't know any kids that age at all, but I said I would give it a go. I think they said to try and do something historical, because it was very fashionable at the time, but I didn't know about that. I'm trying to remember whether they suggested historical or not, now I couldn't be sure about that. I know I certainly started to think about the Quaker thing, the suffragette things, and that all kind of gelled. But it was their idea that I write for older children. And then the sequel – the demand for the sequel came from kids. But

no matter what you write they always want to know something more, I know that now. If you went on doing that, writing sequels - well I'd be very bored anyway. I don't know how JK Rowling does it. I don't understand anybody who can go on writing about the same character, I'd go mad. For me the whole pleasure of writing a novel is discovering the character. When you start out, you only have the vaguest idea of what they are like, it's like developing a film. Gradually the image begins to clarify on the page. That's the most exciting thing. And then when you have got to the end of the novel you have finished the character, they're cooked now, they're done. Then it is time to move on to something else. It's such a chore to have to go back and try and make them do something else.

Particularly with children's novels, because with children's novels there tends to be some sort of expectation to move from – say take *Amelia* as a classic example – to move from an inadequacy, through some sort of experience, some sort of trying experience to some sort of self-knowledge and improvement. That's ostensibly a thing in children's books. So, if you have done that once, you can't sort of keep going back and reinventing your character all the time and having them moving up. Once you have made that transition, you hope they have kind of arrived at a certain point. You can't keep leaping through the adolescent hoop over and over for the rest of your life.

PW: How did you cope then with the transition in *Amelia*?

SP: I really found writing *No Peace for Amelia* the most boring book I have ever written. I don't think it is a boring book, but it was boring to write. And also, it is the only time I have ever planned a book and I have never done it since, because I was so bored by it. I sketched out what was going to happen in each chapter and I knew where the book was going from the beginning. Oh god, it was like filling in numbers. I have never done that since.

PW: Was it a formula then?

SP: No, it wasn't a formula. I made it up. But I found that having a plan, having a very clear idea of how a book is going to pan out, very deadening. I have never done it since. I mean, it is quite risky not to. Children's novels are about 45,000 words, 50,000 words maybe – it's quite a big project if it goes wrong, because if you get to

chapter 17 and realise you have no real idea of how to close it... So, it is quite risky, but I would rather take the risk than do that again.

PW: So you have no intentions of writing sequels to any of your other work?

SP: The one that they keep asking me to write a sequel to is *Sisters... No Way!*. You couldn't possibly write a sequel to that because you have done it in a particular way and it is there for all time and you couldn't possibly do that again. They all want to know something – do you know that book? – there is a pregnancy at the end of it and the children all want to know if it is a boy or a girl. I can't understand why they care. What does it matter? The pregnancy was the point not the baby.

PW: That aspect is clarified in *Four Kids, Three Cats,* just by the whole storytelling thing, that it doesn't really matter what happens next in the story. It's at the end of the book where there is a discussion about how stories work.

SP: Yes. I suppose children have this idea – adults have it too – that the characters in the story really exist somewhere and that the author has some kind of magic access to them, and that they know. They say to me 'is the baby going to be a boy or a girl?' and I say 'I don't know'. They say ' you must know', and I say 'but how could I know?' and they say 'but you wrote it'. I say 'yes, but it hasn't happened'. They just look at me completely blankly as if I am refusing to divulge something that only I know and I am being mean by not telling them. They haven't got that point yet though. If it hasn't been written, it can be written in any way. They can write it as much as I can write it.

PW: Was there any intervention, on the publisher's part, in your novels where maybe there are elements you are not happy with, where they may have changed things or where you would like to see things done differently?

SP: Very little, I have to say, to be fair. There was some quite helpful intervention on *4, 3, 2, 1*. I can't remember the details of it now but there was some. There was one thing in *4,3,2,1* that I am sorry I did go along with now which was the bit about where I explained at the end. That was somebody else's idea. I thought that it was unnecessary, but I didn't really mind and now I think I shouldn't have.

But there were other things in that book that came through the editor, particularly to do with the Dympna character. I can't remember the details of it now, but after talking with her I developed Dympna much more. I'm not sure if I had given Dympna a story in the first draft. I mightn't have, I mightn't have given her a story. I wanted to have that kind of idea of the four children and the four stories. I think it may have been after that discussion that I added in Dympna's story, but I'm not sure, I can't remember now. I'd need to check back on my drafts, if I still have them somewhere. But there were a few things to do with plotting that were discussed and also I made Dympna much more obviously mad the second time. Because I felt she was mad, but she [the editor] felt it was not clear enough to a reader that she might be a bit mad... and the whole idea of singing to the moon, that came out of that discussion. I'm grateful to the editor for that.

But generally speaking I haven't had much intervention, certainly not at the sentence level. I did have a bit of disagreement about language in one of my books. But I just said 'No, I'm not changing it'. There was no issue, once I said 'No' that was it. I think a writer has to be responsible for their own prose. An editor should point out errors or slips and maybe raise matters for discussion, but at the end of the day, if you are a professional writer, you should be able to write without having an editor tell you how to make your sentences.

I do think there is a tension between the kind of books that I want to write and the kind of books that they want to publish. I mean publishers generally. They want to go for what's popular, what's maybe a bit more obvious and what's accessible to a wider range of children. They are, naturally, thinking about schools and how these novels could be used in the classroom. The top three children in the class can't be the only ones, all the children in the class must be able to read it. I don't want to think about that. I am writing for a literary audience and that is a valid audience, I don't think you should have to apologise for writing for a literate and literary audience. Those children deserve books just as much as those with reading problems deserve books. So I am always tending to write toward a literary child, the child who will get it, who doesn't need to have it pointed out. And they are always thinking in terms of the broader picture. That's always an issue, and it's not particularly with my publisher, it's all over the world.

PW: There was no intervention in the *Amelia* texts?

SP: No, not at all, hardly anything.

PW: In *Breaking the Wishbone*, what motivated you to write a book like that or in that style? Because it is a very distinct style, it's almost like a film.

SP: Yes, yes. Well, the reason for the subject matter is because I was dealing with the subject matter at the time. I was working for *Focus Ireland* at the time and I knew all these people who had been homeless. That's where the subject matter came from.

But the style – while I was writing this, or when I was thinking about writing it, I watched a documentary on television about homeless teenagers in Eastern Europe somewhere, I can't remember where it was, it might have been Romania or Albania. I can't remember where. Somewhere remote, somewhere I didn't know. I watched it because of the subject matter. While I was watching, I began to notice the mechanisms of documentary, because I was thinking how am I going to broach this? When I watched the documentary, I thought this is the obvious style to use. *Breaking the Wishbone* is a pseudo-documentary, though, it's not a real documentary, but that's the style in which this subject is discussed and it seemed to me the obvious way to come at it.

I had thought I wanted to use first person, for people to tell their stories. And I thought, first person with people popping up every now and again and just talking, I found it kind of raggy. Structurally, I didn't like the idea at all. Just cutting from one person to the other with no explanation as to why this person is speaking now and why someone else is speaking. The documentary format allowed me to have a reason to have the talking heads thing. That's how documentaries are made.

I find novels where multiple first person voices are used very annoying, normally. I was trying to get away from that. I knew I wanted to do that, but whatever it was that I find annoying, I just wanted to get rid of it. That was a way of solving it for me by using the documentary 'footage' format.

PW: You have no desire to turn it into a film production?

SP: Well, if somebody wants to produce it, I will certainly be very delighted. I'd be literary adviser....

PW: What were the reactions like to that book?

SP: [Shakes her head]

PW: Really, why do you think?

SP: Teenage books are a huge problem area for Irish publishers. They don't know how to market them. They have really cracked the marketing of children's books, to the schools market and they just haven't got a place for teenage books. They are afraid of them, they're controversial, although there was nothing controversial in that book, but by Irish standards there was. They haven't got the mechanisms, they don't know what to do with them. They just disappear. So that book just sank.... It's the only one of my books that was never reprinted. *Amelia* has been reprinted five or six times.

PW: Do you think they have a problem finding a teenage market in Ireland, is there a teenage market?

SP: There must be. I don't know enough about marketing to be able to say, but yes. There is a cultural problem. A lot of people interested in children's books are kind of squishy in the middle, you know, kind of nice people and they don't like this sort of thing. That's part of it. It's not just the publishers, it's not the publishers at all actually – the friends of children's literature out there, the marshmallow people, there's a lot of them. They're grand people but they will not be galvanised to champion books like that. They'd be delighted to champion *Amelia* because it is about a pretty little girl, middle class, and she's better at the end than she is at the beginning and she is about a minority culture, she's got everything going for her, she's just perfect. But no, homeless kids and contemplating abortion, that's no.

PW: Do you find that is a problem with reviewing as well? What do you think of the process of reviewing children's literature?

SP: Well it has improved. Are you talking about specialist journals or are you talking about newspapers?

PW: Both, I suppose. Newspapers first of all.

SP: I think there is a problem with newspapers. They do these big splash things at Christmas and the summer and they review twenty five books or something and it's a good thing. But they put Melvin Burgess and Jane Ray or somebody on the same page. With round up articles – a round up article about picture books, a round up article about middle books, a round up article about novels, and a round up article about teenage novels. I don't like round up reviews. They're fine as a supplement to real reviewing, but not as the core. *The Irish Times* has got a little bit better and it does do more occasional once-off reviews of children's books if they are special ones. But I have still never seen an Irish children's novel reviewed in *The Irish Times* properly, except – no that's not fair now, there have been a few.

Certainly the first Irish children's novel that I ever saw reviewed in *The Irish Times* was *The Giggler Treatment* by Roddy Doyle. Now, there's forty children's writers in Ireland and not one of them has had a book reviewed. Would that have anything to do with the fact that Roddy Doyle is an adult writer as well? A proper writer, in other words. That really riled me.

But they have done a few since, … a few other novels have been reviewed since then. And fair enough it's not a specialist …, but they could have a slot every week, one novel a week. There's enough children's novels published in this country and in Britain and elsewhere to warrant a standing slot in *The Irish Times*, I think. And maybe three or four reviewers, I would like to see that.

The Tribune has a column on children's books, not every week I don't think. It's good, but again it's a round up of everything…. I suppose I am thinking of it from a writer's point of view. If you have written a book you would like to see it treated properly. You want to know if critics think it is any good or not, and if they don't like it I'd like to hear just as much why they don't like it, as why they do like it. As a writer I want to be reviewed, although of course reviews aren't written for the writer,

I understand that, but looking at it as a writer, I would like to see that. I don't require an essay, but, you know, a few hundred words.

PW: It's okay, I'll give you a copy of my thesis.

SP: [Laughs]

PW: What about the journals? Is there a progression in the standard of reviews?

SP: Well, since Valerie Coghlan and I took over (we laugh), there has been a policy decision there to try and get more rigorous reviewing. I think it has definitely improved. And one of the things Valerie has done with reviewing in *Inis*, is that she has given Irish books deliberately to non-Irish reviewers. So you don't have that problem. That's part of the problem, it is so intimate. But you still find that you can't get them to be rigorous enough. It's as if there is this pink glow around Ireland and you mustn't say anything nasty about Irish children's books.

PW: Do you think it is going away from the soft reviews then?

SP: I think there is a movement away from it. There's two problems; one is soft reviews and the other is lack of reviews altogether. So we need to tackle it from both sides. But it's not just an Irish problem. I think it is true about children's literature everywhere....

PW: Do you see there's a difference in writing about children in Dublin and children outside Dublin, or writing for city children and rural children?

SP: No, I never think of it like that.

PW: ... Would you go back to writing about period novels again, or are you done with that?

SP: I must tell you about my next thing that is coming out (laughs). I have written this book for an American publisher (laughs). It's about Irish dancing (laughs). It's a perfectly good novel, but it's one of these books that had to fit certain criteria. It had to be set in a particular period, a character of a particular age. There had to be a

particular, almost moral tone to it and there had to be Irish dancing in it.... So it is set in 1937, I think it is, and it's coming out in the Autumn. It's part of a series....

It was very carefully edited, extremely respectfully edited. Everything was 'do you think' and 'could you explain' and 'why have you chosen this rather than that'. It was a very pleasant experience, editorially. There were lots of positive comments. The first email I got from the editor after I sent her the completed manuscript, in the title line was 'your wonderful story!'. I have never in all my years of publishing ever got an email from an Irish editor entitled 'your wonderful story!'. I think Irish editors are terrified to commit themselves to that level of enthusiasm in case the book might flop later and then – I think maybe that's what it is. But I think the enthusiasm... it really buoys you up, when the first thing you get in the morning is an email saying something like that. And then letter after letter being written like 'we really love this story', 'this is such a fantastic story, could you explain on page 57 why you did this?, can I ask you about page 95 and the spelling of that word' or whatever. But it always begins by saying, 'god, this is a great book'....

PW: That's a really clever way of marketing [selling the books with accompanying dolls]. Do you ever think any of the Irish publishers would think of marketing something like that?

SP: Well, to start with, the American people are very proprietorial about their methods. You have to sign all kinds of contracts saying you won't reveal how they did their marketing. I don't know how they did their marketing anyway.... I imagine if somebody tried to copy it, they would be up in court in a flash....

PW: So, that's another period novel coming out.

SP: Yes. I am writing an adult novel at the moment that is set in the nineteenth century, in Denmark. I have an adult novel coming out in the Autumn from Blackstaff press which is more or less contemporary....

Maybe I should just say something there about constructing the past from a 1990s perspective. When I started writing *Amelia*, I was very much influenced in my own mind by Nesbit and Burnett. But of course they were writing about their own time at

their own time and yet I was consciously writing that kind of novel now. I was aware I was doing that when writing *Amelia*. *Amelia* is very much influenced by *A Little Princess*. It's got the same general storyline. I mean it's very different in its details, but the general storyline of the rich child who loses.... there is that kind of arc.... I was aware when I was writing it that I am sitting here now writing this and I am setting it then, but actually what I am doing is sort of paying homage to something that was written then about then. I wasn't deliberately doing an Irishy thing. Obviously I set it in Ireland because I am Irish and that's what I know, but I was certainly thinking of myself as writing that kind of novel, that kind of period novel.

A child asked me one day where did I get the name Amelia, and I said I just wanted an old fashioned name, I wanted a pretty name. I don't know where it came from and then I said 'oh, yes I do' and I suddenly remembered that the nice teacher in *A Little Princess*, her name was Miss Amelia. I had completely forgotten that, but obviously my subconscious had remembered and it surfaced. This was years after I had written the novel that I was able to identify where the name had come from. So there is that definite link with it there.

The other thing that it had in common with *A Little Princess* is the double-heroine thing, the rich girl and the poor servant girl. That was deliberate. I was aware that I was doing that. It is okay to steal things as long as you know you are stealing them and tell people that you know it (laughs).

PW: I love the idea in the second *Amelia* novel that her mother was put in prison for the suffragettes and protesting. Because their mother is in prison they have to bring the washing to the Magdalen laundry. I just thought that was really well done.

SP: (Laughs) That was before the Magdalen laundries became hot news. That was just what the laundries were called and I simply used the name. I wasn't getting at the idea of what Magdalen laundries were all about, that's just where the laundry was done....

