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The thesis of Jo Ann Petty Bresch entitled
Fields of Family: A Reading of Identity Formation in Modern Irish Literature

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in the School for Summer and Continuing Education of Georgetown University has been read and approved.

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April 26, 1995
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Fields of Family: A Reading of Identity Formation in Modern Irish Literature

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

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April 28, 1995
ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate a genre of contemporary Irish literature to
determine whether or not Ireland's contemporary writers believe their
countrymen and countrywomen place a strong value on the formation of
identity for the Irish child. It will ask if this society is sufficiently prepared
to provide a safety net, or establish an emotional infrastructure, over which it
could establish a foundation in order to provide a positive, nurturing, and
secure environment for its children. It must begin to move toward creating
such a nurturing environment if it intends to ever capably foster the full
development of the child. There is, I believe, sufficient material currently
available to conduct such an investigation. This was not always the case.

Independent only since 1921, Ireland is still backward in many
respects, still, for example, experiencing periodic eruptions of political
intrigue and civil unrest. In backward countries, children are often used as a
means of production, rather than being valued as important individuals upon
which one must heap love, understanding and expectation.

The issue of economic stability is a primordial element in this mix but I
will further investigate the role of church, parents and society to see if it is
possible to determine their expectations for Ireland's children. When a
country has difficulty simply feeding its population, it is almost impossible for
any but a very select few to reach what we know to be self actualization.
Hampered for too long by weak leadership, the authoritarian and repressive
rules of the Roman Catholic Church, and the mythical image that all was lovely, ideal even "Grand," Ireland may be now ready to move from adolescence to adulthood.

Chapter 1 will analyze the writing of Jennifer Johnston and The Invisible Worm. In particular, this chapter will note her concerns and beliefs as she discusses the fragile psyche of Laura O'Meara Quinlan. Miss Johnston's text provides succor for the conflicting roles of power and authority versus nurturing and unquestioning parental love. It also examines the roles of society and church and the importance of traditional land values in the Irish Culture.

Chapter 2 will analyze the writing of Brian Friel and Philadelphia, Here I Come! The salient points addressed in this chapter will include traditional family values and the role of church. Mr. Friel gives his characters a plethora of exciting words about which one may deduce his attitudes concerning the traditional values of nurturing. The themes discussed in the play include abandonment, rejection and the value of the Irish tradition. He begs the question: is nurturing a parental responsibility meant to ensure that basic needs are met or, rather, should it be a valuable commodity liberally applied in order to help children thrive? Lastly, I will use this text to discuss the current societal and familial expectations for the child.
Chapter 3 will analyze the writing of Roddy Doyle and Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha. This text will examine a contemporary family who is provided few supports by state, church, society and school. The Clarke’s are living in a fragmenting society. As a consequence, they are becoming fragmented themselves. There is little hope and much despair in this text. The section will include discussion of abandonment themes; parental authority and fragmented relationships.

The Conclusion will include discussion on the current state of education as it is described in these texts and a determination about where this might lead the country’s children if left unattended. Lastly, I will look to the relationships of these fields of families to their environment to see if there are discernible clues upon which to evaluate the patterns of moral development as they exist in today’s Ireland.
DEDICATION

To James Daniel Reilly, my grandfather, whose family of potato farmers emigrated from County Wicklow to America during the 1860’s. He believed me to be a strong Irish lass and that identity has served me well through many difficult times. Through this thesis writing investigation, I better understand how he moved with seeming ease -- taking his family with him -- to better opportunities. His memories, like his stories, were replete with beautiful pastoral images, lilting voices, good humor, and friendly people.

The course boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly,
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Excerpted from Digging
Seamus Heaney
1966
I carry with me the potato farmer’s love and feel of the soil and the poet’s desire to paint enduring images using words. My thesis is a personal search for a better understanding of the Irish family. While most of my emotions about “being Irish” are positive, I nevertheless have questions about the value Ireland places on her children. Children are entirely dependent on country, community and family to ensure their basic needs. Evaluating these interrelationships will provide insight into the level of support that is available to children. It is widely held that if the basic needs of clean air and adequate food and water are not met, a child’s growth will be inevitably retarded, if not stopped altogether. Once this need is satisfied, the next crucial ingredient identified for integrated development is a safe and secure environment. These two building blocks must be satisfied before the child is able to attain higher growth needs; namely those of loving and belonging, esteem and self-esteem and, ultimately, self actualization. This writing will take me on that journey through Irish literature.

While I believe joy is the most difficult feeling to translate into mere words, the emotion of joy can be conveyed by just remembering what it is like to watch a young child master a new skill. She is not just pleased, she is delighted, proud, exuberant, ready to do it again and again. Just watch Maeve Barnwell White learn to smile.
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INTRODUCTION

POST REVOLUTION, INDEPENDENCE 1921, THE EARLY YEARS

James Joyce spent most of his life (1882-1941) writing about Irish relationships. Abundantly talented and a brilliant observer of life, he scrutinized and then penned beautifully detailed accounts which depicted the very essence of Irishness. His accounts detail how the Irish related to one another, to their culture and to their traditions. With his considerable authority, and an insider’s understanding, he also characterized his Ireland as a “belated Country.” Decades later, Sean O’Faolain, following in the Joycean tradition, employed similar words. His honest assertions, like those of Joyce, flew in the face of the self congratulatory tones eschewed by the majority of politicians, journalists and writers of the day. Joyce and O’Faolain both employed a snow metaphor to quite effectively describe their beloved country: “under that white shroud, covering the whole of Ireland, life was lying broken and hardly breathing.”1 It might now be said that writers like Joyce and O’Faolain proved insightful -- not only because they correctly reflected Ireland’s position at the time, but also because they described continuing conditions that took a long time to change. The persistence of these conditions both effected and was effected by the international dimension, as discussed below.

Independent since only 1921, Ireland has suffered for centuries from the dominant structures imposed upon her by the Roman Catholic Church and the British Crown. Following the “Troubles” she became a Free State and established Independence in 1921. However, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, restrictive decisions separated her further from the global village that lay just outside her borders. For example, several overly ambitious attempts to enforce the Gaelic language as the only viable method by which to bond all Irishmen and Irishwomen together failed miserably.\(^2\)

The Irish people have prevailed, however, at a price. Many experts believe they have evolved as vulnerable and emotionally immature people. Imbued with a strong sense of tradition, the Irish have for generations mistakenly painted their ancestors as icons of mythological proportions. During the twentieth century this misplaced sense of identity kept them tied to, and believing in, a pastoral, a rural and an idyllic Ireland. Terence Brown argues that while later assessments would identify this image as neither real nor ideal, it existed for centuries, serving to give the rest of the world an evocative, but misleading, image.\(^3\) The image of the “pure people,” the “Emerald Isle,” the “Essential Ireland” fostered a perception of inaccessibility both overseas and on the continent, while it served further to keep the country emotionally isolated. During the early years of Independence, the

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\(^3\)Ibid., p. 168.
image of Irish rural life which persisted -- particularly in the West -- helped confirm Irish uniqueness and led to a new order of young people who perceived that this idyllic world would be their inheritance. These themes are particularly evident (but not always endorsed) in James Joyce, Sean O'Faolain and W.B. Yeats.

In pursuit of their true artistic identity, Irish writers, during the period of the 1930's and 1940's, began to emigrate to the continent. They left for several reasons: one notable reason was to have their work recognized and read, especially in light of the fact that the Church was increasingly banning books that did not directly support her views. Distanced from the "old sod," these writers disputed the characterization of Ireland as a self absorbed and antiquated state. At home, however, this image of the Irish was being stubbornly supported by many despite two important facts: 1) Ireland had indeed adapted to the social forms of the English speaking world and 2) conditions in rural Ireland were hardly idyllic. Many now, including Yeats and Joyce, believed that Ireland could only achieve acceptance if she was successful in being recognized as a European nation. They gave testimony to their convictions by emigrating from Ireland and they successfully established links within the intellectual and artistic community on the continent. No longer would they stay home and write about a native and idyllic Irish lifestyle. Rather, they sought to express their artistic identity in terms of opposition and dissent.
Ireland's leaders, however, continued to contribute to her isolation. Of fundamental importance to Ireland's place on the world stage, was the decision not to enter the global community in support of the Allies during World War II. This decision to neutrality, which negated any involvement in world affairs, carried with it an important result on two fronts. First, it established Ireland as a non-player in Europe. Second, it made her ineligible for post-war financial support which would have introduced emergent technologies to a backward society. Consequently, it did not establish opportunities for more jobs, for better education and for a place in what was rapidly being recognized as a global economy. The result was to subtly inhibit the hopes and dreams of Irish society.

Writing in 1990, John McGahern describes, in *Amongst Women*, a stagnant post World War II Ireland that illustrates how its traditional responses to society and to family did not conform to other countries. This was still a time in Ireland when fathers held onto their land as long as possible, chose which son would inherit, discouraged early marriages of their children, and recognized that at least some of the children would be forced to emigrate. McGahern effectively paints a traditional Irish family which comes complete with ritualistic religious structure, a piece of land and a strong father. It must also be noted, however, that this framework, considered ideal by some and anachronistic by others, effectively provided a sustaining safety
net which helped to keep generations of families -- at least physically -- intact.

GLOBAL INFLUENCES AND CHANGE: 1950 - 1960

By the 1950’s, global communication had established itself, and the television was introduced into Irish society. In concert, television introduced American and British influences, which touted material goods as a valuable commodity, and immediately introduced new philosophies into Ireland’s borders. During this period -- particularly outside Ireland -- an increased awareness of the individual was emerging.

Individual values and the importance of self began to assume immense proportions of nations' energies. As with any sea change, however, it is most often not until well after the fact (and far away from the trauma) that new ideas are truly assimilated into the culture. Change occurs slowly and can be documented through a country’s art, particularly its literature. The shift away from the importance of traditional family and church roles and toward investigation of the individual identity, is now making its way into the literature of Ireland.

As the new western ideas of the 1930’s and 1940’s, including the revolutionary theories of Freud, which centered around investigation into the individual, “the self,” were being discussed and disseminated throughout western civilization, another dimension would be added to conversation.
Discussions concerning personal identity would begin to include sexual themes. Such topics had not been a part of a sexually repressed Irish society and Irish writers needed to consider how to tackle these topics. This subject was problematic not only because sexual independence and expressions of sexual freedom were not discussed openly, but also -- and perhaps more importantly -- because they went against the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Irish society of the 1950's and 1960's was not yet prepared to question Church law. Years, centuries, in fact, of dominance by the Church had established an environment of unquestioning obedience. It has been argued that the Church was an institution dedicated neither to spirituality nor to intellectual enhancement of the faith, but rather to an unquestioning loyalty which garnered social and material advantage.

At the same time, the consequences of changes from pastoral to urban, from Irish Catholic to secular were also being experienced within the family unit. Conducting research during this period (1949-1951) Humphreys noted that:

> the traditional balance between the sexes characteristic of the rural family is upset in the city. The greater share of direct domestic responsibility and labor falls upon the wife rather than the husband, and, generally, upon women rather than the men. At the same time, a marked decline takes place in parental power and in the power of the aged in general.4

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There is at this time an increasing interest in investigating the full essence of Ireland. Listen to the words of Bryan MacMahon in 1968: “Culture [to me] means the full, aggregated, multicolored fabric that is indigenous Irish life.”5 This modern time period, which we will see exactly and excitingly described by Roddy Doyle and Jennifer Johnston, moves away from the mediated political and historical experience of the lyric and pastoral to the personal, often painful, psychic exploration of the individual. It moves from reporting on public life to learning about private life. It moves from the public sector to the family. Thus private life, and investigation into the family, becomes a focus for the contemporary writer who seems to reflect on the individual human experience rather than the uniqueness of a society.

During the 1950’s the rate of growth in Dublin and in her surrounding communities was much greater than the rest of the nation. Terence Brown describes this Dublin in *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to Present* as: “This once elegant, colorful albeit decaying colonial center of English rule in Ireland, now [had been transformed into] a modern, dull and bureaucratic administrative and commercial capital.”6 These new suburbs of Dublin attracted Irishmen and Irishwomen that had been firmly established in their own distinctive family lives and social organizations on farms and in small communities. It is notable that they experienced, upon transplantation, precisely the same pressures as suburban dwellers

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5Bryan MacMahon, *Culture in Rural Ireland*, (Christus Rex, 1968), vol. XXII, p. 324.
6Brown, p. 168.
elsewhere. But we will see that these nuclear families did not fare well. One identifying factor is that parental authority is significantly lessened. Given little opportunity and fewer tools with which to fight the lack of tradition, parents abdicate authority to the school. This important statistic must not be overlooked because presently greater than 50% of the Irish population is under 30 years of age.7

**TODAY: INTEGRATION OR FRAGMENTATION?**

During the last two decades we see major differences in the willingness of artists to break new ground. Sexual themes are being related with explicit frankness. Religion is treated as a metaphysical question rather than a one-dimensional statement of fact.

Today, the Irish writer is taking up the charge of a healthy eclecticism. Writers like Roddy Doyle and Seamus Heaney investigate the person, the individual. They are moving away from the safer interpretation of public images and community persona. These writers identify with the real, they monitor the environment, they sense change and they report it.

I will investigate three particular works of Jennifer Johnston, Roddy Doyle and Brian Friel to determine how they perceive the identity of the individual. Each of them establishes a strong and unforgettable persona that

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7Brown, p. 199.
is wrestling with personal identity versus Irish identity and each of them portrays a character left someplace in a state of arrested development.

In Johnston's character of Laura O'Meara Quinlan we see an Irish woman/child who has been mistreated by her father. The patterns of behavior which Ms. Johnston carefully unearths help us to hear, see, smell and feel many of the recurring themes which have been examined in the contemporary Irish literature of Julia O'Faolain, John McGahern and Edna O'Brien.