I remember as a child being very taken with Nesbit's ideas of childhood. She was the first writer that made me think about what it was to be a child *while* I was a child. She was quite revolutionary in relation to children. She has the kids in stories say things like 'what's wrong with adults is that they can't remember what it is like to be a

child'. I remember myself deciding at about the age of eleven that I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to make a conscious effort to remember because she is dead right, that's exactly what the problem is. So that might be worth looking at. She is very child-focussed. When I was a child I had the Puffin edition of *Treasure Seekers* and there is a long introduction in that. That was the first time I ever remember reading an introduction. There was quite a bit about her life. She was a Fabian, a socialist, and presumably a suffragette, I don't know, but she had quite revolutionary ideas about children.

Emer O'Sullivan gave a talk to the CBI Summer School one year and it was reproduced in the magazine. It was about the links between children's publishing and economics. That was the first time I was ever really aware that one of the reasons there was so much children's publishing suddenly in the late 80s and the 90s was because of all this money around.

Mark O' Sullivan Interview

2nd November 2005

Mark O'Sullivan and Pádraic Whyte

PW: This is more of an informal chat about some of your work, but one of the things I'm looking at is *Melody For Nora*. You've read the essay I wrote?

MOS: Yes, I did.

PW: So it will just be general questions. To start with, what interested you in writing for children in the first place?

MOS: Well, I mean, if anyone had said to me when I was young that I would some day write for pre-teens and young adults - as I call them- I would have said I don't think so. Basically it happened because I have two daughters of my own. I was writing for a long time, but I had a pretty busy life. I was working with the health board and building a house, playing football, playing rugby, hurling, doing the garden, so I didn't have a lot of time really to focus on this. I wrote a lot of poetry, short stories and that. Over a period of time I was just doing less and less. One of the main reasons it came about was, from the start I always read to my kids. And when they began to read themselves then or I read them stories from whatever book, I just thought well maybe I could do something. Basically if you look at the trajectory of my books for pre-teens and young adults, they follow a course. Basically they are a dialogue with my children in a sense. If you notice the sort of things and the depth that I go into, the character develops as the books go along. By the time I come to something like *White Lies* or *Angels Without Wings*, they are different types of books. Basically that reflects the fact that when I began, certainly when I wrote *Melody For Nora*, the two girls were thirteen and ten. When I did the last one the older girl was seventeen she was no longer reading my books and the other girl was fourteen. So, there is that aspect to the fact that I had written children's books, the fact that I am a father. And also the fact that I am a father of two daughters, I don't have any sons, which is also - when you look at the books – why there are so many female main characters. Besides that there are other things involved. I remember reading quite

recently a book of essays by Margaret Atwood about why she wrote, and she was trying to examine a sort of growing and analysing the usual things of vanity and stuff like that which are there ... but she actually called the book *Waking The Dead* and the main essay is 'Waking the Dead'. Her idea was that a lot of her books were reconstructing the lives of people from her own life from her own past, people close or relatives and that. In a sense, either making their lives better or more exciting, less drab, or even just trying to understand their lives, various things like that you know. When I read this I began to realise that I really very much do that myself, to an extent that I hadn't, hadn't really realised. For example now *Melody For Nora*. The main character is based on this woman who is ... we called her our grandaunt, but really she wasn't. It was one of these kind of connections, back in that time you know you wouldn't talk about broken homes and all that stuff. She was really a distant cousin of my grandmother's. But she came to Thurles, and was regarded by ourselves and the family as our grandaunt. She was this really generous woman, very funny woman. She was the person, of our grandparent's generation, that we were closest to as kids, my brothers and myself. And she died a few years before that book. It had a big impact on me. It was the first big death in my life really. I suppose I was very lucky in that sense. Because of her death, she began to come together as a character in this book called *Melody For Nora*. As it happened, in a period of three years I lost three of my grandparents, and this woman. This woman was first. The other aspects of Nora in the book are a grandmother who played piano in our local cinema and all that, all that stuff is true. All of these people from my past, my antecedents if you like, came together to form the character of Nora. There is a sense of me saying, 'I don't want these people to be dead', I want these people to have... Like all lives they had lots of problems and stuff like that. I didn't set out to do this intentionally, I only realised after, rationalising after the fact, but I saw that it was true. What I was doing was reconstructing a life. That woman, the Nora woman who the character is based on had a very repressed, very narrow kind of life, which didn't quite suit her character because she was outgoing and a very funny kind of person. I was rekindling her spirit and my grandmother's. The other side of that was that I wanted to tell my kids about the kind of stuff that did actually happen, like her playing games and stuff like that and relating the family history to my kids, it was just a way for me to do that. Again, I can't say that I consciously sat down and said 'I'm going to do this because', it happened because of those forces and because of the fact that I did always want to

write and I didn't have the time in my life. Which was quite ordinary: married young, I was married at 24. My wife was 23. If one of my daughters came home now at 23 and said she was getting married we'd go crazy. You get tied up in this lifestyle, but the notion that I wanted to write always stayed there and I kept in touch by writing poetry and short stories and I would occasionally get published in *Poetry Ireland Review* and stuff like that whenever I got around to doing any. And it just came together at that time. The other main force that came together at that time was my physical – like I was always very active, playing games, the rougher the game the better - I did a lot of outdoor work, helped to build the house – then I got this ME thing and my physical world crashed. Then I had all of this time on my hands. I was thrown back on my own resources, that's when I began to sit down and write.

PW: There are so many things that I want to ask you from that. It is fascinating. When you talk about the different trajectories in the novels, a lot of them are about generational conflict. Is that the sort of thing that you were trying to explore with your children in a way, putting it out there for them? Is there a pattern and did you consciously develop that pattern?

MOS: I can't say that I consciously developed any pattern. I have to say that in everything that I write, including the novel that I have at the moment. This is my first novel for adults.

PW: Yes, what's it called?

MOS: It's called *Enright*, Blackstaff Press. In all the run up to the novels that I wrote, I always start with the person. I don't start with the story and I don't start with the logic or the intention, of what's going to happen and why it is going to happen. I just start with the person. I've always written that way. The story develops out of periods and different ideas I might have depending on how the personality for Nora began as you say, it's very much with the character. If there was any intention, the one thing that I did try to do was to have strong female characters. I wanted to tell my daughters that sexes achieve in the same way. In effect I suppose this seems almost redundant in some ways now because society has changed, but even fifteen years ago, which is when I began to sit down and think about writing for my own kids, it wasn't so

obvious, particularly down the country it wasn't so obvious. So that was definitely an intention, strong female characters that they could identify with for a start but also see that they could be as strong as they wanted to be. But at the same time, I think in all the books, but in particular that one... I could say in a sense that I am an intellectual, the kind of stuff that I read and all of that, and I do like to analyse stuff myself, but when I write I am not. I find I can't. The one time that I did try and I think it worked pretty okay was *Angels Without Wings*, but that was a construct. Very artificial construct, two in fact, one within the other. That was a mental challenge. Whereas the other books were to me about emotions. At the same time I don't separate the emotional and the rational. At the moment I am reading William James, or about William James, the philosopher. He was one of the first people who really pointed out that we can't separate the rational and the emotional. I have been reading also Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, which I think is an absolutely brilliant book and there I think I saw the same ideas. The notion that... theoretically, the rational person according to the old way of thinking and the way of thinking still applies in places particularly in psychiatry... was that the completely rational person doesn't allow emotions into their decisions or whatever. He gives the example of children from a Romanian Orphanage. Where there is an area in the brain, pre-frontal, or something like that, I can't remember exactly, but it is an area that is connected with the emotions. It has to develop, like everything else the connections have to be made with a synapses to make you or give you the ability to feel emotions, to think emotions. What they find, and what they also found with people where that emotional centre is damaged, is that because they are completely unemotional they can't make rational decisions. I feel very much the same. I see the difference between emotion and sentimentality, obviously, but what I always try to make now is emotion, that's the thing that connects a reader to a character anyway. I don't even remember what you asked me now. About my intentions. That was the point I was making, I don't intend to be intellectual about these things, I don't set out with particular intentions. It is certainly true that I am guided as I write by my own thinking, stuff I have read and agreed with. To some extent, there is an intellectual framework. But I don't set out with intention, I always begin with a character. The story develops then from the kind of person it is, where they happen to be, what has happened historically, or not.

PW: So, you talk about different philosophical approaches, would philosophy have influenced your writing, would you have read a lot of it, is that what impacted on your writing?

MOS: Well I did philosophy in college. Now I didn't follow it through. I didn't have the opportunity to follow it through. I obviously got married very young, I was living in the country. But I have always read in that area and mainly my ideas correspond a lot with Camus. Camus is probably a bit more optimistic than I am. I tend to be personally a little pessimistic about things, in general. That's probably by what has happened over the past number of years in relation to my own health and that, but I always would have been. I had the tendency toward a kind of sadness or something. I think a lot of writers do actually. Maybe, it's a sensitivity or something like that. I do it very strongly and it is there in all the books. The main character has to keep rolling that stone up the hill because there is no alternative. The latest book that I have written is very similar to that except I go further toward the edge. The characters are characters who have various weaknesses at the beginning and overcome internal and external ones through the story. I think, probably, and again going back to the fact that I wrote them with my own daughters in mind, was that I never wanted to give my daughters an unrealistic vision of what life could be like, of course it can be wonderful, it was great for me in a lot of ways, but I wanted to present the dark and the light, but also show that there is a way through and that way through is human persistence, the resilience of the spirit, which is basically what all the books are about.

PW: Along with the philosophy, are there certain writers that have influenced you along the way or certain novels?

MOS: Yeah. Well I think that my favourite writers tend to be Americans. I particularly like people like Raymond Carver and John Cheever. I think really when it comes to these books for pre-teens and young adults, as to whether my reading has affected the styles or the way I wrote I am really not that sure but I think that probably when I was writing those books I was thinking back further to the little that I remembered from when I was younger. I didn't read an awful lot when I was younger. Like I said I was very active. I was kind of more a jock. The things that I remember would be *Great Expectations*, an abridged version of course because I wouldn't have

had the patience to read the thing. And a book called *Coral Island* which was by a fella called Ballantyne. First of all the range of books that was available to younger kids was very limited. I read the *Great Gatsby* when I was thirteen and to show you how naive I was at the time, I read the whole book and didn't realise that Gatsby was shot in the end. When you look back at it doesn't say that somebody shot Gatsby. I didn't realise he was dead. The point I'm making is that while I read it and liked the style of it, I didn't really understand it all basically. When it came to these kinds of books, for example, I didn't read any other books that anybody else had written. Now there wasn't a lot around at the time, Siobhan probably had started, Joan O'Neill, maybe some of those people. But I didn't read anyone else's books, so if mine are any different from the others that is one of the reasons. Not because I don't think they are good enough, but because I am an adult, I don't read kid's books. I never set out to make a lot of money or anything like that, which you couldn't do in Ireland anyway. There were no influences from that kind of thing either. The only real influences in my thinking were the Dickensian ideas in *Great Expectations*, the young fella Pip, and the sense of atmosphere, a sense of what happened next, because he wrote in serialised form, so he had to do that. So these were the kind of influences that I had in relation to these books. I couldn't say there was a contemporary writer or anything like that. It was the Dickensian idea of structure and atmospherics. And the emotional end of the Dickensian. Like Dickens, you know, as I said earlier when I wrote short stories and poetry, a lot of it is very obscure, a lot of it very intellectual, these ideas. I'd bring a poem down to my wife and of course she wouldn't say that's shite, but she'd say 'what exactly are you talking about?'. I would have to spend longer explaining the poem than I did writing it. If you have to do that then there is a problem, you have to communicate, but I thought that was all fine because I was talking to myself basically. But when I came to doing these I realised you are talking to your kids and you wouldn't talk to your kids in that way. I was very much aware of that fact also and the need to grip an audience with a sense of what is going to happen and a sense of emotional turmoil. Those kind of things you know. In a way you can almost say there's a Gothic influence in a sense. My first attempt at a novel for adults was actually a Gothic type of thriller which was set in Ireland in the 1930s during the Blueshirts era. But I was drawn to that literature. Light and dark, thunder and lightning. Even in the book that I just brought out, looking at it now, not thinking about it before, it is the same kind of things in it. I would definitely say that the

influences on that book and most of the others was that Dickensian thing, it's all I would have known really.

PW: And then you are combining that with stories from your relatives, your grandaunts and family?

MOS: Yes... I mean obviously I had to develop them and make them more exciting.

PW: Did you change a lot?

MOS: Well, none of that stuff happened to Nora, really, but all that stuff was happening at the time to other people. She did actually come down. All that stuff at the start is true, once she gets here and the Jack character comes in and all of that. That's where I pictured them. That's where I could draw together stories of other people and stuff that happens. Some of the stuff did actually happen, like the guy under the stage. Those things happened. Basically, the stories that I heard are a range of starting points of adventures that I made up. A number of the characters are plucked. The Alec character for example. There was no Alec, that's a complete invention. But the funny thing about that is that when that book was being launched down in bookshops down in Thurles and I was signing, this woman came up to me, an old woman, a woman like in her eighties. She said to me 'I knew that Alec fella'. It's curious, because what she did in a way is almost what writers do. What she had done was she had confused in memory this character I created and this man who had a certain mystery attached to him who came to Thurles in the 1940s as a church organist. He was Belgian and he had escaped from Belgium during the war. He was quite a different character for Tipperary at the time. And she actually confused that. I talked to her at the beginning, she said something like 'he had a funny sort of a name'. And this organist's name was Verhagen. Then I copped. What had happened was that it was her memory, her memory had taken events and people from different periods and stuck them together to make a story. That's what she had done and that's what I did. And, getting back to that Damasio book. I remember reading a thing in that and I thought, Jesus, that's really really true. That's what writing is about. The memory has three functions. The memory, well, the areas where memories are stored, you know in the various parts of your mind. The three functions of memory anyway, or of the

brain: The first of all is to store memories, store facts. That might one day go out the window. Unless it comes back to me someday. The second one is reformulating that memory all of the time as time goes on, as you get older. Because as you get older you understand ... like let's say an event in somebody's childhood. Like if the child's father hits the mother in front of them. It's stored as a memory, as a factual thing that has happened, but really the child is too young to understand. That memory is the reformulated as time goes on. He goes through his teenage years and all that and maybe he blames his father and something like that. All through one's life one is reformulating memory because you are developing it, you have more experience, you can go backwards, you can make the wrong reformulation. The third thing which is really interesting too, the third thing is that it formulates what it calls future memories. You know the ones? What he was talking about was, from the memories that you've got stored and the way you've reformulated them, you create the possibilities of a future, of your future. Everyone has to have something that they are moving towards. If you are caught in this middle part of reformulating your memories in the wrong way, you can't formulate possibilities in your future. That's the way he divides memory, Damasio. And when you think about that, that kind of encapsulates what writers do. What serious writers do. I'm not talking about someone who writes a general book, just commercially. It's very very interesting. Particularly the one of formulating memories of the future. That's really significant to me.

PW: Do you think that part of that is in your writing, in *Melody For Nora*?