It can be no accident that each of these writers has provided haunting descriptions of fathers who fail their sons and daughters. It cannot be marked as simple coincidence that each of these writers has depicted fathers who fail to provide even the basic requirements for sound childhood development -- a safe and nurturing home environment. It must be recognized that all of these recountings, reinforced through the beliefs of insightful, talented writers, resemble real life portraits.

With realistic and necessarily brutal words, these writers have forced us to observe families in which the father tragically moves beyond a minimalist role as, for example, it was described by Friel in Philadelphia, Here I Come! While at first glance this father may seem simply stubbornly withdrawn, in truth, he tries and misses connecting with his son. If his greatest flaw is his passivity, it is because it culminates in his inability to convey his emotions either by demonstration or by description.
Johnston and McGahern, in particular, write startlingly and convincingly, and move us even further to a level we intuitively resist, into a painful world that we are wary to examine. They force us to know, to acknowledge and to remember the awful acts and lasting outcomes of sexual child abuse.

On at least two levels The Invisible Worm draws a parallel to Edna O’Brien’s earlier works. On one level, the symbolism of water (which surrounds Ireland) is employed to demonstrate the battle of nature-versus-nurture. In each of the texts The Invisible Worm, and O’Brien’s County Girls, the water wins. In both novels a mother is forever lost; a daughter is left without even a grave upon which to place a flower. On a second level, each writer successfully orchestrates a similar nature-versus-nurture portrait in which the reader must take a dreadful look at a dying calf.

These reports of nature-versus-nurture may be particularly significant to women. While women are silently charged by the Catholic Church with the responsibility of fostering a country’s virtue as well as the morality and safe-upbringing of its children, they are left out of the decisions that would provide for public safety or child rearing except at the most private level. Historically, their lives have not been examined, nor are we often allowed to see images of mistreated children or animals. Perhaps these are routinely left out of fictional portrayals because we do not want to know that they exist. If, on the one hand, healthy animals -- like healthy children -- connote a
healthy culture, these writers are showing us a culture in transition -- if not in trouble.

Instances like the ghastly images of malnourished animals and abused children introduce a sea change in the story line. In The Invisible Worm, the dead heifer provides for Laura a portent, on the one hand, while at the same time it is intended as a reminder of what happens when nature is not provided its requisite nurture. As she looks out her bedroom window, the dying heifer not only brings about a remembrance of her mother lost at sea, but it also forces her to relive her father’s act of ultimate betrayal. In some strange way this window holds a pathway to her future but before she can get to the other side she must deal with the symbolism of the dying calf, left unnourished? perhaps poisoned? She must remember the poisoning affects of her father’s advances and her mother’s averted eye before she can incorporate them into her consciousness. Only by doing so will she be able to say “I, Laura” and know she is speaking of the present. In O’Brien’s story we are reminded that the farm land once so prolific has now been left to ruin. The animals, left without nourishment, depict a pastoral gone wrong.

Lastly, each of these writers describes the Irish Protestant or Catholic female with many of the same words -- as different, better educated, snobby, cold, or even as Laura says of herself, “that Protestant bitch above in the big house,” and further “as the traditional Irish daughter, the sacrificial lamb.”
Neither girls nor women are at the forefront of stories told by men. In keeping with the patterns of other preeminent male Irish writers, Doyle writes a story without strong female characters. While Edna O'Brien, Julia O'Faolain and Jennifer Johnston write convincingly of young women and boy/girl relationships, their contemporary male writers seem more likely to limit their writing to the narrower view of men or young boys. In some instances even the book titles themselves may be somewhat misleading. For example, John McGahern's *Amongst Women* is a story that pivots around the father; his needs and the control that he exerts are at the center of the story. All of Moran's family at Great Meadow bounce their emotions off of him. As father, he is center, key, pivotal.

Consider the parallels. The girls depicted by several of these contemporary women writers, share their thoughts, share their dreams, and try to understand their emotions. While the boys depicted by men writers share activities, but do not share their dreams, do not share their worries and do not share their emotions. One thing that all of these boys and girls have in common, however, is that their families are failing them. The once and beautiful and pastoral Ireland -- is now depicted with real live people who encounter dilemma, sense a palpable tension at decision making and try to determine whether they have to abandon their heritage as it has perhaps abandoned them first.
CHAPTER 1

IDENTITY FORMATION: IN CONFLICT WITH POWER

A READING OF THE INVISIBLE WORM

Throughout the tale of *The Invisible Worm*, Jennifer Johnston intertwines the authority of society, church and parent with the fragile psyche of a young girl, Laura O'Meara Quinlan. Sadly, it is only her property, passed down through generations of her mother's family, that she believes might provide her with a safety net. It is her most prized possession. Even if it means never having to be ill again, she says, "I cannot leave this place. After all, what would my mother have to say . . . my grandmother, come to that, if I ran away, abandoned them? . . . they burdened me with it." Each of the "power figures" in her life (Society, Church, Parent) seems to call Laura to an insurmountable task and then in the end, each abandons her.

Laura's father sees her as his pet, a little beautiful thing that should know her place and should know when to not interrupt his important affairs. He does not care for her or about her. He abuses his authority in the most profound, shameful and hurtful way, by sexually molesting her as a very young girl. He leaves her believing that she is, (in her words) "Bruised . . . No, unclean. Marked, marked by uncleanness. Dirty, Foul, Defiled, Stained,

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9Ibid., p. 140.
Smirched.” He never admits any wrong-doing; rather, he continues to intervene in her personal life, assigning a private detective to follow her when she leaves the country and successfully arranging her marriage. After she marries Maurice, he again inserts himself into their relationship and grants Maurice responsibility over the mill.

Laura firmly believes she could have successfully carried out the responsibilities of this position. Her father held it open, however, only to a male. This, in light of the fact that the mill actually belongs to her mother’s family -- not his. This opportunity is never extended to her -- either as an option or as an expectation.

Laura’s father is in control even as he approaches the very end of his life. He insists, for example, on coming back into her home to die. And though he has never demonstrated any remorse or acknowledged his abuse of her, he is persistent in seeking her forgiveness even as he lay on his deathbed.

Laura’s mother, on the other hand, seems to want to be a free spirit. Perhaps this demonstrates a fear of failure on her part. She certainly should have had the equal -- if not the upper -- hand in her marriage because it is she who brings considerable social standing and valuable property, including land, houses and a factory to the marriage. In her relationship with her husband, however, she is yet another powerless Irish woman.

\[10\] Ibid., p. 133.
Ironically, she does exert power over her daughter. She forces Laura to stay in situations that harm her rather than help her, both at home and at school. She further abdicates her role as nurturer which means that Laura will remain underdeveloped. She does not pass down a strong system of values upon which Laura might have otherwise thrived. Finally, she is a weak role model; one that ensures that Laura will lack, at least in her marriage to Maurice, the capacity to form an adequate relationship. Tragically, when faced with a choice between a strong husband or a needy child, she commits suicide, deserting her daughter forever.

The roles and expectations of religion in this society also serve to further alienate Laura. This overwhelmingly Catholic society has mostly negative and shallow expectations of her. She is expected to keep the big house in proper running order and entertain on demand. They call her “Proddy bitch and West Brit”\textsuperscript{11} and although these words hurt her, she also believes that she maintains some “mythological edge.” She expresses the view that, perhaps, there is some “glamour [in] being an endangered species.”\textsuperscript{12}

The role of the Catholic Church is also eloquently expressed through her relationship with Dominic, a young and sensitive Catholic priest who has suffered at the hands of both his Church and his family. They have each required little more than rote response from him, placing a greater value on

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11]Ibid., p. 77.
\item[12]Ibid., p. 121.
\end{footnotes}
the integrity of the family structure or church structure than on the individual contained therein. Even Dominic's sisters converge upon him. They cease to value him when he refuses to blindly and unquestioningly obey the authority of the Church. His only value to them was his service to the Church and this was only important because the father deemed it so. Only Laura, it seems, is able to see Dominic as an individual. Others, including his family and his church, see him in Maurice's words as "a dismal creature."  

Effectively employing flashbacks, Johnston juxtaposes the presence of Laura's dead father into the present time which Laura and the reader experience through a shroud of confusion considered at times to be mental illness. Laura, now about forty, often sees herself as a disembodied young woman running, always running, away. In the present time she is, in fact, married to a successful and self-assured Roman Catholic. In her reality, however, she perceives herself rarely in the present, more often in the past and never in the future. She is powerless.

Laura frequently refers to herself as "I." When she speaks in this way she is actually remembering. As "I," Laura is ensconced in the past. It is a private world to which she retreats because she feels simultaneously unsafe and insecure in the present. She sees herself float by in a vibrant, if fragmented vision . . . Quite desperately she tries to uncover her past. She

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13Ibid., p. 118.
must uncover it in order to recover from it. She must face it head-on before she can move forward into the future.

When Laura speaks of “I,” she is outside of herself. She is, in fact, watching Laura. Reveling in the past, she remembers the cold abandonment of her mother. While she attempts to visualize it all in her mind’s eye, she is, in the same moment thrust back in memory against the initially warm, then blatantly hot, animal advances of her father. She remembers her father’s touches, her mother’s recriminations. She relives the guilt which threatens to turn into a madness even as she wonders if she might have been the cause of it all.

Laura, in the present tense, is thin, a waif, a wife, a friend to Dominic. She speaks of herself in the present tense as “her” or “she.” She is clearing away the cobwebs that clutter her mind as she physically struggles to clear away the jungle-like vines which have overtaken the summerhouse. She is, she says, “quite afraid to open it up.”  

She speaks here of both her mind and her summerhouse. Day by day the summerhouse is stripped of underbrush and brambles and Laura is likewise stripped of her protection. She will finally know the raw details of her personal nightmare and she will be able to tell it all.

An adult in chronological terms, Laura is more a child to her husband, Maurice, than a wife. Laura, as “Dote” is patronized by her husband,

\[14\] Ibid., p. 109.
Maurice, who treats her as if she is “frail, a petal, a blossom, dearie, a porcelain doll.” He touches her lightly and with affection while he lies to her. This pretense is acceptable to Laura because she has chosen the catholic Maurice to care for her, her house, her land, and her father’s mill. She knows that these material things (many outside the expectations of the average Irish Catholic) will excuse the “foulness” she brings to the marriage. In point of fact, Maurice, is an opportunist but he also cares for his “Dote.” He will not be the one, however, to encourage her out of the childlike behavior she exhibits. He would rather in fact, pay for expert help to fix her things, whether that means to provide council and therapy for her mental problems or to lay down a new floor in her summerhouse.

Further, he finds her behavior to be in many ways eccentric, even charming. He is quite amenable to explaining away her standoffish and withdrawn behavior as peculiar due to her protestant upbringing.

Laura’s relationship with Dominic, a Catholic priest, is quite revealing. She seems comfortable only during the time she spends with him. Then and only then does she think and speak in the present tense. In the present time with Dominic she refers to herself easily as “her” or “she.” Now she begins to relate to Dominic, her friend, her cohort. Perhaps this is feasible because he too has unquestioningly accepted per se the choices his parents presented to him. Now, like Laura, he is fighting those decisions, fighting his father, fighting his sisters and experiencing an overwhelming sense of inadequacy.
These two, Dominic and Laura, struggle together. Perhaps they are linked by the fact that they each have been rejected by their fathers. Additionally, Dominic is also being rejected by his church because he is recusant. Each faces rejection as they reject. Dominic’s family believes he has abandoned his father and his Church, while Dominic feels rejected and abandoned by them. Often Laura and Dominic are so consumed by their problems that they talk against one another in an excitable, childish way.

Laura’s memories of her mother are often sentimental, and remain quite childish. She has not had benefit of supportive and loving parents; she has nothing on which to role-model her actions. With typically childish emotions she still thinks she overwhelmed her mother with the news of abuse at the hands of her husband. She still physically reels from the shame. She still feels the intensity of her father’s strong hands exerting control over her life, her being.

Through daily hard work “head down, bum in the air”\textsuperscript{15} [her words], the summerhouse is uncovered and bare. Ironically, though, when fully repaired, refurbished and shining in the sun, the summerhouse poses an even greater problem. It allows the memories to come flowing back and Laura must confront them. No, she is not mad. No, she has not imagined this shameful thing. No, she did not kill her mother. Yes, she hates her father.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 109.
She strikes out by creating a great fire. A fire that carries significant similarities to a forest fire. It kills everything in its path. With this deliberate act, she assertively demonstrates a justifiable and healthy anger. In this vengeful act she obliterates the summerhouse and recognizes the enemy. Perhaps, (sic) this conflagration will be like the all-consuming fire that enriches the floor of the forest. Perhaps, it will spring forth again with greater vigor and nubile growth. Perhaps her honest and open relationship with Dominic will be sufficient seed to mimic the one seed dropped ever so carelessly by the tiniest bird overhead that regenerates the life cycle. Perhaps... she doesn't even have to watch it... pointedly she offers Dominic the opportunity to recriminate.16

Laura has demonstrated to herself that she is now ready to move into the future. A place where she can charge and counter charge. A place where she can accuse. A place that will accept her voice in dialogue. A place on the old sod that will enable her to grow even as she chooses to stay.

16Ibid., p. 168.
CHAPTER 2
IDENTITY FORMATION: IN CONFLICT WITH TRADITION
A READING OF PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!

The Irish playwright, Brian Friel, writing in 1965, introduces the reader in, Philadelphia, Here I Come! to another young man growing up in a depressed Irish community. His character will share so many similarities to characters developed by other contemporary Irish writers that one cannot dismiss them as coincidence. This repetition in contemporary Irish literature demonstrates that there is an undercurrent of concern among writers, a bubbling up of questions, a recognition of the problems which face the youth in this society. It calls for a closer scrutiny of the existing social system. It authenticates the argument that this is a society where the family does not create a safe, nurturing environment in which to raise its children.