MOS: Yes it is. Because all of the characters go through difficulties, they go through internal and external difficulties. As you know yourself, the external ones tend to reflect the internal ones. Again, you see, I can't say I did that intentionally. I just know I had to, that's just it. In the sense that I don't sit down and think. I have to have this happening so that it's a metaphor for what's going on here. I just don't think like that. Most people probably don't. But then you can rationalise it all afterwards, think about why you have done this, why you have done that. One other factor, hopefully, stuff that I write is a little different from what other people are doing. If that is the case one of the reasons is that because I live down the country. I'm away from all sort of cliques and groups and people that meet either often or occasionally, or are just in the same sort of circles. I'm much more of an outsider and always have been and

that's the way I want it to be. Personally, I feel that's very much reflected in my work. In that the people, even the Nora person, has to come to terms with her own essential isolation from other people while also developing her own sociability. That goes back very much in my own case, personally. While I said that I was very active and all that as a young person, I always had these interests, especially when I was in my teens and I began to read. Interests and things that other guys weren't really into. Like I was interested in Operas. See, you just wouldn't mention that, as you know. And it can be difficult when you are younger to find yourself in a situation where there is absolutely nobody you can talk to, of your own age. I talked to my father, that's where I inherited a lot of my interests. In a sense you don't really want to do that. It's people your own age you want to be with. You have to kind of accept that there is an isolation. To me that is just a reflection of the central isolation of every person who might have any particular obscure interest or anything like that. The whole game is about striking some balance between that sense of isolation and finding someone or some people to share an existence. That's what the girl does in this book. In a sense, the new parents that she has at the end are a second best. They are not her parents, you know what I mean. It's a more difficult, it's a less safe kind of world, but she has learned to live in it and create her own individuality. They're the kind of things that come through generally.

PW: It's fascinating stuff, just hearing you talk about the story or different philosophies and how you relate them to the story. Just to go back to some of the details in *Melody For Nora*. You talked about your grandmother playing or accompanying the films in the cinema. What did she do, and how did that happen?

MOS: That was quite common at the time. In the bigger cities and the cinema in the cities you would have a pit orchestra and for the bigger well-known films, like DW Griffith. That would actually have a score. You'd play along basically. If there was a bit of romance or whatever. Generally speaking it was the piano.

PW: Was this in Thurles?

MOS: Yes. This was quite common in and around the country. Well in the towns. Sometimes there would be a score, but very rare. As I said maybe for the bigger well-

known pictures. But generally my grandmother would just ... there was actually a sort of a booklet of pieces relating to different types of scenes. So my grandmother would have planned maybe one of Mendelssohn's songs, lyrical type pieces and then she might have had a nocturne for a romantic scene or something like that. But then she could play *Flight of the Bumblebee*. She would just pick them out of this book and just play them. She actually ended up as the first and only ever female Church organist in a Catholic Church in Ireland, into the forties, before this guy came from Belgium. That was how it worked. It was quite a common thing, just generally not directly in front of the screen but over to the left, just below it.

PW: Was the cinema family owned or was it just in the town?

MOS: It was family owned. It wouldn't have been purpose built. Like it was a hall for various entertainments. You'd have a film one night but the next night you might have a concert. Concerts were a big thing. You had your fella who went up and tried to sound like McCormick. So you had that as well. And of course my grandmother used to be in those too. But this hall would have been used for many things. And you had them in a lot of places, parish halls. But the equipment and stuff for the actual cinema, it would have been family owned.

PW: And how did you come about choosing the particular films that you mentioned in the book, can you remember them? *The Mistress Of Shenstone* and *Black is White*.

MOS: The reason they are there is that those films were actually on during that time in Thurles. A big part of the research for the actual background of the book was basically going through the local history and the newspapers of the period.

PW: So that's where you got the sources?

MOS: Yes, I did a lot of that. An awful lot of the stuff came from the newspapers.

PW: The *Tipperary Star*?

MOS: Yes, The *Tipperary Star*. Like for example the names of the films, incidents like the guy hiding in the hall. Bits and pieces like that. I just went there looking for... not with the particular intention of having all of the detail but also hoping that I would find stuff there that would kind of spark the story. That's actually what happened. Just from reading. When you read through those local papers of the time, you get a flavour of it, you get the sense that in spite of the fact that there was a war going on, ordinary life went on too. That's what I felt was missing from stuff written in Ireland, anyway, that I knew of. It was all about the big history that you read in the book, but there was nothing really about things like that people actually went to the cinema, did other things, kind of got on with their lives. And you find all that in the papers, this sense of the atmosphere, hurling matches going on, you know, there were things happening.

PW: And are they all archived in Thurles, in the library there?

MOS: Yes, they are. They have some very good stuff. I used it again for the latest novel that I wrote, the *Enright* one, I got a lot of the little details, little bits that you never quite hear. Even though the *Melody* book and some of the others that are historically based, and this new one that I have done, I've always approached them with the notion that I would try to portray life, ordinary life. I find that even from the historical point of view and from the point of view of the historians themselves ... I remember reading ... one of the books I read in relation to that book as far as I know, it was a book about the civil war by Hutchinson or Hopkinson, a Scottish historian who wrote this book about it... Green something. This guy is fairly well known in Irish historical circles. I remember reading there in one section of it, in one particular footnote, he says that not at all enough research has been done at local level, about what precisely happened and why in local areas, and that the understanding of history seems to be drawn from the level of the later discourse about history. So therefore the understanding, there is a slight warp in the understanding. One very good example seems to me the incident what started the War of Independence happened in Tipperary. It was the killing in Soloheadbeg of two RIC men by the IRA. And that incident has never been properly looked at or investigated, as to why it happened. Would it have happened if their had been a different guy in charge on the IRA side than Dan Breen, who was a psychopath? This is a reality. The man was really not the full shilling. When Dan Breen came to Dublin with Sean Treacy, another one of the

loonies, don't say I said this... while they were taking time off from walking around the streets looking for a B and T man to shoot or whatever, they used to spend their time at cowboy films. When the War of Independence was over, and during the Civil War, Dan Breen left Ireland, and do you know where he went, he went to Texas and worked as a cowboy. The man was mad. But you never see that anywhere. That throws a different perspective, because this was the incident that provoked the War of Independence, and this is the guy who did it. There isn't a sense of any coordination between those guys on the ground in Tipperary and Sinn Fein leadership in Dublin. They didn't say 'go out and shoot somebody'. This fella did it because he wanted to use his gun. What happened at the incident was that there was two men, RIC men, one of them was in his fifties and would have been in the place for years and years and everyone knew them on first name terms and they were guarding this cart of explosives. And about fourteen or fifteen IRA men surrounded them and they shoot them. They didn't even give them a chance to draw their guns or anything. Which they wouldn't have done anyway because they were from the old style of school. And it was basically they just went out and murdered them. So, you have the kind of a marked gap when you like at precisely the detail that happened back there.

PW: That's interesting when you draw all that back in with specific references, like the films, and the music. The music used, the different composers and tunes mentioned, are there specific reasons for those? You mention Beethoven and Chopin, I think that's it.

MOS: Well that's because they would have reflected my own strong taste. I do play piano a little. They're the kind of pieces I probably would have played myself. The simpler slower stuff, as I call them. I think the Chopin in particular.... In a sense the character is very much in the Romantic, with a capital R,.... the music of that time... like the Chopin....

PW: Yes, an Ètude. And there's *An Evening Shade*, wherever that comes from.

MOS: Yeah, again, those kind of pieces would reflect, even the Beethoven piece, Beethoven would really have been before the Romantics but that piece would be more on to the Romantics. And basically that's the kind of character... Remember I was saying earlier about it being almost Gothic in a sense. The Romantic kind of ties into

that.... Emotional, lyrical, and that kind of thing. That's part of the character of the girl. One of the big difficulties for her, for anybody really, is in the face of the fact of one's existence, or one's continual existence, it can be difficult to still believe in the dreams and the romance of it, of the possibilities of life. Within myself and within all the characters that I write, there is a kind of a flat between an intellectual, that kind of agnostic type of vision of life, and yet that kind of spiritual and more romantic side as well. I feel I know exactly what it felt like because it's my parents, you know, in a sense and hence be like that in the books as well. And it's not always the female being the romantic and the male..... In fact in *White Lies* it is the reverse, the father is the romantic and the mother moved away. She just ups and goes. She made the right decision, but very hard on your family. So that opposition is always there in all the books. That's something that I certainly... you know I wanted to communicate some sort of optimistic message like that to my daughters, for sure. They're both in their twenties now. You never know exactly what your relationship with your children is, or with anybody really when you think about it. I think the books and that, it did kind of add some dimension to our relationship. Probably wasn't vastly important, but I probably reflect the kind of dialogue we always had. I thought there was two things involved, not just about *Melody For Nora* but about some of the other ones as well. I think they were kind of surprised at how much I emphasised that bit. That I wrote these books as a father, as a father, that's how I wrote the books, so that is something, while it has it's advantages, it imposes certain limits also. You're not going to tell your children that life is just complete shit, you just don't do that. Let them find that out for themselves (Laughs). One of the terrible dangers actually in children's writing is the notion.... there is this huge didactic element to it. As I say, I don't read a lot of it, but I read reviews and stuff like that. They give a sense that there is too much of that didactic stuff, so I am always conscious of being too obvious. But yeah, the whole business of being a father was very much a part of all that writing for me. You know, you probably noticed the last book I wrote before the one that just came out this year was in 1999, I think. People have been asking me 'are you going to write for kids any more or are you not', and basically I don't have any kids now. I don't have young children. Because I never approached it as a kind of commercial enterprise or anything else, or thought Jesus now this is the most wonderful place to be, writing, you know. When that audience had moved on to another stage, I found that I just couldn't do it. I don't know precisely... well I suppose one of the reason is... the other

thing about having kids and having daughters is that when you have them, you are close to that world, their friends. You are closer to them in some terms. That's no longer there for me really. I've never said, well 'I'm not going to write anything like this anymore', because I probably will, but it will be quite different the next time. At the moment I can't actually imagine what exactly it is I'm going to do. I think I will go back to it, because I did enjoy writing them. But something has to replace the fact that I don't have my own daughters at that age. That hasn't happened yet. I've had offers from people and publishers. I wouldn't say they're queuing up, but there is a few. They make the occasional call and ask 'well have you written anything yet', and I say 'no'. I suppose in the last number of years I've been focussing on the other stuff anyway. And for the time being, or at least for another year or two I will be focussing on that too. I do feel that I could contribute in the longer term. I do feel that I did bring something different, or so I'm told. You tend to believe the nice things and forget about the other stuff.

PW: Well, when you were writing them, what characters did you enjoy writing the most, or where did you come up with the names of some of the characters, are any of the names significant?

MOS: The characters, I suppose, and a lot of writers are like this, the characters I was writing about are the outsiders. You mentioned something about the outsiders in your essay. Then having something about my own youth, having different interests, and feeling a little bit detached. Or not so much detached but isolated, but still wanting to be part of the gang and doing all the gang things or whatever. But it would be very much the outsiders, and the losers to an extent. Like the Alec character, the Jack character. In other books the, like in *White Lies*, the father, who is based on my uncle who died very young basically because of alcohol. He was a musician who played in the show bands. He wanted to be a Jazz musician. He could actually play. He was a sax player. But it never worked out for him, he messed his life up completely. That's where that character came from. So it does tend to be the outsiders. Actually the Jack name was significant for me in the first book because ... I like that character in particular. He's essentially a good guy who is drawn into this situation where he knows morally he should never have gone. Idealistically he thinks he has to. It's all about someone who is personally unhappy but is quite a brave and strong person ...

The name, well I have two uncles called Jack, on each side of the family. One of them was the hero of my youth because he was a total hurler and soccer player. The other guy, curiously, well he is still alive he's in his eighties now, was my father's brother who I never met. He went to Australia in the 1950s. I never met him. There was always this mysterious uncle Jack who lived in Australia with all these different things like driving across the centre of Australia and he worked in Papa New Guinea and raising the forests. And I always wondered what he was like. And I never met him. So these two characters are different types of Jack. One of them is the guy who is my hero, the other is this mysterious fella who never came home and we always wondered why. I always felt really sorry for my father because my father was his younger brother, he never came back to see him. So that's kind of how I made Jack. It's curious the way names come like that. And I have to say while now it has become a desperately fashionable name for babies, it wasn't when I wrote that. I have to point out all these things. Like when I wrote *White Lies*, in 1997. It was before all this, all the problems that are there now with people apparently unable to deal with immigrants, particularly from Africa. I was at some, it wasn't a conference, but maybe it was just a conversation with somebody who was saying, 'oh you got on that bandwagon too'. I said listen 'I wrote that in 1997, before all this started, go and check it'. I suppose what I am saying there is that I try really hard not to look at trends and political correctness with the way I do things. It just occurs to me. There are lots of different reasons why it occurs to me. Like the girl in that *White Lies* thing is a young black girl that I knew when I was young in Thurles in the 70s. That's when it really was tough on a girl. There was nobody else, nobody, not one other person. That was a completely different experience. I was aware of that thing. It keeps coming back to the notion of an outsider. Also in that book *White Lies*, I had, now I'm not sure, it's what I was told, the first gay character in a young adult book.

PW: There's only one other gay character I think, in Tom Lennon's *When Love Comes to Town*. I'm not too sure when that was published.

MOS: Again. It is not an issue in the novel. You have him as a character all the way through and he is dealing with situations and people are dealing with him. There is absolutely no mention of ... you find out at the end in a critical situation, where the young fella thinks that he wants to get off with his girlfriend, that's when you find out. Therefore it is never an issue, it is just a fact and it is the fact that he is the

outsider. The main character in the book, OD, thinks that nobody is as outside as he, that he's really messed up. Then you realise that this fella is further out. So, I use it in that way. I just hate the idea of having, let's say, gay characters so that it is like filling a quota. So, that's it.

PW: I don't want to keep you much longer, because you have given loads of time and loads of information. I think you have answered most of the questions that I had. But was there any particular historical sources apart from the *Tipperary Star* and the newspapers that you used when you were writing *Melody For Nora*? Did you have to go and read up on Irish history?