Friel successfully culls experiences from his own childhood which was divided between two contrasting cultures. One, the beautiful, if economically depressed, Donegal was located in the Irish Free state. The other, Derry, geographically only a few miles away, was situated in Northern Ireland and differed immensely from Donegal. Less attractive and economically depressed, Derry was a town where the Catholic family was in the minority.

\[17\text{Brian Friel. Selected Plays, (Great Britain: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1984); With an Introduction by Seamus Deane, reprint ed., Washington D.C., Catholic University of America, 1986.}\]
Experiences from life in these two places are no doubt imbedded in the foundations of the fictional town Friel calls Ballybeg. Alive in many of his writings, Ballybeg seems a depressed and depressing place not unlike County Derry. More importantly, however, this is a community which reflects many other towns throughout Ireland. Friel describes places and peoples we have seen before. He describes young people faced with the dilemma of whether to focus on a future steeped in the rural Irish traditions or to abandon family and move away from their homeland. He investigates their trepidation about potential adventures toward a new frontier which, while it may hold the promise of new opportunities, simultaneously produces a palpable tension.

While these young Irishmen and Irishwomen ask the question, “should I aspire to the old, rural, pastoral way of life?” they seem to intuit a response that demands they explore a different world. This new world will require an intellectual, rather than nostalgic or sentimental, approach. It might be said that Friel draws comparisons and contrasts between Donegal and the United States. While both convey an image of hope, they also both carry the danger of deceit. While the United States offers economic opportunity it carries with it the absence of tradition and the potential to develop crass, shallow relationships that are based only on expediency. Conversely, Donegal, offers an aura of charm, a “potent spell,”\textsuperscript{18} that is often misconstrued to be a goal.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 13.
and of itself rather than just an environment -- an incomplete environment that falls short of allowing the opportunity for self fulfillment.

This is the conflict that Friel's character, Gareth O'Donnell, faces while he fights for a place in the new world. Will he be able to discard what has been labeled an important and emotional heritage even if he recognizes it to be backward and provincial? Will his decision place him in an alienated society that does not foster the values he perceives to be important?

Friel has put Gar's private self on stage, thus we see, hear, and begin to understand the tension between the excitement of venturing to a new world, a new place, while at the same time we also sense, first hand, the confusion within Gar. The play opens with Gar and his alter ego examining the conflicts of self against tradition.

Friel uses this highly theatrical role to convey the idea that overvalued tradition has produced a broken society. His character, Gar, is so conflicted that he talks to, about, and with himself. He even interrupts himself. His fragmented thoughts and conversations are an example of the duplicity he experiences as he begins to understand that while he may be a victim of the politics and authoritarian structure of Ireland, he also has within himself the wherewithal to reject these traditions. His arguments allow us to see his views of tradition, family, church and authority.

Gar, confronted with this dilemma, carries out, through his two selves on stage, a comedic parody on his life. Gar is alienated from himself. He has
not had benefit of the nurturing that is prerequisite to developing the strong sense of self known as character. Friel uses comedy to strip away the nostalgia which all Irishmen and Irishwomen seem to fight. He makes fun of the priest, he makes fun of Gar's bungled relationship with Kathy, he makes fun of his father, he makes fun of himself, he debunks the myth.

We will see that while the Private Gar aggressively scrutinizes areas of concern, the Public Gar falters. The Private Gar is brutal in his observations: for example, he unequivocally states that Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Con are shallow, opportunistic and without sentiment. While the Public Gar is able to see and assimilate their seemingly opposite views and opinions. If he admits to himself that he is prepared to leave the "country of his birth, . . . and the Irish Sweepstakes [he also acknowledges that he may be going to a] profane, irreligious, pagan country of gross materialism."\(^{19}\) Thus the reader is empathic to ambiguous emotions that portray impatience, sentimentality, insecurity and volatility.

These emotions, tensions, and conflicts represent additional problems to those already complex situations encountered when one attempts to move from adolescence into adulthood. Friel recognizes that to abandon a part of one's heritage is not easy -- even if it carries the promise of personal growth. Gar's out-loud reasoning helps the reader to understand the tension in his

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 32.
personal relationships and places them within the confines of the Irish
culture.

In an imagined conversation with his father, Gar allows us to see that
he wants to leave for three important reasons. First, he believes that his
father treats him as a five-year old rather than a twenty-five year old.
Second, he believes his father undervalues his worth to the family-owned
business. From this we can conclude that by paying Gar less than a servant’s
wages, his father will keep him forever a child. Third, father and son cannot
talk honestly to one another. They circumvent what they really think -- his
father cannot ask him to stay, neither can Gar say that he might consider
staying or that he loves the old man. Thus we see that, although Gar must
abandon his Ireland, he does so only because he has been abandoned first.
Abandoned by tradition, church and a society that allows parents to use their
children as helpers and servants rather than prepare them for a fulfilling
adult life.

The play is replete with references to Church and the values the
Roman Catholic religion has inserted into the culture. The priest visits
routinely and all of the O’Donnell’s (including Madge) kneel and pray the
rosary each and every night. Gar secretly wishes for fourteen children while
at the same time he seems to recognize the inherent irony in the statement.
The Public Gar knows that it is ludicrous to think he might be able to support
fourteen children. Thus reality is weighing in and Gar is growing up.
Gar's relationship with his father demonstrates the unemotional, "take-it-for-granted" attitude of Irish-parenting. In one instance when he tries desperately to get his father to remember a time they spent sharing a quiet day on a small boat together when he was still a young boy, father and son cannot arrive at the same remembrance. S.B. simply cannot call it up and, ironically, the Canon (a representative of the Church) inserts himself into this conversation which is the only time in the story that the father and son truly attempt to have a serious conversation. This serves to further demonstrate that the Church is prevalent in every aspect of their lives. Finally, one can observe that the authoritarian approach of the Church, while it may help to keep the family intact, does not necessarily allow it to grow.

The Ballybeg that Gar is trying to leave is a remnant of past times, past civilizations. Gar has an overriding ambition which seeks freedom in a more urban, metropolitan world that provides more opportunity even while he describes it as "shallow, materialistic, plebeian, vulgar -- and perhaps for the Irishman worst of all -- without tradition."

When faced with the final day of his leaving, Gar knows his father is unlikely to even say good-bye to him. Once again we see an unemotional, disinterested father. This pattern is repeated throughout the story. He showed no emotion when his wife died only three days after giving birth, he has never talked of her to his only son, and it is extremely unlikely that he
will now be able to convey any sense of loss at his son's leaving. He will not make it any easier.

Gar, for the sake of his own integrity, must leave Ireland. Gar is twenty-five, has had one year of education at University Dublin and then he, like many of his contemporaries, dropped out. If he stays in his father's house he will "become S.B." So Gar is fighting nostalgia -- long a popular Irish trait. He is fighting the emotional loyalties to the backward and provincial ways of doing things, to business as usual. Further, he is embarrassed by the fact that he knows his father is not capable of moving out of his routine, mundane, everyday responses to life; even in this supercharged environment of Gar leaving, he is incapable of asking him to stay. 20

Not surprisingly, all of Gar's friends are also immature. They come to his home to say their good-byes only because they are prompted to do so by Madge, the O'Donnell's house-keeper. Like other men depicted in a myriad of other Irish stories (especially those written by men) they seem able to share activities but not ideas, emotions or real conversation. They would rather be off sitting at a bar inventing stories that they will attempt to pass off in the morn as being true fact. Their stories will portray them as macho men who conquer women nightly. While in fact, they sit off on the sidelines and drink and make little sniveling noises. Gar realizes the shallowness of their

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20Ibid., p. 49.
existence and hopes for a change for himself when the Private Gar says, 
“Aye, and but for Aunty Lizzie and the grace of God, you’d be there tonight.”

I disagree with Madge’s assessment that Gar will “turn out just the same as his father.” He makes a point of reminding Madge that he wants to know if anything happens to his father. Though S.B. may feel this same concern, he is unable to say it and therefore, Gar has progressed past his father’s ability to communicate in personal relationships. He has broken the cycle, he will move away, he will abandon the nostalgia and his homeland. He says at the end -- “Why, why do I have to leave. I don’t know.”

His statement carries a heavy dose of ambiguity. We know that Gar seeks an education -- he talks about going to night school in the “US of A;” he intends to better himself. But we are not certain that he has not simply traded one set of problems for another. For while Donegal was pastoral and apparently nurturing, it was also oppressive and without opportunity for advancement. Now, however, living in the United States, Gar may experience the nurturing from Aunt Lizzie that he did not get from S.B. and Ballybeg, but it is certainly within the realm of possibility that Aunt Lizzie, with overzealous, albeit well-meaning affection, might stifle him as well.

Thus we are left with the knowledge that Gareth O’Donnell has moved beyond tradition. Now, however, he must face new concerns. He will immediately be faced with the differing roles of Church and society. He will

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21Ibid., p. 77.
22Ibid., p. 98.
be expected to make decisions based on knowledge, logic and questioning rather than the rote acceptance of church or societal law. He will need to examine his decision to abandon his country. And, if he is to be successful in his personal growth he must be open to new rules as he writes the script for his own self-actualization and begins to assess the expectations he might have for future generations of (transplanted) O'Donnells.
CHAPTER 3
IDENTITY FORMATION: IN CONFLICT WITH
A FRAGMENTED COMMUNITY
A READING OF PADDY CLARKE HA HA HA

Writing *Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha*\(^{23}\) in 1993, Roddy Doyle convincingly describes life in the fictional setting of Barrytown, Ireland during the late 1960’s. These surroundings allow him to show the decay of a landscape as it is converted from farm country into an unappealing urban sprawl that seems to just spring up rather than attend to any logical preconceived plan. Further, he couples the devastation of the landscape to the lack of nurturing within the social structure and family unit of Barrytown. Specifically, Doyle is interested in exploring the activities, the thoughts, and the convictions of young males. He writes in a quite believable ten-year-old-boy’s voice and by doing so allows us inside Paddy Clarke’s head.

Roddy Doyle is particularly successful at getting to the heart of the problem because he exploits this uncensored child’s voice. He insightfully paints an accurate pictorial of children. Unlike the classic American stories of *Tom Sawyer* or *Little Women*, there is no adult, authoritarian overseer to explain right and wrong. This is notable because many of the aspects of contemporary Irish Society can be compared to this earlier time period in

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America. Both time frames, for example, endure the struggle between separation of church and state, both anguish over recent civil disorder and both are social structures built on the Christian ethic. Doyle, the realist, however, does not intend to sugar coat the story. Unfortunately, for the reader however, what kids think is a rather illogical moving target, so this story does not necessarily progress smoothly; it does not come with all of its ends neatly tied together. Rather, it leaves the reader with a handful of loose threads.

Paddy Clarke's landscape is rough and tumble. There is no nurturing experience associated with it. His landscape, like his family life, is reeling in an era of change.

Structures like church and community-life are sorely missing and the result will place an unbearable stress on the family, particularly the father. Unlike, other writers' descriptions of the land, the sod, the turf, Doyle's carry no warm sentiment of the Irish culture. He describes how the boys climb into buried sewer pipes, build huts out of left-over building materials, inhale smoke from fires built long after dark, and climb around in the muck and the sand. Several references in fact, point to the hostility of the land ... land so hostile that "the sand actually almost swallowed up Aidan one day" [and Keith Simpson didn't die in a trench but he did drown in a pond covered with frogspawn and slime] "It just kind of sucked him down. They just found him in it. Nobody ever knew how he got there." And not surprisingly, even the
burial ritual surrounding this child’s death leaves the children on the sidelines watching as the adults queue up to convey their condolences. “We weren’t let go to the graveyard, either” Paddy tells us. Instead, they were “told to pray by themselves some other time.”24 While this unfriendly land is claiming their childhood, the adults are ignoring their concerns.

Few events (soccer the notable exception) are offered to the boys of Barrytown. Lacking organized events that might provide the opportunity, and more importantly the guidance, to acquire a hobby, learn a survival skill, or promote civic pride, these boys simply roam the landscape. Left to their own devices, they form groups where the sole reason for existence is to see if others have the wherewithal to withstand the rites of initiation.

The only good part about Barrytown is that Patrick and the boys “own it.” This is their place -- where they run, they fight, and they win. The territory of the boys in Barrytown, however, is getting smaller all the time. The fields have become garbage dumps of detritus, mixed together with discarded building materials. They provide excellent opportunities for exploring but they also carry an aura of danger. The injuries are abundant and are described in graphic detail. These boys carry their wounds proudly, as battle scars. Characteristically, Paddy Clark uses injury as an opportunity to make himself the center of attention, the hero. He runs head long into a

24Ibid., p. 194.
rusty scaffolding joint, he collapses in pain. Now he is the center of attention, the hero.  

During one vivid description of the land, Doyle comes close to becoming sentimental about the earth as he tells how Kevin’s brother was able to cut through the turf with no effort. His tone when he describes using his spade to “cut right through the mesh of roots “ is as reminiscent as this text gets to Seamus Heaney’s observations of nature and even boys observing/taunting nature. However, in this instance when they finish working the soil, although they build a clubhouse – they immediately surround it with booby traps. These are not innocuous toys, they are serious instruments of destruction. In fact, Ian McEvoy ran into a trip wire and had to go to hospital for stitches. “His foot was hanging off him.”  

Doyle is simply unrelenting as he reports the repetition of the violent events between the land and these children.