MOS: Well I always had a big interest in history and I always read around the subject, Irish history, and European, and American as well. So, a lot of it would have been information that I would have gleaned over the years from my reading. My favourite reading is not fiction, except possibly for short stories. But I like the real history of it. I really love it. If I go over now to 'Waterstones', and let's say there is a new book there about Nazi Germany, the more pages that are in it the better. The bigger the index, at the back, the bigger the bibliography. I just love all of that. Same in relation to Irish history. Russian history I am reading at the moment and stuck in the 19th century. I want to write about that. At some stage, you know you have to let these things ... you can't just say, or I can't say 'I want to write a story about a Russian character next year so I better read all these things before that'. You have to kind of let it dawn on you, the atmosphere, the emotion of the time. I would have had this kind of sense of the period because I was always particularly interested in the modern troubles. I'm obviously fascinated by all of that, you know. I see people now ... it's becoming politically incorrect to write about the troubles which to me... somebody said to me about *Silent Stones* .... I wrote that in 1998. I said 'actually that the book is about the aftermath'. And it hadn't happened yet, it is only happening now. That's what's interesting. Like a book like *Silent Stones*, the idea came for that when I was lying out in the garden on a summer's evening and a song came on the radio, Jeff Buckley singing *Hallelujah*. Here's me thinking 'Jesus Christ that is absolutely amazing' and I thought 'I have to find out about this guy' and I got the album. Then I realised that it was, that his father was Buckley as well. I was a big fan of his in the 1970s. Father and son. And I had been thinking about writing something in this kind

of whole area and then I read an interview with Jeff Buckley about his relationship with his father. It came together in my thinking so that the book became a story about the son coming to terms with what the father has done. Striking out and thinking for himself and that kind of thing. But the eerie fact that the voices were so similar meant that there was going to be a similarity between the son and his father too. He has some violent impulses, you know, he is not afraid to go and fight his corner and stuff like that. But I am getting away from the point now, the history thing. I'm just a reader. I love to read history. This particular book that I wrote, now I think, but again I am looking back and it is all about memory. Now you could check this out and find that it is all wrong. But this book that comes to mind is what I mentioned earlier and he's Scottish, a Scottish historian... *Green against Green*. It's about civil war and certainly it seems to me now that this went in to the writing of *Melody For Nora*. Now you could check this out and find that the book came out afterward which will just show you again about memory. I just can't be sure about that. But I certainly had read a lot. The *Collins* book, Tim Pat Coogan, that kind of stuff. And the same with Nazi Germany with *Angels Without Wings*. When I was reading a book about German society in the thirties during the Hitler period and there are different essays on different types of areas like literature and whatever. And it was there that I read about this character, this actual fella who was a writer of children's books who also wrote adult books and his adult books were banned but his children's books were published. That's where the character came from. People ask me why is it all in the past, you know... I just have the sense that you are never actually writing about the past. What you are doing is what I said earlier about re-visualising memories. Which is something that everyone does all of the time and you are just brining them, the different perspectives to the past. And however much the circumstances and the times change, people themselves don't change a terrible amount. People say, people are different, they use mobile phones modern man is different. My answer to that is, I can switch on a mobile phone, but I didn't invent it, I didn't discover electricity. Everything around us, very few people have made it, and we say modern man has advanced. No. A few men have mad scientific advances and ... and we have come with them. But we are basically the same people. Those back in the caves are no different, just a different way of surviving. We didn't invent any of these things. Somebody said the past didn't go away, the past is always there, like a stone in the river.

PW: I had a whole list of questions, but you have actually covered all of them. That's brilliant. Thank you so much for your time. Once I have transcribed it I will send it to you and you can have a look over it and say yes or no. It has to go into the back of the thesis. Thanks a million. It has been fascinating.

Joan O'Neill Interview

17th August 2004

Joan O'Neill and Pádraic Whyte

PW: What inspired you to write the book? What sort of writers would have influenced you? I know you were doing it as part of a creative writing course, or that's where it came from.

JO'N: The inspiration was that I was writing short stories for a while and I got kind of tired of them. The short story to me goes a certain distance and that's it, you know you can't do a lot with it. And, I just thought I would like to write a novel. I had written three short stories, and they all seemed to have a similar theme. One day it dawned on me that these are all about the same people. And then we went to Annamakerrig, I was lucky enough to get on a course with John McGahern. And I took a chapter with the granny in it, the chapter where Karen is coming home to have the baby and the Gran says 'we'll be the disgrace of the parish'. And Clare Boylan was giving the course with John McGahern and I gave one story to her and one story to him. He said give me as many stories as you like, but suddenly as I handed mine he said 'no more, that's enough'. I was the last one in. There was about sixteen or seventeen of us on the course and it was kind of an intensive course and he wasn't all that well. He said 'that's enough'. So anyway, off he went and I went off for my interview, I was really with Clare Boylen, and then on the Saturday, that was on the Friday, and on the Saturday, he said to me 'I want to see you before I leave, I'm leaving this evening'. He was having a last lecture before he left and he said 'I want to see you before I go'. I thought ' ah, what does he want to see me about?'. So, he gave us this fabulous talk and he called me over and he went 'yours is the best prose I read on the course'. He said 'write that into a novel, that granny will travel the world to America. And I will read the first draft'. And that was the main inspiration for *Daisy Chain War*, which was fantastic. I came home and thought about it, and thought ' I won't tell anybody, I better not tell anybody'. I knew them all on the course and there was a whole group of us, you know, and they were all very well known writers and one wonderful poet and I had even read about her in *The Irish Times* going on this

course. I thought I couldn't be right, he couldn't mean me. On the way home I told a friend of mine, the friend of mine who was driving, once I got out of the place safely I thought I could say it, 'D'you now I think I dreamt it' and she said 'you did Joan, you dreamt it, he couldn't have said that'. But he did.

Then, he was writer in residence in Trinity and I wrote and applied to get in. And he wrote me a lovely letter back, which I think I have lost, and he said 'you do not need this course. Write your book and I will read it. My brief is to facilitate people in need. You write well enough. Write your book'. Lovely letter, and a bit more, you know. I was still in the writing group, I'd started, the writing class with Liz McManus as facilitator. So, the next day in the class she came in, she says 'girls girls, you will never believe it. I got on John McGahern's course'. I said, 'ah well he wrote to me and said I didn't need it'. God, but she was always very encouraging. They were all very encouraging and she was fantastic in the beginning because there were twenty four of us and she listened to each one of us individually and she commented and she never ever put anyone off, 'you can't do this', you know. Very encouraging, not just to me to everybody. She didn't single me out in particular and say 'you've got it', but what I did have I think more than the others, and there were some wonderful writers and wonderful stories, I had the determination. I was there about three weeks and I had given up everything I ever did. Everything I ever started, apart from having the kids and staying married. Everything I did, I tried tennis, I tried golf, everything.... I gave them all up, but that was the one thing. I kept waiting to give it up. I remember saying to my mother that I was thinking of taking creative writing classes, because John had been very, very sick and I wanted something to keep my mind occupied. I saw creative writing and I said ' I am thinking of doing a creative writing class and she said 'you don't sit down long enough to write an envelope'... which I didn't. Anyway, for the first three weeks I was expecting to walk out of there and when I got to like the group, lovely crowd, brilliant group, and Liz McManus was great. After about three weeks when I was expecting to walk out and say... it's too much like hard work, I began to think I really like this... Now I used to write letters home when I lived in England, long letters, but I never really thought too much about writing as *writing*, except that I loved telling stories. Maybe that's the inspiration. It also kept my mind occupied.

PW: Are there any particular writers or books that would have been a big influence on you?

JO'N: Jennifer Johnston would have been a huge influence. John McGahern. At that time I started literature with Katie Donovan. We did a book a week like *Middlemarch*, or *All the Pretty Horses*.... She was a brilliant inspiration. I learned things like in *Remains of the Day*, the unstable narrator. In *Middlemarch*, say Basil, who's is the one of the bad characters and it is also a poisonous plant. So it taught me how to use names, like in *Daisy Chain Days*, the names of the gang as names that would put you off. How to use a name with significance, like in this one *Fallen Star*, there's a Mrs Cribbens and she is always complaining, you know. Various technical devices I would never have learnt. I learned from John McGahern more than any of them about the craft of writing, and he said there's a craft and there's a technique and you learn it. No matter how good a storyteller you are, when you put it down on the page it is different, and he sort of talked about the word and their influence. They are like stones, in his mind he has a weighing scales and he weighs up each word and if the word doesn't fit into the sentence he takes it out and uses another one. To get the balance and then to colour and shade, it's just brilliant. The power of the words and the weight of the words. Being a word-smith.... Another thing was that I was desperate to earn some money as well. I didn't think I would earn it writing novels, but with the short stories it was great.... It was a bad patch for me when I started so it was kind of therapeutic....Another thing was that when the kids were young I used to tell them stories....It wasn't that long after Annamkerrig that I started writing *Daisy Chain*.... They loved Lizzie but Vicky was the wild one.... Then I went onto the novel course in Devon.... Francis Molloy said 'I read your book, I read it all in one go, I wish I had written it myself and I am going to introduce you to a publisher'. She introduced me to Attic Press and it went from there. They took it and paid me £150, and that was it....When it came out it just walked out of the shops....Then I wrote *Promised* which did very well.... Then I wrote *Bread and Sugar*. I told you about the little girl, the little girl that stopped me on the street and said what happened to Paul?....I said I don't know. She said, You don't know!? So I thought I would go and see what happened to Paul. I went down to the south of England on the train, the whole way down to Havend where the naval hospital is, where he would have come in. Because I couldn't work out where he would have been in ten years, why they

never heard from him. If he wasn't dead, why hadn't they heard? So I went down and went through the whole procedure as if he was a person. And I talked to the security guards and they brought me into the hospital and showed me all around. This little train goes in through, right into the wards, the tracks are still there, because when they brought the men in from Dunkirk, they didn't tell them where they were. They were never to know where they were. For some reason. They thought they were in Germany, they didn't know where they were.... I did the trip that John went on with Anthony. That book was easy to write and I think of all the books, I thought it was the best one. It has a lot in it, there's an awful lot in it because you have the Quinns in the basement. There are other families going around. Then again maybe the pacing could be improved upon. But I think there is a lot in that book.

PW: There is, there's huge amounts in it.

JO'N: The TB and all that.

PW: Yes, the TB. You tend to put huge cultural and political background into a lot of them. There is a lot of mentioning of the politics of the time, particularly in *Daisy Chain War* and in *Bread and Sugar*. Is that just off the top of your head or did you have to do some serious research?

JO'N: I did some serious research. On chapter four in *Daisy Chain War* I just put down the book and researched the Second World War. I didn't know anything about it, nothing. Except to say that in the dresser at home there were ration books put away. They used to talk about the war and the lack of petrol, about De Valera.... My father was a politician and he fought in 1916 and all of that. Politics was his whole life. So politics were our life really, though we tried not to listen. I felt as well – they were very interested in current affairs and my father was a very literary man – and I felt that's the house I lived in in Dun Laoghaire, the setting is that house. I felt that if I was going to do it, even though it isn't my family, not really, it's very similar, it's semi-autobiographical. My mother said to me afterwards, why did you make us all so countrified? Because they were from the country but they were polished and she had lost all that. She was always trying to get away from her country origins. I said it is not about you mother, it's just not about you. It's not about us at all. She said 'it is'.

You know because of the difference influences that came in. For instance the Granny – my father was sixty five when I was born so the Granny would have been him. He was very gentle now. He worked until he was eighty, he worked in the land commission.

PW: What was his name?

JO'N: Manahan, William Manahan. As in Anna Manahan, we are all related. He was a huge influence in my life. In the sense now, that I didn't read the books, the books that he was reading. He always had Shakespeare in his hand or was reading poetry, he was always big into poetry. Yeats was a big influence in his life. He knew the man personally but he didn't like him that much personally but loved the work. He knew Maud Gonne McBride, he knew them all. He campaigned with them all – Erskine Childers. There were always writers in our house. Ernie O'Malley used to come and write in our house, so there was a huge influence of that. To get back to the political thing – I set this book in the war. It occurred to me that nobody had written a book either adult or children set during the war, set in Ireland at that time. I thought, well, people lived, there was no war, but something had to happen. As I said, I used to hear the conversations about lack of this and lack of that. And when I was a child the oranges were always in the purple wrapping tissue paper stuff. Everything was always 'oh, isn't that great'. And the English would come over for the meat and we had a guest-house in the summertime and they'd be there saying 'isn't it great to get the good food', they didn't have it. They had nothing in England compared to us. And we weren't short or deprived we had plenty of everything, particularly because my father worked in the country. He was always off travelling around Ireland sorting out the land, and he would bring us ... so I got a great fell of Ireland and the land and our nationality and all of that. He wasn't a great De Valera man subsequently. He might have been initially, but he was for an independent Ireland. But my mother used to talk about De Valera and different people used to talk about De Valera and how great he was. And when I researched, when I did the research, I left about four chapters down and started the research, I discovered otherwise. Things were happening that I knew nothing about. Seven months on, I put very little about what I had read and learned into the book. I read everything I could lay my hands on. I remember reading about Churchill ... I read tonnes of stuff. John bought me a book about the second world

war, a big coloured book and he bought me a little tiny aeroplane, a Lancaster bomber and all the people were sitting inside of it. The real gunner, the pilot, the whole lot. There were seven I think in it. So I negotiaited my way around all of that. Oh there was a woman in London that wrote about the Second World War. Some famous writer, I can't remember her name. I read her accounts of the bombings in London, what it looked like. I got a good idea, so that when I was doing aunty sissy I had a good idea what was going on. So then I decided to do what Jennifer Johnson said to do, murder your darlings... she didn't say that, who said that? Howard what's his name... the guy who wrote *Howards End.* Murder your darlings, if you love something. I went to all these courses, and all these places. It was a great excuse to get away. Never been away from the kids, so I went to Listowel and all these places. Jennifer Johnston said in one of these talks, if you are describing something, write down all your descriptions and allow yourself one or two sentences and that's it. So I took that on board. So I felt the same with the research not to over-do it, not to put too much into it. People wouldn't have been able to grasp it. So really, the main thing for me was the story, what was going on. And then the different opinions of all the people coming in. It's what I heard people say. So I think it is fairly accurate.

PW: There is definitely a great sense of the background to it, without overloading it with detail.

JO'N: I also lived on Round Terrace and it was a street full of mixed backgrounds. There were the people in the basements. The basements were rented out, but a lot of them were condemned so that people could get a house in Sallynoggin which was being built at the time. So you had, like the Quinns, the working class people in the basement. A lot of poverty. Beautiful houses though. Now we owned our house which my mother kept telling us saying you are not going out to play on the streets. Hyacinth Bucket! We used to go out when she went to town or something like that. We weren't out that much but I must have been an observer, because the games we played come into it an awful lot. You made up your own games and all that kind of stuff. Then there were people who were back from India, the bygone days in India people used to call them and they wore black and wore the hats. Like a day like today they would be out with trays and cucumber sandwiches on the lawn and reliving the old Raj stuff. I was only a child and they used to invite me to their afternoon tea.

There were quite a few families and there were some widows as well in different flats. Then you got middle class people waiting to move into their houses, waiting to save up and a lot of them got off to a great start there. People who did own houses ... and the kids were as a rough. Oh my god. Talk about bullying now. I didn't have to look too far back because they were rough. I used to be scared to death. My brother was in a gang, a gang of kids from the streets, not all from the basements. They were pretty wild and pretty rough. And he was blind from birth so he had about ten percent of his eyesight. I have never addressed that, but that was a tough one. We had to look after him and stuff like that. And he'd go off with them, they played cowboys and Indians. And Biddy Plunkett comes into that a bit where she was wild, you know the harem scarem wild and the one roller skate. To have two roller skates, that was a great thing, to have a bicycle, you know, all that kind of stuff. We had a car so we were a bit ostracised on the road. There were only a few cars in Dun Laoghaire and we had a phone because we had a guesthouse. My father was very well off he lived in the Gresham before he got married. As time went on my brother's hospital bills had to be paid, he lived virtually in the *Eye and Ear*. That took tremendous amount of money. That was very sad. Then the TB came into it because there were people with TB. We used to drive past Newtown Mount Kennedy and see them all out on the balconies. It was the tail-end of all of that in the fifties. Then I got interested in Noel Browne and I read all about him. In actual fact if I were doing it again I think I'd have separate book on that. That would be a very good book. That is a big story waiting to be told through the eyes of a child. TB is coming back, in London it is rampant apparently.

PW: Yes, it's a frightening thing. It fits in so well with your strong women characters in terms of the *Mother and Child Scheme* and then the oppression from the Church.

JO'N: I found it very hard to understand the *Mother and Child Scheme*. I found that very difficult. When I was researching that and I went into Archbishop McQuaid and De Valera and how much involved they were and how much in cohoots they were and how they ostracised Noel Browne and how they treated him. I read his life story. His mother died of TB and his sister died too. He had a horrific life. He was adopted by these wealthy people and that's how he became a doctor. He became a doctor because of his mother's death and because there was no cure. I think he was in the west of Ireland. That was a brilliant book. I can't think of the title of it in all fairness, an

autobiography. I read that and I went into the TB in a big way reading about the hospitals on James's street and the *Mother and Child Scheme* and the way... and I came to the conclusion that De Valera didn't want him, didn't want the women educated, didn't want them to use contraceptives because he wanted them to have tonnes of kids for the Catholic Church and not to, you know ... and De Valera did everything he said. In actual fact it was John Charles McQuaid who ruled.

PW: Right. Were you reading his letters?

JO'N: Yeah, I read his life story. I read a whole lot about him. Then one things leads to another. And in actual fact if you do your own research, and you can get your own researcher for about €150 a day, it gives you ideas for the stories as well. One thing led to another. So what I would do is look at the time I was writing at, look up what happened, the headlines what had happened. Go into the National Library, look up the newspapers, see what was happening what was current, who said what about what. Write those down and come home then and weave it into my own stories. So what I am really doing is rewriting history in a way. Not rewriting history, but giving history as what it was like, what the everyday people were living and what they were saying and what life was like, not as a history in a history book. You know the way you learned history in school, dates and what happened, the battle of such and such, well, I think what mine is, is history but also social documentation of the times and the way people lived and what they were saying. Oh and another book I was reading that was very interesting was Eamon MacTomás, his books about Dublin. The nursery rhymes and the skipping. I thinking it was MacTomás. And a lot of his books gave a great flavour of Dublin as it was. Also, I went to school in Marlborough Street as a child and this had a huge influence on my love of Dublin and Dublinese, Dublin speak. I used to go down Moore street with my friends and listening to them, just listening. We used to absolutely love it. That comes into it as well, I think there is a great love of my subjects and my characters. I think. I loved them. I think it comes across. I loved the granny. The granny is a huge influence on the whole of that book. She is my mother and my father combined. My mother spoke like that, her sayings and... she had sayings for everything. 'one swallow never made a summer' and I'd hear myself trotting it out to my own two when they come in about something. My mother had to be from the country to have those sayings. So I am as at home writing about the

country as I am about the city, because I spent a great deal of my childhood in the country. My mother was one of fifteen, my father was one of twelve, so there was family everywhere. Plus my father stayed in hotels, but really he was going back amongst the family to hear things and stories. They were all great storytellers. My mother's family were all great storytellers, my father's family were into music and acting and the arts. My mother's family were farmers but they all played the violin. They were self-taught and they were fantastic. They would tell wonderful stories about the neighbourhoods and what was going on. So it is kind of to record it all to put it all down the way it was. Life was much more simple.

PW: You definitely get that from it as well. The Magdalene Laundry, to send Biddy to the Magdalene Laundry, was that a tough decision to make?

J O'N: No (laughs). That's what would have happened to her.

PW: Did you do much research for that at the time?

JO'N: Yes, even though there is not a lot about it in it. Let me think. When Biddy got pregnant, I couldn't think of anything else that I could possibly do with her. I told you about going to the Magdalene Laundry with my friend to leave in the hampers of washing on a Friday. That must have had a much bigger influence on me than I thought because when I started thinking about the Magdalenes, I started to think about that place so I didn't find it that difficult to write about. Now that I have had to write a whole book on it, it's different again. I had to do a lot of research. But that is exactly what would have happened to Biddy. Nothing was that difficult to plot out. I don't have a problem with plotting the stories because I just go with what would have happened. That would have happened, that's exactly where she would have ended up. When I was in England recently promoting the book, the three, the trilogy when they came out in England, I remember one librarian saying 'what happened to Biddy? Did she marry Anthony in the end, did they get together?' And I went 'ah yeah, I'm sure they did'. Then she said, 'did she become a dress designer and please will you write a whole book on Biddy?' And she was very important in the librarian end of things. And I was sitting beside her at the dinner and I have a funny feeling that it was somebody like her or a few people like her who got together and said lets have the

whole Magdalene book. And I said to her, 'it would be too heavy for the kids, and it has been done to death', but it hasn't been done for children.

PW: It hasn't, well, Marita has her one.

JO'N: That's an adult book.

PW: No, there's another one called *A Girl Called Blue*. Well, actually, that's about an institution.

JO'N: When I was clearing out the books in there, I found the Magdalene laundry, Marita's one, and I had mine written, I found *Eclipse*, that play by Patricia Burke Brogan or whatever. I said I'll have a quick look. But I don't want to be influenced by them. What can you write that is different, but that she is only in the Magdalene's for a few chapters. Maybe the editor is going to come back and say 'say a bit more about, not so much the harshness of the nuns, but a little bit more about the day to day running of it'. I start with what she is doing. I give the reader about two days of her routine and then it goes into a routine so it is not mentioned too much. Then she gets sick, so she is in the infirmary for a while. Then, what else happens to her... Then of course, the baby. It is all leading up to that. Obviously it is very severe and very harsh but I haven't singled them out for too much punishment because I feel I'd lose the kids if it went on too long. Then there is the great escape. It's like the fire, you know the fire in *Daisy Chain Days*, it's like the crisis point isn't it?

PW: Yes.

JO'N: You know the way you build a story and the situation rises into conflict, rises into crises and then the denoument. The crisis in this is when she escapes. She thinks this is it, I've had it, I'm getting out. Then it goes into an adventure. That has to happen to keep the page turning. If I left her too long... That Antonia Hobbs (?) book was beautifully written but she is in the bloody convent, in the chapel, singing prayers, with the nuns, dressed up in different uniforms. Nowadays, for a modern book, you have to sustain their interest. I loved writing it. I thought I'd hate it because it is historical. I absolutely loved writing it. It took a lot out of me, you know

at different times I was sick .... I fell in love with the character, she's called Stella. Her father is onto the stars and wants to call her Estelle and that's where 'Fallen Star' comes in. I told you about the baby didn't I? She loves Buddy Holly and I decided to give her Buddy Holly rather than Elvis, everyone does Elvis. So, she is into Buddy Holly, which I was and so I got a book on Buddy Holly. When Buddy dies, it's 1959, he's not very long dead. Her name is Stella Wood, and she wants to be a film star, the star theme runs through it as a motif, and when she has the baby she calls the baby Holly. And the priest who brings her to the Magdalene comes back when the baby is born and she thinks that he is bringing her mother and is disappointed and he says 'I came to baptise the baby, and your mother is very anxious to get it done'. He says 'what are you going to call it' and she says 'Holly'. He said 'Holly, that is not a name', it might be a today name but it wasn't then ... not a saint's name. She says it is Holly after Buddy Holly and he is horrified and the nun says 'it doesn't matter, let her', because when the baby goes out, nuns are cruel bitches, the name will be changed anyway. So he is christening the baby and I'm on page 69 and it only dawns on me, and this is what I love about writing, he christened her Holly Wood and she is going to be a film star! (Laughs). And I said to the girls, ah God, I can't do this, guess what the baby's name is? And they said 'Mum that is just brilliant, leave it'. Now whether the editor will leave it or not I don't know. And for a kid reading it, that should be good.

PW: Does she pick up on it, or is it just left unsaid?

JO'N: Not much said about it at all. But because the baby is so delicate and she has got to be with it for a week or ten days, she can't, when it comes to parting with it. Even I couldn't see her having to let it go. And then I thought she'd let it go and then get it back. She would go and sneak out. So I thought, no, that is too difficult. So I decided that I would let her escape with the baby. A bit like Biddy, but you know, more detailed and a different route. She has an aunty who lives in Bray which was very handy for me. That's where she is aiming for. The one person who is on her side is her aunty Nora because her mother won't have anything to do with her. I think that was the saddest part of writing the book. It was a huge challenge and I just loved doing it. Now I could write sequel to that called *Rising Star*, when she starts getting on her feet. I suggested that to Emily (editor). Now she is not opposed to that or

anything, she said we will talk. But you know when you finish something it is just enough to leave it. I don't know if *Daisy Chain War* needed all those sequels. But *Daisy Chain Wedding* and *Daisy Chain Dream* was really a winding up of everything. Certainly if I had that book back I would rewrite it. The pacing in that is not great. It has the Quinns, it has the different families. You've got the Doyles. It's a bit bitty.

PW: Yes, there is a lot...

JO'N: It's like a conclusion of each story. I'd make it bigger maybe. But you always say that. The only book I wouldn't change is *Daisy Chain War. Bread and Sugar...* Maybe *Daisy Chain War* a little bit, a little bit more of the boarding school. But then again I couldn't wait to get them out of it.

PW: You were in boarding school....

JO'N: Yes, that is just exactly what happened. (Laughs) That is autobiographical, my mother coming down to the school and killing the nuns. Just as they were about to complain about me, the Reverend Mother called her in and said 'now you know, I have to tell you, Joan is causing trouble'. Before she could get the next words out my mother just reefed her asunder. 'Don't blame my daughter'. I was causing trouble. (Laughs). 'We haven't got a proper teacher for science...' She gave out yards. And my mother had been a nun so she wasn't afraid of the nuns. She was one of the very few mothers that wasn't deferential and afraid and scared to death to open her mouth, she used to march in. She only came once or twice. But the other schools we were in, the national schools, she'd be down to the nuns regularly. She would talk on a level with them, whereas the other mothers that we knew didn't go near them. She was very authoritarian. She is very much the granny in the story, and Gertie. She was a great business woman. We did turn the house into a guesthouse. We made a lot of money on it, she did very well. In those days every house was nearly a guesthouse, if there was any room at all in Dun Laoghaire. You had so many coming over from England for the good food. Same ones came back year after year.

PW: Did those people end up in the book?

JO'N: Yes, names and all some of them. Grimshaws and Turnbulls and names like that. And we got to know about Lancashire and the factories and the cotton mills from them.

PW: There is a great sense of place in the books as well. You really get the sense of Dun Laoghaire. Even in *Daisy Chain Days*.

JO'N: Was I telling you I went over to Dun Laoghaire to check out the west pier where the mother's studio is? As I drove in the first dance of *West Side Story* came on Lyric, just as I parked the car and I thought, that's a sign, I am on the right track here. I had difficulty with *West Side Story* as to how much I would use and how they would put on the play and the performance and everything and then I decided that they wouldn't do the play at all. But yet the reader wouldn't realise that I they hadn't done it, because they did do it but we just missed that bit. But even getting ready and picking it. There had to be a cohesion between Beth and her friends, the Bosnian boy Alexandru and Ryan, and the Goofer, and Spider. There had to be a connection because they are all in different classes. If they were all in the same class there wouldn't have been the same tension. They would have got used to one another. If they have one particular class they could attend ... I thought this would be suitable. Plus Alexandru has a great voice and is good looking, he has everything. So it is all like pulling strings, it is like being a puppeteer. But you don't always think it through at the time. Sometimes it just happens. Lots of coincidences happen ... That's what I love, I love the resolution. I love the fact that I write the whole book and the structure is never changed and the chapters are never changed and the length of chapters are never changed, or the endings. Clare Boylan taught us how to end chapters and begin other chapters. Have a cliffhanger at the end of each chapter. So there is a lot of learning went into it. It's not all happy. Sometimes it is.

PW: It was interesting the way there is a complete thread the whole way through about the places in Dun Laoghaire. It is interesting looking at it from the first book right through to the fourth book and the change in the places that they visit and the change in the shop names. Were they the actual shop names or did you change them?

JO'N: No, they were the shops. In actual fact, *Bread and Sugar* had more shops in it and my agent said at the time that this is not a book about a list of shops in Dun Laoghaire. But he was wrong because people love that, they love that. I took out some of them but the shops were all there. The face of Dun Laoghaire changed. I went to Dun Laoghaire to look around and see what was different and try to get a flavour of Dun Laoghaire today. Yuppy land really it is. I tried to do that in this but then I got that mostly through Beth and her attitude toward everything, didn't I? Plus they are middle class, they are not working class like the Doyles. The Doyles weren't exactly working class, they were up from the country. But the others around them were working class, very much a working class book, and poor people and what happened to them and how they were walked over. Whereas with Beth, she is from a privileged background really. That is why she is so sympathetic to Alexandru and the treatment he is getting. They are all from a privileged background. And my brother's background comes into play in this too in the sense that my mother decided not to send him to the national school, he wouldn't be able for it. He would be bullied and all that. So she sent him to the private school where they killed him. Dreadful. That has never left me and I have never been able to write that story. But I put a bit of it in *Daisy Chain Days*. I did know how these gangs work. I have met Ryan and his gang. All through generations you are going to get that. That's your public school boy thing. That kind of stuff....

PW: What are most of the letters about that you get from kids?

JO'N: Some fill in the forms at the back of the books, others write just saying we love the books, please write back.... It's probably like when I read *Anne of Green Gables* and those sort of books, they stay with you. When you are young you are very impressionable and you don't forget. You remember characters and they influence you in a certain type of way...

PW: In your writing as well, by referring back to the other books the reader is in a sort of privileged position where they know these memories as well as Lizzie does.

JO'N: I wondered about *Daisy Chain Days*. I talked to Robert Dunbar before I wrote it and I said do you think I should wrote about the family again as in the trilogy. And

he said, well, you may have done enough. And you see, I think Hodder wanted the *Daisy Chain* title in it. And when I was doing it I felt that it was a stand alone book anyway, you didn't really need Lizzie in it. And then I couldn't find a place for her, I found her very difficult to write about. She is kind of peripheral. I couldn't fit her in to what was going on except that she was the listening ear, until I got to the end and I thought I have to have a reason for doing all of this and going back into the family photographs. It was the only device I could think of to bring them all back, to say where they all were. So at the end, she sorts out Alexandru. She sorts out the whole thing by going into the docks and getting him. Originally I had Beth going in on her own but that didn't work. He wouldn't have listened to her. He would have turned away again. I wondered if he was fickle, did he not care. Then I decided to make him care but scared. Scared to go back. Why wouldn't he be scared to go back? He was going to get blamed for everything. They are going to try and blame him for everything. That is exactly what can happen. Then I gave it to Mary King to read who works with the refugees and she said 'yes, that's just right'. Also, there was a tremendous aloneness about him. Also there is about Beth who is in a lovely house with a family and a father and a mother and a sister and Elvie, who is very good to her, and yet she is on her own. It is a very nuclear family. The father is looking after the refugees in Dun Laoghaire, plus his practice. The mother is trying to find herself, trying to get a life for herself as mothers today do. The sister is totally wrapped up in herself. And the only one really who has time to stand and talk to her is Elvie the maid.... Elvie sits down with her and discusses it all.

PW: She is kind of like Mrs Keogh.

JO'N: She is. If you look through it all, she is not exactly Mrs Keogh, but she is a type of Mrs Keogh. Elvie is good hearted and is very involved with them all. I didn't want too much of her either, too much of an intrusion. The story is really about the gang and Beth and Sarah, working out there...

PW: I like the fact that there are those references back to the other books, to the life history and it does give you this 'family tree' sense.