Roddy Doyle’s narrative mimics the pell-mell pace Patrick Clarke sets for himself as he races through life. Often using profanities typical to a ten-year-old, Patrick Clarke observes and candidly reports all. Throughout this story we hear how Patrick evaluates his surroundings, his parents, his teachers, his brother and his friends. A bright boy, with a natural curiosity about the way things work, about history, and about right and wrong, he is unchallenged by his parents, his school system, and his friends. He spends

\[^{25}\text{Ibid., pp. 146-147.}\]
\[^{26}\text{Ibid., p.}\]
most of his free time planning and executing activities that come laden with risk. The ability to win -- or to set up others to lose -- carries for him the allusion of success. He is pretty good at everything he undertakes but the only job he really wants is to save his family -- to keep his Da from fighting with his Ma -- to keep his father from leaving altogether. Not surprisingly, he has focused on an impossible task.

Paddy Clark identifies many conflicts in his world. He studies them intensely and tries -- without the active or involved support of adults -- to sort it all out. He is a bright young man. He reads easily and often. He is learning to understand the nuances of life. He can, for example, understand that it is wrong to "rob." The element of wrongness in the acts though, the potential for getting caught, is what drives him and his friends to do these things in the first place. It is the risk of getting caught that is the best part, he says. "The hard bit was getting back to your seat before they turned the lights back on. Every one would try to stop you, to keep you trapped in the aisle. They'd kick you and stand on your hands when you were crawling under the seats. It was brilliant."\(^\text{27}\) Clearly he understands punishment will be involved. "If my mother finds out, she'll kill me."

He can also relate these wrongs to his religious teaching - where one can receive "about a million years in purgatory for every venial sin." But he takes the argument further and uses deductive reasoning to wonder how

\(^{27}\)Ibid., p. 68.
someone “can get off at the last minute if they simply confess before they die.”
He understands that “robbin [sic] stuff out of shops” is bad, he knows that it is, “worse than cursing” though he also understands that they are both venial sins. Further, he is trying to figure out if it is right that you might go right to hell even if you were on your way to confess your mortal sins when the “lorry hit you.” While Patrick struggles with these issues, his parents show no interest in helping him. His father, who appears intelligent and well read, does not bring any form of teaching -- religious or otherwise -- into the home. Thus, the support system that religious rituals bring to the family, is not evident here. No one helps him, for example, to figure out the answers to what he has identified as difficult questions and conflicting situations. Rather, he is expected to just follow the rules -- “Ah, now; the same rules for everybody (son).”

We watch young Paddy Clarke trying to understand relationships. His brother Sinbad is an enigma to him. Patrick sees his little brother as a nuisance even while he begins to understand that he loves him and finds it comforting to have him around. After an episode where they get caught “robbing,” their father beats them each with a strap across the backs of the legs. Afterward, the two boys compare their wounds and Sinbad knows that his older brother had taken on his own (Sinbad’s) share of the punishment. There is an unspoken exchange in which Sinbad demonstrates his acceptance

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28Ibid., pp. 84-85.
of Patrick’s leadership position. This is enough for Patrick. He doesn’t demand any words from Sinbad. The two boys try to accept their punishment and cement a personal bond. They do not hug. They do not cry. They do not rail at their parents. They do go to their room, climb under the covers and have a war.

Patrick tries to understand his brother. Younger by four years he calls him Sinbad. It is a name his brother hates. It is one more way of driving Sinbad loony toons. Among the many tortures that he hands out to Sinbad is an absolutely shocking account of setting his lips afire with lighter fluid. Patrick is never really punished for this. He is not apparently without compassion as he does cry along with his brother who needs to be physically restrained so he won’t pick off his scabs. There seems to be little concern within the family that this might disfigure the younger boy.

The parents of Paddy and Sinbad, like the parents of the other children in Barrytown, seem so overwhelmed by life that they just turn their youngsters loose. They live in close quarters, the babies keep on coming, and there seems to be no evidence that things will ever get any better. There is no apparent relief to the monotony of their lives which might be provided through neighborhood relationships or social discourse. This is one of the few Doyle texts that does not have a pub on every corner. The fact that social, religious and pastoral traditions are lacking in Barrytown is negatively affecting the entire community.
Patrick’s parents do not seem to care for one another. They are both fighting a boredom born of despair. They are not hopeful, they are not forward thinking. The excitement or spontaneity in their lives seems to come with their fights. Lacking caring and affectionate role models, Patrick concludes (like most of his friends), that you “couldn’t be proud of your little brother.” This theme runs throughout the text. At the end of the story when Patrick is planning on his leave-taking, he really needs his brother. But he has no sense of how to tell him so. He is incapable of extending to him a kindness without coming right back and giving him a “dead leg,” a “pruning,” or a “Chinese torture.” This violent way of acting is the only way he knows to interact with people. It establishes a sense or order, a way of counting success; it leaves him still in charge. This way of relating is carried over into all of his relationships. If you wanted to be best friends with Kevin, he says, “you had to hate a lot of other people, the two of you together. It made you better friends.”

Patrick’s days at school are often torturous, sometimes great. He is brilliant and he is disengaged. He investigates mitching with James, he studies so hard one week that he gets the “best chair” in the class, he tries smoking, and he keeps a friend’s confidence – not because he was asked but because he is sensitive. Well, he told later and he did it in a particularly painful and public way.

\[29\]Ibid., p. 181.
Patrick's school system is failing him as well. His teachers are concerned with homework assignments and the fact that playground rules must be attended to. They miss opportunity after opportunity to teach these children how to think, how to plan for contingencies, how to plan for the future. Their efforts seem expedient at best. They really do not see their students as people to be nurtured and encouraged, rather they view them as charges to be shaped and controlled.

As Patrick is planning to leave, to run away, an important transition occurs. He gets involved in a huge fight at school. He is purposefully set up by his friends and he fights dirty because this is the only he can win. He is ostracized. At this important time in his life everyone walks away from him. He is totally on his own. Even now Sinbad, nee Francis, shows signs of growing up and refuses to be bullied by Patrick. He is no longer afraid of Patrick. He does not follow his instructions. He fears him not. This is extremely problematic because their entire relationship has been built on a sibling rivalry which frequently exhibits violence and requires Sinbad's submission. There are no models for how they might now relate to one another.

Patrick has learned the art of control. He has not learned effective communication skills; he has not learned how to make a relationship work. He is embarrassed that Sinbad found out he wants to talk, had, in fact, been scared. Ultimately he feels lonely and frightened. Crying and upset he tries
to hold Sinbad, but nothing happens. Sadly, these brothers, unprepared to relate to one another, may simply drift apart.

Patrick scrutinizes his parents. He tries desperately to understand their relationship. He is always on guard trying to figure out what makes them change, what makes them mad, when it is likely he will be able get his own way, when it is likely he will get in theirs. Doyle interleaves the disintegration of the parents’ marriage throughout the story. As their marriage spirals downward toward disaster, Patrick looks for ways to prevent the fights and tries to figure out if this is “normal” behavior for parents. He establishes that up and down his street the da’s are gone -- and the mas are gone or dead. Thus he sees his family problems as something expected. After a careful accounting of the families where either the ma or the da were gone, missing or dead, Patrick concludes, “We were next. I knew it, and I was going to be ready.”30 This becomes perhaps the only serious expectation that Patrick can express.