JO'N: It does. Even Bill and the family were involved with the Black and Tans. When we moved into Royal Terrace there was the protests.... There were two little dolls on the bed when we moved in. There were magazines on the table and there was the chute down for the horse. They used to bring horses, they used to stable the horses there, there was even straw in the chute. There was a little bathroom and sitting room and we used to play there, that was our doll's house. So I have it in the book, was it Bill was in the IRA, and they used to hide there? Not too much of that but there is a bit. Granny used to hide her bottles there in the coach house.

PW: There is also a bit in the last book where the reader knows more than Beth about the family history obviously.

JO'N: I love that when the reader knows more than the narrator.

PW: Yeah, and I think that works really, really well in it because of that privileged feeling. But there is one point where Beth is talking about Lizzie, about her gran, being a nurse during World War II, which she isn't. In the first book, Lizzie only decides to become a nurse after World War II. I was just wondering what the reason was for putting that in.

JO'N: When was she going to be a nurse?

PW: It is after the war has ended that Lizzie goes to England to become a nurse.

JO'N: Yes, but Lizzie is a nurse in Dun Laoghaire in St Michaels.
PW: Yes, but it is only after the war that she goes to England. I think it is Beth who says that she was a nurse during World War II and used to tell them all the stories about the Blitz.

JO'N: Oh God, it is Aunty Sissy who has the stories about the Blitz. That's wrong.

PW: Yes.

JO'N: It doesn't matter because Beth might think that. (Laughs)

PW: Exactly. This is what I was thinking because it works really well. I presumed it was deliberate.

JO'N: (Laughs) It wasn't actually.

PW: I have it here. I can point it out to you. (Reads extract)

JO'N: Well with one sentence that could be put right. 'Granny was a nurse in England after the war'. It was Aunty Sissy who told of all the bombings.

PW: Yes, Lizzie doesn't actually go until the war has ended....

JO'N: Although when the books were coming out in England I did have to read them all again, so I was pretty up to date on them. It is awful when somebody asks you a question as well and you can't remember exactly.
PW: Well, that is natural enough too.

JO'N: *Daisy Chain War* does stay with me more than any of them because it was my favourite, it was my first too. I think there is always one that a writer has....

PW: With your editors, have you ever had any major disagreements, where you have decided, no that has to stay in, or they have said, that has to come out?

JO'N: The biggest one was with Ailbhe Smith when I was writing *Daisy Chain War*, half way through the book I killed off the Granny and she said, you should never kill your best characters or your main characters until the penultimate chapter at least. So, in went the Granny, no problem with that, Granny went in and died I think at the end of *Bread and Sugar*. I kept her in, and she was right of course and it wasn't a major clash. In *Daisy Chain War* the Granny gets sick half way through but I had her die at that point. So, it was like weaving it, I just had to thread her back in, very simple and very enjoyable. The thing about this editor that I have with *Daisy Chain Days*, I think it is skilfully done. I think it has more skill in the writing than in the others. But I also think that she was very picky about the sentences. The odd thing here and there that

was changed for the sake of it. I don't really like that. But on the other hand she is very thorough. She is very gentle; she'll say 'Joan is this all right with you'. I definitely have the upper hand here.... So, she is deferential on that but there is also a great sense of what she wants. I will be interested to see what comes back. But I didn't have any major clash.... The fact that the whole structure is there, the whole story is written by me and I have done all the plotting and there is no change. There is no change in *Daisy Chain Days*, nothing. The one fault, that is a fault, is that the writing is a bit abbreviated. My adult editor used to say that the Irish suffer from verbal diarrhoea and I got the one writer who doesn't do it. I talk it but I don't when I am writing. It is sparse enough and sometimes I imagine that I leave things to the reader too much, to take in. I sort of leave the reader to their own imagination, but to too much a bit. I did a screenwriting course with Tommy Holland in the Irving foundation in Yorkshire and my adult editor said that it didn't do me any good at all that I became even more abbreviated....

PW: I think that is good, that is why the fire scene works, that you don't go on and on about it....

JO'N: I have just read a book that I thought was brilliant and it was recommended by Richard and Judy. *Liars and Saints*. It is a whole generational thing, it does all the generations and yet it skims through them all. Yet it doesn't skim, you get a lot, but yet she is not wordy, she does not go on and on into a big saga epic thing. Marian Keyes' latest is a doorstopper. I loved it, *Liars and Saints*. I liked it. And I thought I was going to do another book and I was going to do a saga which seems to be the trend, plus, I love that kind of writing, it is like an epic but it is not overdone. They were reviewing it on Richard and Judy and some of them were saying I would like to have more about this or more about that. In actual fact when I read it I was totally satisfied with it and I couldn't wait to get back to reading it. Which is very hard to get nowadays.... She is a new writer, Maile Meloy ... and it is her first book. It is sparse and I was telling Robert about it and he said that is best kind of writing. Even in *Daisy Chain War* it is kind of sparse too even though it covers a lot of ground.

PW: Yes, I was saying in that paper that you read, which has been changed slightly, the narrative voices that you use work really, really well. You keep it in a first person

narrative but have so many different views of world history. Was that a conscious decision to do it like that?

JO'N: Yes. In those days, time was more leisurely I think. My mother was always busy. She would go down to the Church to mass every morning and get her shopping and meet the different ones, have a quick word and that would be it. Then different friends used to call to her say at eleven o'clock for a cup of coffee, people would call in. We would hear that kind of talk that was going on. For instance, when the buses were going too fast. The buses were huge things. They hated them because they were scared because the trams must have been so slow. They'd be talking about things, about the old days. I would have heard a lot of different opinions, you know, my father's friends, different type of people. There was much more conversation in those days because there were no televisions. So we did hear it. A lot of it I would have read. Then you would read something and then recall something. The reading would give you the recall. I can remember all sorts that wouldn't have been of any interest to other people.... It's like seeing everything in an exaggerated form. I remember Maeve Binchy at the Edna O'Brien Life Achievement award saying to us that you have to exaggerate. And the dialogue too. To get the dialogue right it's not said. It reads as if it is the way we talk, but it isn't. Because if I wrote the dialogue the way we are talking now I'd have to polish it, it would be too repetitive.... I learnt all those tricks at all the different courses. God knows I went to loads of them, I don't know how many I went to but I did a lot. Showing not telling is the main one. Show it, don't tell it. And then you tell it. There is a way of showing it in the telling. Now that is very hard to explain. If I am teaching creative writing I find it very hard to explain. There is a way of telling the story by showing what has happened. I think the show not tell is the most important writing device of all of them. If you don't engage the reader and show them the picture, forget it. I am always conscious of the reader, the age of the reader. For instance when I was writing Beth I could see all the other Beth's reading it, all that age group, and Sarah and Becky. And I was very conscious of always having the reader on my shoulder and thinking I must keep this reader interested. And the fire – something had to happen in that story to make it suddenly come to a crisis, because the reader couldn't endure them just taunting him all of the time. Something has to happen. It has to resolve itself, it has to go forward and get worse. Nothing ever stays the same. It has to get worse or it has to improve it or stop altogether. And there was

no way the teachers were going get involved. They were very subtle about the way they got at him. Even Potty when he had an idea of what was going on he kind of shied away from it. I think he was a bit eccentric doing his own thing anyway and it wasn't really his concern. He wasn't really taking it in too much. Until the fire there was nothing much about the teachers at all. Which I think is what goes on in school today. The teachers are watching them but only on a certain level. I talked to the woman who is Career Guidance in Newpark, she was very helpful. She told me about particular kids, refugees who were not coping well. Some of them could not cope at all. One girl got on so well, she was some Muslim religion, that another family from the same type of religion adopted her. Well, that was unusual.

They are up to their own devices down there in Dun Laoghaire. They don't have proper supervision, they have volunteers. There isn't a government thing. When I rang up the agency, the Irish refugee agency they didn't want to talk to me at all. I didn't get any help from them. So really I made up a lot of it and then got your woman to check it. And I drove over there and watched them coming in and going out. They have seen horrific things from whatever country they have come from and they don't even get counselling for it.

PW: I think we have covered most of the questions in what we have talked about. I suppose the style has changed in the second book and the third book. How come you decided not to have a first person narrator in the second and third book?

JO'N: Well, John was too young to narrate his own story. With the omniscient you can bring more characters into it. You can tell a wider story and give a broader picture. Really *Daisy Chain War* was set in a house whereas *Bread and Sugar* they travel to England. *Daisy Chain War* didn't travel until *Bread and Sugar*. People came to them. It started moving out in the next book. *Daisy Chain Days* was incorporating so many conclusions that it would have to be omniscient, but for *Daisy Chain Days* I definitely wanted her. I think I stopped at that. There was no other viewpoint in it. Also the diary was a device to give the reader at the end of each chapter the reader had a little note of what happened. It reminded the reader of what was going on too. It was like a bit of shorthand for the story. That was a device for that. And to remind me too of what was going on. Plus her companion. There was this aloneness again. I don't write down synopses on each one and what they are at, only very sketchy ones.

But later on I did realise that Beth was lonely and had no-one to talk to. Wasn't going to share anything with the sister. Her sister had gone to Trinity so she had lost her companion who had been more friendly with her. They were growing apart. I thought the diary was the friend. She didn't trust Sarah even though she was her friend. You get a lot of that, you get rivalry and all that. She didn't trust Sarah to tell her her feelings about Alex so the diary was a good way to put that in to let the reader know what she was thinking without her having to tell somebody else. For had she told Sarah, Sarah would have been straight in after him herself. I thought Sarah was a great character, I liked her. She couldn't care less. She was a good foil for Beth. It's Lizzie and Vicky again. Then when Tory comes she is just otherworldly, she is from another planet. Because of the disturbed background and the parents. It was Vicky all over again. I didn't really change the plot to any great extent except for the Bosnian boy.

I didn't set out strictly speaking to do another Daisy Chain War. The first thing I thought of was the Bosnian refugee. Robert Dunbar said you are setting a trend here. That's what they are going to be writing about because that is what life is like. Who would ever have thought when we were growing up in Dun Laoghaire that there would be any foreigners. Apart from English people we very rarely saw foreign people.

PW: Yes, so much has changed in the last ten years even.

JO'N: I wanted to address the changes. Being impartial, not showing what I felt about it, just giving. I like to do that. This is the picture, draw your own conclusions. Not to be intrusive and ramming it down their necks, especially vulnerable kids as to what I think about it. Just letting them know that this is the situation. This is the way it was, this is what people said.... Making the everyday that bit extraordinary. I remember when I first started writing and thinking what do I know, what big huge event can I write about. But what interests me more is everyday life. It is fascinating. It is what you make it. Amazing things can happen to people. Some of the stories are unbelievable and you think how did I get through that, how did they get through it? How did the Granny survive, what she had to put up with in *Daisy Chain War*. That was my own grandmother's story, stuff my mother told me about her mother. So there would be a lot of authenticity in that. My mother used to tell us an awful lot of stories

about her childhood. They grew up in an orchard so she would tell us how the apples were graded, you know when they go to the country and they are doing all that. The different types of apples and the names, so I didn't have to go too far to do all that. A lot of the country stuff came directly from her. But that is why it is important to record it, they are going to be gone. Life today is completely different to when I was young. Yet when I was writing about Sarah I was writing me, I was that kid. I just didn't give a damn. I think I was just rebellious. I just kicked against the system. It was so rigid and we were so repressed. But within reason. There was only so far you could go. My mother would have absolutely killed me. She was very strict. That is another thing. If you have strict parents, you do tend to break out and go a bit wild. You can do.

I think the poverty is the underlying thing in *Bread and Sugar* though, when you look at that. Dun Laoghaire in *Daisy Chain Days*. And *Bread and Sugar*, the Quinns and all those they really didn't have anything. We had people in the basement, I remember them scrambling for a shilling for the gas metre to cook the dinner, if they had anything to cook. Frank McCourt, people say he exaggerated, he hasn't. My parents were both from Limerick and they were farming so there was never a shortage of food, but when we went to Limerick, one aunt married a man whose three sons, he was a widower and his three sons were priests... we had to go around and see them all, the big banners up and all of that. It was everything he said. Full of religion, full of repression, full of poverty. And the more religion there was the more poverty stricken they were....

PW: I think it is fantastic that you managed to capture that world in *Daisy Chain Days*. I think it must have been very difficult to a degree to capture that.

JO'N: I kept asking people. I decided not to put much in about religion because it doesn't have any bearing with the kids. But as for the school they go to, it is non-denominational, it is everything. It is Newpark, or my made up version of a Newpark comprehensive.

PW: That's the difference with the others books. You don't have the religious, cultural and political stuff in *Daisy Chain Days* to give a background to the same extent that you have in the other books.

JO'N: But it has the Bosnian thing so that marks it out for the times we live in. I picked a Bosnian because they were one of the first crowd to arrive. It all happened around the time I set *Daisy Chain Days* in. I looked up the different nationalities that came here and they were one of the first. I was able to find out more about the background of the Bosnians, because Bosnia is getting sorted out now with Srebrenica and that. I didn't want much of it, I didn't need much.

PW: No, I think it is like the other books as well where you get a sense of the conflict.

JO'N: I think you get a sense of his real deep down – you know he puts on a very brave front. I don't think he is that scared of the lads. I think if he let himself go he could have turned on that Ryan and killed him. But he is smouldering more than – I think there is a tremendous sense of his grief, without him saying it.

PW: He seems to be much darker and deeper than any of the others. Their stuff is so trivial to him compared to what he has been through.

JO'N: Poor old Beth is trying to mother him and he is not having any of it, he is not able for it. He doesn't want that intrusion, neither does he want to share it. He shies away from ever telling her too much. But he has lost more than he is ever telling her. And Mary King was telling me horrific stories about their parents being beheaded in front of them and everything. That was a big ritualistic thing. And they saw that, hanging from trees and everything. And those that weren't killed off went out and committed suicide anyway. She felt that was very right that they go very silent. Especially the lads. He wasn't going to start moaning to her. And she was a bit intrusive then. She didn't know where to draw the line really in her desperation, (a) liking him and (b) wanting to help. And being absolutely shocked. Her innocence at the shock of the way Ryan and the boys were treating him. Of course they were jealous. This good looking guy walks in on their territory. And it brings you right back to your adolescence and you think 'Christ', how to handle everything and doing it all wrong. Never getting it right. I love that. That's what I love about writing. I love their awkwardness. I love the first time they do something, the first reaction and all the different reactions. Her going off with the girls and telling them, when Sarah drags out what happened and all that, because that is exactly what happens.... Trying to

work out who is thinking what and different opinions. Complications. It is a total web. That is the joy of writing....

PW: Thanks a million. I really appreciate all of this....

Martin Duffy Interview

2nd March 2005

Martin Duffy and Pádraic Whyte

MD: I appreciate the interest; it is the interest in the film that keeps the film alive too. A young woman friend of mine in Germany has done some research into young people's films in Ireland and the UK, a bit of a broader thing. It is that kind of interest. Somehow the film has continued to attract this kind of interest and that's what keeps things alive. If a film doesn't resonate over a period of years, then that's it, it's gone basically. So this keeps it alive. Her name is Jule Diener. She did this thing as a German thesis but she had done some work in Ireland before and she was looking at or comparing a whole set of films from Ireland and the UK and was seeing if there was template of an absent father, a theme in both UK and Irish film. So, it turned out that with *The Boy From Mercury*, you could tick all the boxes, in terms of this father thing.

PW: Yeah, certainly in most Irish films in the 1990s you have that absent father thing which academics have great fun with, because it is a lack of leadership, or moving on from de Valera and all that.

MD: First of all I have to say that part and parcel of the creative process or whatever is that you don't particularly know. There are lots of those things that I would not have been in the slightest bit aware of, but might have seen them in retrospect, because you are purely part of it yourself. You are a product of it as opposed to being someone who can say well I set out to do this. You are inside the box, you are not able to stand outside of it and look at it. I'd also have to say that from my point of view, my father was alive when I was eight, but my difficulties with my father were so great that when I wanted to write a film about my childhood, which is largely what that is, I didn't know how to put him in the film, frankly. A brother of mine died when I was eleven and that had a very profound effect on my family. My father died when I was twenty but really from the death of my brother on, I had very little connection with my father. I was the youngest by far and he was beaten, it was kind of the last

straw for my father. And I just didn't know how to incorporate that into any kind of look at my childhood. Speaking of it in personal terms, my mother was hugely supportive of me and my creativity, I was a real mother's boy. I mean, stuff that isn't in the film for instance and it's a true story. I am the youngest of thirteen so it was a really, really packed kitchen. Now, I had an imaginary friend and my mother used to leave a place for my imaginary friend at the table. That's a huge indulgence in a house that small. For instance in the film, the boy sitting on the railings and talking to the sky, I used to do that. And my mother was very supportive about that and when my brothers and sisters would complain about it she would say 'no he's ok, leave him alone'. Whereas by contrast, something that any psychiatrist would have great fun with and which I did once tell, because I have been in and out of therapy a couple of times and once told a psychoanalyst who obviously had a field day with it. There used to be a TV series called *Bat Masterson*. Which was this elegant cowboy, played by Gene somebody, and the thing about this guy wasn't that he was this rough cowboy but he was a gentleman's cowboy with a gentleman's suit and everything. But he had a cane and sometimes uses the cane as part of how he defends himself. I once got a piece of broken chair and painted it black and made the silver thing on top so that I had a cane. This is at the age of eight or nine. I remember once with this thing walking proudly down the street to meet my dad on his way, because there was a time when he would always be coming back from the pub. But there was a particular time he'd be back by, you know. I remember walking down the street to meet him and when he saw it he was furious with me for having this thing and said it made me look completely stupid and to get rid of it and everything. I remember going home and in the back garden breaking it in two and sticking it in the bin. So I mean, for me in the film, and now I'm just ranting to you, but for me in the film I wanted to write about my childhood, but the fond memories were about my mother, and the narrative turns in it that role was served, if you like, by my father. If he had been in the story in reality then really it would have been a story about a mother and father who saw a kid in two different ways. A mother saying 'let him be what he is' and a father saying 'why doesn't he act properly and hang out more with kids'. I got away from that in the storytelling and went instead for this kid who is in search for, I dunno, I couldn't really belong here, I must belong somewhere else and a need to belong, a kid having a need to belong.

PW: There is very much that idea of an outsider in it. You have said that before in your *Road to Mercury* as well. You felt like an outsider as a kid as well, and latching onto that sort of identity. One of the things that I wanted to ask you was the Saturday morning cinemas as a child. Was this something regular that happened...?

MD: Yeah Completely. I have to say, and this is being very pedantic about it, I'm not sure if it was Saturday morning or Saturday afternoon. Somewhere in the back of my memory I have to say it was afternoon. I think in the UK it was in the morning. But that was a weekly thing, completely and absolutely. I was just about at the tail end of when you could go with your jam jars and your milk bottle tops and stuff for your entry into the cinema. That you even didn't have to be there with your couple of pennies but that you could get in with that. And the huge queues outside and people pouring in and doing stuff like when the film was on you'd have a bunch of pals waiting outside and you'd go and you'd open one of the emergency exits and they'd rush in the dark before the ushers could stop them and things like that. Seeing *Flash Gordon,* seeing *The Phantom*, which is the one I particularly remember, seeing the *Batman* series. These were kind of strange leftovers because this was very early Sixties but what we were seeing were series from the Forties. But then there was kind of a programme where you would get like the *Three Stooges*, one or two 'folly 'n'uppers' as we called them. A few cartoons and a film, or maybe two films. I saw *Thirteen Ghosts* or something it was called, Dr Sardonicus, Hammer horror film that frightened the living daylights out of me. You'd see the westerns of course and all that sort of stuff. So there was already a staple diet every week. And always, as in *The Boy From Mercury*, the cinema was the Sundrive Cinema, next to Sundrive Park and so you'd go into the cinema and then into the park to play out the film. You'd go and play Cowboys and Indians and whatever else. It was a complete ritual.

PW: What were the films that stuck out? *Flash Gordon*?

MD: When you ask me that question, the very first film that comes into my head is *The Incredible Shrinking Man.* I could probably list you half a dozen films that I remember seeing from then. But that film really, really got me. Actually, I have seen it a few times since and I actually think it is a very deep film, particularly as it gets toward the end. Eventually he is being reduced and reduced until he is microscopic, a

tiny, tiny entity. And even as we would say now in Quantum Physics, he becomes the whole universe. It is incredibly intelligent for what it is. That had a huge affect on me. That and the fear that I got from Dr Sodonicus. They're the two that right now, very, very strongly, stand out in my mind. There were a couple of ghost stories that would stand out in my mind. And I think maybe *The Haunting*. I would have to check whether I remember that from then or maybe from later. Because I was an apprentice projectionist when I was fifteen. Maybe it is not then. That is always a slight blur for me. But there was definitely this kind of *Thirteen Ghosts* because we got those 3D glasses for watching ghosts in 3D. It was a real sort of communal event, just hundreds of kids sitting down watching these films.

PW: When would you have stopped going?

MD: With me, it would have happened when I was thirteen. Because when I was thirteen, I went to college to become a priest. I was in a seminary for a couple of years. So that would have broken it for me. I was in the college for two years and when I came out I started working at fifteen. So my memory is that it would have lasted up until that time, up until twelve or so.

PW: It was still very much a social event; was it the entire neighbourhood?

MD: Yes, completely so. I remember, just towards the end of it, trying to go with a girl, which would have been a whole other experience. Even though it was still the milling crowds.... It must have been just as puberty was kicking in that I moved to the college. At that stage, 1964, this is extremely early days for television, very limited television. I think it is kind of a shame now, there is too much home entertainment. Then there was this focal point that all the kids would flock to, as with Sunday nights. Local cinemas would be packed then too. So, television was the death of all that.

PW: The TV in *The Boy From Mercury* kind of features a little bit....

MD: ... But in a very unentertaining way. He doesn't see anything interesting on the TV. It is always boring programmes. He gets to see excitement in the cinema and then

he is watching some old television play or interview or *What's my Line* or something. They're the only things he sees on television.

PW: That's interesting because I was going to ask you about that, what sort of motivates you to choose these particular programmes to put into the film?

MD: Well, with the interview, I couldn't believe my luck. It was the most boring thing you could imagine. It was the guy talking about his function as a European Ombudsman. It was like you could feel the ash settling. *What's My Line* just seemed funny, because I remember it as a kid and I remember it was one that everybody watched. The other one turned out completely by coincidence. I was looking for something that might be on TV on a Sunday night and I discovered a play that was written by an old mentor of mine, Michael Voysey. He had been the script editor in RTE when I sold my first two TV plays there. So when I was looking through the library of plays I saw his name. *Tuppence in the Gods* was its name. But just the fact that it was Michael, it was an opportunity to bring something of my own into it. That's how the choice happened.

PW: With the *Flash Gordon* films, was it a similar thing, or why did you choose them?

MD: That's a very interesting question because, first of all, when I wrote the script, I wrote a false set of things.... created this character Chuck Solar, who then at the end goes to Mercury and the Mercurians are all these weird creatures. That was originally what I had in the script. Then it was Rod Stoneman who said 'why go pastiche when you can find the real thing?' Then I went hunting through tapes. And what I found with *Flash Gordon*, it was perfect with *The Boy From Mercury* because it was about his father, he does something on behalf of his father. Unfortunately I fear that it gets lost in the mix. I mean at the time, the mix in the body, I'm not complaining about the mix of *The Boy From Mercury*, I'm talking about the mix in the body of *Flash Gordon*. The guy says to Flash Gordon, I will radio your father, Flash Gordon has saved the Universe. So this theme of the father from the beginning. I think the first line that you hear from Flash Gordon is the father talking and Flash saying 'no Dad,

I'm not coming home, I have to go and follow Zarkov' or whatever it is. He is doing something for his father.

PW: You also have Frank Shannon, who played Zarkov, he's actually an Irish actor. He was born in Ireland and emigrated to the States, so you pay homage.

MD: Oh, I didn't know (laughs), well of course I knew all of that!

PW: That's interesting because I was trying to figure out exactly why Flash was chosen, and the music as well. You use different songs from different EMI records. I presume it was difficult to get the rights for that.

MD: It was. I would have liked to have used more, but they were really charging a lot of money. So the Shadows one at the start, and what is the other one at the end? It's ok if you have forgotten as well, it is ok.
There are two songs and we tried to get a third one as well called *Starry Eyed* by Tommy Steele, around the end credits, but we just couldn't afford it. *Shakin All Over*, that was it, and Apache. I would happily have had more music but it was budget limitations.

PW: Did those songs have any particular resonance or significance?

MD: No. The thing of playing guitar with the sweeping brush, I saw one of my brothers doing that, he used to do it regularly. I play guitar, but he never learned. I remember seeing him in the kitchen, doing this and listening to the Shadows....

PW: When you are talking about it being semi-autobiographical, what were the main features that you would see as literally jumping out of your childhood onto the screen?

MD: The sense of being an outsider. I now live in Berlin. My wife sometimes says to me that I look like I just fell from another planet. Sometimes I walk around disorientated. Now, when I am here in Dublin, I am actually not being fully familiar with where I am. I don't know if that is because I have just grown accustomed to it

over the years, or whatever. In my own biographical terms, I really wasn't supposed to happen. My mother was forty six, my Dad was fifty. We reckon I was something like her twentieth pregnancy. She had diabetes and was overweight. The famous family story is that my mother went to the hospital and said 'I am pregnant 'and the doctor said 'no it is the menopause', or the change of life as it was called then. My mam went away and then went back a few months later and famously went to the same doctor and said 'the change of life is kicking'. And they were very, very alarmed and they said that the likelihood of me being Downs Syndrome was extremely high because I was on the top of the list for everything: late pregnancy, diabetes, over-weight mother, high number of pregnancies, so I was right up there, 80% or something. And that is why I am called Martin, because my father's favourite saint was Blessed Martin de Porres and they were all saying Novena's to Blessed Martin that it would all turn out okay. There was always a debate in the family whether I did turn out okay. So it was this complete unlikely event, I was born at fourteen pounds, a huge baby. My mother had a nervous breakdown more or less immediately after I was born. I think I must have had a sense of the unlikelihood of the whole thing, it was there with me all the time. It is basically true. I did believe.... I used to look out at the sky and think 'when is the spaceship coming'. Genuinely. And I remember talking to other kids, when I was seven, eight or nine, saying I had special powers and believing that I couldn't possibly belong to this world.

When I was born, my eldest sister was already married with three kids. My mam used to be pushing me along in the pram and my nieces and nephews would be walking along beside me. The whole thing was sort of so unlikely that I think my sort of way out was through fantasy. I used to talk to myself a lot as a kid, an awful lot. This whole imaginary friend thing. Really, it was kind of like a disconnection. That is kind of what I wanted to write about. The fact that my mother allowed it. It could have gone either way. If my brothers and sisters were pissed off with my behaviour and my father didn't like my behaviour and mother said 'what is wrong with this kid'; I mean it could have gone the other way. It could have wound up that I would have gone to therapy or be in a home. It is possible that you are just that bit too odd. I was redeemed, I know, by the fact that I was funny. I know that I was a funny kid I have been told that a lot. I had a good sense of humour as a kid. Speaking honestly and openly, when my brother died I think it was the end point of that. But I remember when I was kid of seven or eight in school, putting on shows for the nuns and the

other kids. I have a distinct recollection of a nun and she was holding out her frock thing and I was pretending to be a bull and she was pretending to be a bullfighter, and this in front of all the other kids in the canteen at lunchtime. So, that was my redemption, that I was also funny. I remember at home putting on funny acts for the family and all that. I remember doing impersonations of Jerry Lewis and Red Skeleton at home at parties.

PW: Do you still do that?

MD: (Laughs) No, unfortunately not. I started writing the story just a couple of years after my mother had died. She died in 1990 and I started writing in 91. It was really kind of for her that I was writing it. It was a celebration of that. The other elements come in in terms of storytelling. It wasn't so much that I was trying to join the body of work of absent fathers, it would have just loaded the story completely differently if I tried to actually address what that was going to be.

PW: Why Mercury?

MD: I have no idea, and yet that's all it ever was. Mercury of course is the Messenger god. And Mercury is the planet in the sign of Virgo, I'm a Virgo. But I didn't know any of these things. When I was a kid I just knew it was Mercury, no idea why. It was never any other planet.

PW: That idea of being an outsider, what happens when you come back to Ireland now. What do you think of contemporary Irish culture? You have that outsider's perspective, you are distanced from it to a degree. Do you see any major changes?

MD: I see huge changes. But I lived outside of Ireland for a few years, between America and the UK when I was making these two films. That was a gap of three years. Even then when I came back, it felt very different. I found a real difficulty reconnecting with a lot of friends. There was a gap that I had occupied in friendships and the gap had become filled with other people. I found as I was moving over to Berlin, that there were a lot of people my age in Berlin because of the nature of its culture. It is not German as such, it is Berlin. A lot of people were very actively

involved in friendships, I love friendships. In Berlin I have gathered a great number of friends and I love it. It is a culture that is about getting older. That's what I love about Berlin as well. Whereas here, it has suddenly become a culture about money. It is funny that you should ask me that question now because in the past - since I only got here yesterday evening – Waiting on the plane with a couple of Irish people at Schonefeld, two women behind me in the queue waiting for a taxi, a couple of guys when I was waiting for a DART earlier on, and a guy on a mobile phone, four conversations that I overheard and they all had to do with money. They all had to do with some type of business transaction. These two guys at the DART station were wondering whether or not one had put in £280,000 stg into a deal to buy a two and a half million euro house. The others were talking about what account they were going to use to draw down this and ... I was just hearing about money. As far as I am concerned, it has become a very acquisitive culture. When I was here, you could sit in a pub and amuse yourself with stories and not have very great expectations. I am sure it is good to have expectations but it changes the culture, it changes the way you think about it. Maybe why I relate to Berlin so well is that its post-empire culture, its post-everything culture. Germany had its nose wiped of all the shit of everything that empire is all about and they were reduced to rubble, and now struggle to deal with the fact they are this lame, limping giant that is nothing compared to what it was. The headlines yesterday evening were that 5.2 million are unemployed, that's the highest figure since the thirties, since the rise of the Nazis. I am not advertising as such but it makes the people more introverted in a way that they turn in to what is going on inside themselves and look to other people as to what is going on inside themselves. At the moment it seems to me as if it is kind of like some form of spending spree or acquisition thing here.

PW: One of the things about the film in relation to that is, is there a sense of loss for 1960s Ireland in the film? In the *Road to Mercury* you talked a little bit about the nostalgia market when you are trying to pitch a film to the producers. Do you see *The Boy From Mercury* as a nostalgic film? Is it a loss in terms of, is there something in Irish culture that had been lost?

MD: First of all, it is about whether you are in or out of the box. All of it evolved out of this wish to celebrate that particular bit of my childhood and I would have to say

that particular bond with my mother. That was the real motive. It had to be that time. *The Boy From Mercury* did not exist in the now. Some people were saying don't tell another story in the past, tell it in the present, but you couldn't have that innocence now. My wife's son is eight. He has so much information, science education programmes, all the adventure programmes. He is surrounded by everything. He actually has far less room for imagination than I had. All this imagination is in terms of - so much is given to him. Whereas with us we had loads of room for filling in the gaps. The gaps get smaller and smaller. I say that now, ten years after having made the film. I can see how now kids might look at that film and be awe-struck at how innocent he could be or how simplistic those times could be, or how simple life could be. The one thing that I know, I also have an eight year old daughter, Ellen, who obviously has English whereas Noam only has German. But for them, still the nightmare sequence for all its simplicity still scares them. So, nightmares still exist, that fear in your bed at night, that doesn't go away. All these other things around having scope for imagination have been hijacked and taken over. All the blanks have been filled in. With my wife's son I see him having very little time for just his own free-floating thinking. I used to day-dream and I don't know how much time there is now for daydreaming for kids. Someone should set up a separate course for day-dreaming for kids. What do you do, you lie back on the floor and look at a ceiling that has been painted the colour of clouds and blue sky and you just lie there for an hour. (Laughs). That has sort of gone.

PW: Do you think, looking back on the film now, that it achieved that idea you had of representing the bond between you and your mother, celebrating that idea? Do you think that it worked well with Rita and James in terms of establishing that sort of a bond?

MD: I hope that I didn't overplay it. The extent of what happens in the film is that one of his last sentences is 'Goodnight mother' as opposed to 'Earth mother' and that is as far as it goes. I didn't push it to an extreme. I am happy I didn't. It has always been a regret of mine that when the film was played in the cinemas, I had actually made a mistake. I had put in what I had thought was a very modest line to uncle Tony, about the telephone operator saying 'don't let him touch anything until he gives you a ring'. And then a beat after that you cut to Harry with his 'Goodnight mother'. But I have

seen that in cinemas and people are still laughing at that line. I never thought it was that funny, but people are laughing at that and the Goodnight mother is gone. That would be on my list as one of the things I screwed up on.

PW: In terms of the Irish culture aspect and representing the past, the treatment of Harry and his guilt complex which comes from the Catholic Church and the iconography that is used, do you want to talk about the angle taken on Catholicism in education in the film.

MD: Guilt and control is all in that era. I can't say what it is like now as I am completely disengaged from it. Yes, I was completely driven by guilt and would have had a very keen sense of guilt and I think that was very much part of the process. Powerlessness and guilt would be the two things that I would associate with anything to do with the Catholic Church. They made you feel that you had no power, that they had all the power. They could make you feel guilty for whatever. It is true. I actually did write a note once to a kid in school and signing myself as Mercury Man. He was picking on some friend of mine. It was found by a Christian Brother who went one by one around the room 'who wrote this note' and you had to swear. And I lied (laughs). That part actually happened.

PW: That's a great sequence, and the moving statues... From the article that you read I was trying to interpret that in relation to some of Margo Harkins stuff in *Hush-a-bye-baby*.

MD: Which of course I cut.

PW: Did that have any influence on the moving statue stuff in the film?

MD: Honestly, it was more the irreverence than anything else. It wasn't particularly the phenomenon, it was the irreverence, the making a joke, looking at a crucifix that looks back. When we were doing the nightmare scene, it was somebody from the art department's idea to put flashing lights in the Scared Heart. Pure irreverence.

PW: In that scene in the school, there is the use of the Padraic Colum poem. Does that have a particular resonance from your childhood too?

MD: It is the only poem that I do remember by heart. I did remember it by heart. It was drummed into us. I don't know why this particular Brother drummed it into us, but he drummed it into us successfully. I won't even try now, but I probably could recite a good chunk of it. Certainly at that time, it was my number one choice because... part of it stuck in my head because he used to make us act it out.... It was a performance as well. As an adult I taught myself the 'Jabberwocky'. Those are the two poems that I could recite. I also used the exteriors of the school that I had gone to. The interiors are from somewhere else, the exteriors are from the Christian Brother's school that I went to.

PW: Is it still a school?

MD: It is still a school, but now it kind of functions as a community school. Christian Brothers are still there. Two of them.

PW: They didn't have any objections to the use of it in the film?

MD: No. They were there really more in a background administrative role. It is all lay teachers and everything.

PW: On one of the points you made earlier about kids coming to see the film and how they might view it. What sort of audience did you have in mind when you were making it or pitching it? Was it a child audience or an adult audience?

MD: There is a huge ongoing debate in the business about this. Always at the top is the term 'the family film'. In other words an adult would go with a kid. I haven't seen *The Incredibles* but it is a film that kids can see at one level and adults can see at another level. An adult would see it as something about the past and remembering their own childhood, and a child would see it as a more visceral thing about this kid and what this kid is doing. I used to have a catch phrase for it, which to be honest I have tried to apply as a catchphrase to two other things that I have written, but it

hasn't be used yet: it is a film for anyone who has ever been a child. So there is no defining line. With my own daughter or my wife's son we would often go to films and the best films are the ones that have one level for the adult and one for the child audience. I believe that it fits into that and I know from experience that kids do experience it in a very strong way. They can be moved by it and scared by it and fascinated by it.

PW: It is interesting from reading the *Road to Mercury*, the problems with finding producers and companies that will promote it and will get on board because it is a family film. The idea of 'family film' seems to go down much better in the US than in Europe, I think. It is something that you talk about in relation to pitching it as *The Snapper* meets *My Life as a Dog*. Did you really believe in that?

MD: (Laughs) By the same token there is a ghost story script of mine that is written that is going to happen later in the year, called *Little Boy Priest*. I told you that I went to a seminary when I was thirteen. Well this is a ghost story set in the seminary, about a thirteen year old boy who goes to the seminary and starts to see the ghost of another boy. It turns out that he is kind of like a secret thing that has been suppressed within this seminary and the boy gets in more and more danger as he starts to get drawn more and more into what this ghost is trying to get him to do. When I talked about that I thought, this is the dark side of *The Boy From Mercury*. This is no kid's film, this is a film that kids wouldn't be allowed to see. So, you still end up using catchphrases.

PW: Some of the reviews that I have read often compare it to *Cinema Paradiso* and *My Life as a Dog* and I was just wondering if there was any influence from those films.

MD: I would have seen both films, but I would have thought if anything it is the shared experience of creative people in the early stages of their lives when they are beginning to find themselves. Trying to figure out where they fit in. And that is really the theme. I would have thought there would have been plenty of creative people – where they feel that sense of separation and what to identify it with. .... There is a book called *Solitude* by Anthony Storr who has written a lot about the makings of

creative people. He says it is almost a template for creative people. One of the ingredients is the loss of a parent in the early stages of life. This kind of withdrawal where you retreat into some other area of life as a response and that is where these things come from. I think that would apply to me and a lot of creative people. They tend to have this thing, something has been disrupted in the first few years of their lives. I have always suspected and I would be interested to talk more to my brothers and sisters about it, particularly my sisters would be more open about it. For me, it would have been my mam. In some way I would have been affected by what happened to my mam after I was born. She became agoraphobic and wouldn't leave the house for a year and a half. My sisters told me that when she was starting to get better she would sit on the bus with a pair of rosary beads. And apparently I used to do the same thing as a little kid. Maybe that was part of her. Then when she saw this ongoing colourful behaviour, well she just let it play itself out.

PW: What would you see as some of your major filmic influences then? Films that may have had an affect on your career.

MD: I cry very easily at films, for example *In America*. I had to see that on video because in the cinema I would be a wreck because I know it is about the loss of a child, I couldn't handle that. So for me in general terms, emotions in the story are really important to me, to have an emotional truth. Any good filmmaker, I wouldn't know where to start. For instance, *It's a Wonderful Life* is still a film that I cry watching. I am a bit of a softy really. Anything that in story terms touches on fathers or children or things that are unresolved or need forgiveness. These stories always deeply affect me. I was a wreck when I saw *The Fisher King*. It hit me unaware that this guy was trying to help the other guy to heal. For me it is more about the themes than – it is more about content than it is about form... That's a very broad and wishy-washy answer but I can't think of anything that would – you know, Billy Wilder is a fantastic filmmaker, and lists of other people. It is more just the heart.

PW: You talk a little bit about that in the *Road to Mercury* as well. In terms of getting an emotional impact in *The Boy from Mercury* and the difference between American film and European films and the use of music and sound to evoke certain emotions. So are you steering toward an American format in that sense?

MD: I don't think it is necessarily pushing toward an American format. I said right from square one that this has to have a really big music score, this can't be small because for him this is huge. So it has to be like big orchestra. From that point of view you might consider that was an American influence. But to go back to what you were saying earlier on, I wouldn't have thought a great deal about it consciously, but when he says 'Goodnight mother' she doesn't get down on her knees and start embracing him... I wouldn't have done that and that would have been milking it the way the American's do, which I saw relatively recently in a film and it lost out on my tears. I was getting into it and they started getting into this thing of everybody being thrown in there. The whole thing of the suspension of disbelief. Maybe there is a way in which Americans – it is like Bart Simpson when he is in the cinema with Lisa and they are watching a horror scene and she closes her eyes and says 'tell me when it is over' and he says 'its over' and she opens her eyes and it is still on. He says you got to desensitise yourself to the violence. So I think if it is pushed too far you are desensitised to the emotions.

PW: One of the other things I wanted to ask you was why Walkinstown? Why was it chosen?

MD: Well, it was the place out in the country. I had a best friend named Sean who was out in Walkinstown and Walkinstown was the country for us. When I would get on my bike you were still sort of in the suburbs even though Crumlin was still – basically you were living in the country – but when you got to Walkinstown that was the countryside. Where this guy lived, his house was amongst the last houses and then there was fields and so on. People of that generation would get that....

PW: In your later work after *The Boy From Mercury*, you can see some sort of childhood threads going through as well, such as *The Testimony of Taliesen Jones*. What was that like to work on? Did that help you reshape some of the stuff you had done in *The Boy from Mercury*?

MD: One followed the other because of *The Boy From Mercury*. *Boy From Mercury* started picking up prizes all over the place then I got offered to do this film in

America *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*. Basically people could see that I could get really good performances out of young people. So, that is a cast of young teenagers. I was jut finishing that when I got *Taliesen*, for the same basic reason. The principle is that you can engage with adult actors but it is a particular thing to get performance out of young people. I think it again worked with *Taliesen*. In each case they were kind of dealing with themes that I would have felt connected to. For me there would have been a break and in the break there was a change. When I came back here I was trying to get *Jenny's Gift* made, this thing that I tried really, really hard to get made. That would have been a continuation of what I was trying to do with working with young people. After three years I had to abandon it and any hope of getting it done in Ireland. Fate or whatever led me over to Berlin. In the past few years this *Little Boy Priest* has a boy as a central character but it is not a family film. The other stories that I am involved in, none of them are family films. One of the books that I wrote, *Mothership*, there are moves on developing that as a film project but it is a really big scale project. I have to sort of get back in the ring basically. It has been five years since I directed anything. I need to get in and start showing my colours again before it is possible to start looking at bigger budget things. The move has also been a change for me. I'm involved in a couple of things that are all adult things. There is an American thing - a political drama, a science fiction thing – me and science fiction have always been good together- there is a horror film ... *Jenny's Gift*, if it could ever happen would be my attempt to try and deal with the subject of abuse that I was really trying to deal with and trying to get done here and failed to get done.

PW: You worked in children's television in Ireland for a while, *Bosco* and *Wanderly Wagon*, *Forty Coats* – what is your view of children's TV in Ireland as a genre? Do you see it as something that needs to be explored?

MD: I think it is completely underdeveloped, from what I can see. Television is different. Television works with a different set of things. I would still try to get work writing different episodes and stuff when work like that comes along. For me it is simply fun. There is always a sense of political correctness to it that can always be a bit boring. A couple of years ago I met with a couple of heads of the Irish Film Board asking what was the policy on family film and was told plain and straight that 'we don't have a policy on family film'... I have gotten to know a lot of people within the

family film-making community, internationally. There is a friend of mine who used to run the Amsterdam Children's Film Festival. He told me that at a press conference a filmmaker was there with his third or fourth family film and one of the interviewers said 'so when are you going to make a real film?'. So, none of these things have been a career move, if they were I would have handled it much better. But in terms of where I am now, if it seems that I am somebody who tries to make family films, I am not. The one that I really tried to get made, *Jenny's Gift*, I just couldn't get it together here, I just wasn't getting the support I needed here in Ireland.

PW: Why do you think that was? Was it the theme?

MD: I think it was partly because of the theme. Partly because there was a transitional phase going on in the Irish Film Board. Nobody really knows how to make a decision and it got lost in development. The script actually suffered with every draft I was doing on behalf of the Board as I saw later from the script reports that I got through the Freedom of Information Act. I did something like six drafts and their script reports on the six drafts got progressively worse, as I was doing what they wanted me to do. The theme was something that people were afraid of. All I wanted to do is something that still doesn't exist. Which is to make a film on the subject of child abuse that you can show to young people. There have been films made about abuse and they are always horrific films and there was a dreadful, and I don't mind being quoted on saying this, a dreadful Irish film called *Park* [John Carney, 1999] about a woman who goes into therapy because she realises she was abused as a kid and ends up committing suicide. I mean, I was abused when I was a kid. You want to give a story that you recovered, you can recover, there is a way out. To tell kids if it happens, you can do this, you can do this, told in a story, but also letting them know that there is a way out. You are not in a cul de sac, you won't die, you don't have to kill yourself. There is a way out and a healing and so on at the end.

PW: That area certainly needs to be developed, the idea of family films in Ireland, the topics that you are talking about too. That is what came up at the *Kaleidoscope* Seminar that you were at a few years ago, basically questioning why there was no specific funding for children or family films. It almost seems to be lip service in a

way. Seminars like that are great, but I don't know if we have actually seen anything come out of it.

MD: I honestly do think that there is a sort of a hip coolness that doesn't go with family films that is part of the problem. You get a complete reversal in countries like in Denmark, everybody's hero, where twenty five percent of the budget goes for family films. People then end up making great family films, constantly winning awards....

PW: I think you have covered most of the stuff, jumped right in there and answered most of the questions, which is brilliant.

MD: Great, well if you want to read the books, they are what they are. *Mothership* is still ongoing as a plan. It was originally the first of three. I have written the second as a novel and the third exists in script but not yet as a novel. There is a plan, when I have the time to sit down and write the trilogy as one book. There are a couple of producers who see it as along term plan to make these films.

PW: Was there an attempt before to make them as films?

MD: I tried to make the first book as a film a few years ago, but I only got to maybe half the budget or something.

PW: Great....