After careful reflection, Paddy determines that his ma is “the best ma around.” He is able to observe that she takes good care of the babies, keeps the house neat and puts “lovely” meals on the table. Further, she does not have the negative characteristics that many other ma’s have. She does not smoke, yell or wear tight jeans on a Sunday. She is also of more than average intelligence as she is quite capable of listening to and carrying on

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30 Ibid., p. 245.
conversation. What is the matter then? It may be that both of the parents are simply overwhelmed by circumstances.

The father, in particular, seems to grow more and more despondent, more and more mean as the story goes on. This seems to be a characteristic trait among all of the fathers in the neighborhood. Patrick observes that father's liked to sit in a corner of the room and didn't want to be disturbed. Patrick watches as his father retreats further and further into himself. He sits quietly, interacting with no-one, drinking some, getting drunk some, and staring at the television screen.

His parents' fights escalate into slapping and shouting matches. Patrick is obsessed with keeping them together even while he intuitively knows that his father will someday leave for good. In his wishes to stop the fighting and protect his mother, he decides that he must be omnipresent, physically alert always -- especially at night when the words start. If he can do this, his father will not hit his mother. So he stays awake, he spends ages doing his homework, he tries to convince Sinbad to hold an all-night vigil, he creeps out of bed and sits at the top of the stairs, he makes many trips to the bathroom. The otherwise hilarious accountings throughout this book take on a deadly serious tone when young Paddy Clarke describes his father's mood changes, mean streaks and lack of control. His heart thumps, his blood courses, he worries himself into many sleepless nights. He admits he is

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31Ibid., pp. 257.
confused. “I loved him. He was my da. It didn’t make sense. She was my ma.”

He correctly deduces from the occurrences in other families in the neighborhood how the situation in his own family will play out. But he is wrong in one way. His father will abandon them all before he has his chance to run away at all.

He knew it all along. Tomorrow or the day after my ma was going to call me over to her and . . . she was going to say, -- You’re the man of the house now, Patrick.

No one had to tell him anything. He knew it all along.

Paddy Clarke, has no da ...

Paddy Clarke ha ha ha.

Another family fragmented. We knew it all along . . . it was the way it always happened.

Patrick asserts that he is just fine without his da around. But I doubt it. Patrick’s life is not likely to get easier without a father. Although he will try to become the ‘man’ of the family, he is less well equipped than his father, so how can this be?
CONCLUSION

If we want to form men and women, nothing will fit us so well for the task as to study the laws that govern their formation.

Jean Piaget
1965

Each person is uniquely formed by the patterns of her/his growth. These patterns are many and varied and are interlaced throughout the psyche like threads in a woven garment. We see their designs throughout our stories, our paintings, our gardens, our literature and our children.

We have seen undeniable evidence that literature allows issues, otherwise held intensely private and personal, to be openly explored. Earlier chapters have studied wonderfully written texts that show us how children are conceived, born and given shape within the imagination of a talented writer. We have seen that these children are threatened by their society, have been abandoned by their families, their church and their culture. They are somewhat retarded in their emotional growth, without the capability to move unimpeded through the various stages of development.

The characters seen in these texts share so many similarities to characters developed by other contemporary Irish writers that one cannot
dismiss them as coincidence. This repetition in contemporary Irish literature demonstrates that there is an undercurrent of concern among writers, a bubbling up of questions, a recognition of the problems which face the youth in this society. It calls for closer scrutiny of the existing social system. It authenticates the argument that this is a society where the family does not create a safe, nurturing environment in which to raise its children.

Social environments are an integral component in the development of the child. The philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) developed an early important theory, called symbolic interactionism, that is widely accepted among sociologists and psychologists. Symbolic interactionists see role-taking as the central mechanism of socialization. Role-taking in this definition refers to one's capacity to place herself in the position of another. Mead also believed that role-taking begins at a very early age and continues throughout life. For instance, an infant is totally dependent for the satisfaction of her needs on her parents, her caregivers. However, as she is fed, changed, and otherwise made comfortable she begins to associate the presence of the parents with their positive responses to her needs. As babies grow then, Mead believed that they would move through various stages, including the play stage and the game stage, and that they would grow, mature, and begin to generalize the actions of their parents to others in society and so internalize basic norms and values. Through these processes they would acquire "self."
Stanley Coopersmith, widely recognized for his work in self-esteem, based many of his clinical studies on the work of George Mead. When Stanley Coopersmith wrote his dissertation at Cornell University he chose to undertake research which would clarify the antecedents and consequences of self-esteem.\textsuperscript{32} Interestingly, his studies began with the subjective and behavioral ways a person regards her/himself. He introduced clinical findings that revealed that persons who seek psychological help frequently acknowledge that they suffer from feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness.\textsuperscript{33}

Coopersmith's major work would be to uncover the conditions that lead an individual to value her/himself as an object of worth. He lists many of the commodities that were missing in the lives of those discussed previously in chapters 1-3. His four basic necessities are as follows: 1) parental warmth, 2) the experience of consistency, 3) clearly defined limits of acceptable behaviors, and 4) receiving respectful treatment.

Parental warmth includes more than taking care of the child's basic needs. It goes further to include immediate acceptance, little worry as to the sex of the child before birth, and listening! Defined limits are necessary because those children who have more ambiguous limits cannot judge themselves as favorable or unfavorable. On the subject of parental respect,


\textsuperscript{33}R. Wylie. \textit{The Self-Concept} (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).
he is careful to note that one of the ways this can be done is to allow children their own private times. Adversely, parents who are protective and controlling, who indulge and constrain their children, provide a very artificial living environment. In this environment the child cannot learn how to deal with the "shadows that lurk at the edge of his world."\textsuperscript{34} It is not difficult to immediately identify the areas in which Laura, Gar and Paddy Clarke were left wanting.

On the way to completing his research, Coopersmith also dispelled some general assumptions often associated with self-esteem. Importantly, he noted that personality is not associated with the subjective experience of self-esteem.\textsuperscript{35} In other words, the number of times one is chosen as a friend, is judged successful or popular may lead to her/his greater poise and assurance but will not necessarily measure her/his subjective self-esteem. This characteristic is widely noted in the literature discussed here. Many of the boys in Barrytown have strong personalities; this should not be construed as a necessarily positive trait or an indicator of high self-esteem. Likewise, Gar's friends certainly fall in the category of apparently self-assured, while on the inside they are less than certain about their fate, their decisions and their friendships. It is also interesting to note that Gar's Private self seems so much more assured and poised, while we know that he must have the

\textsuperscript{34}Coopersmith, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{35}Coopersmith, p. 48.
same insecurities that Gar the Public experiences, since after all they are one person.

The values generally associated with various levels of self-esteem include, power, significance, virtue and competence. It is important to note that not all four of these characteristics need to coexist in equal amounts in order to reach high self-esteem. For instance, one may be very successful in one category; but, because he considers another of the categories more important than the one in which he excels, he may conclude that he has lowered self-esteem. Conversely, if one sees his job as doing moral good and values virtue over power, he may still have high self-esteem even though his position (power) in the community is low.

When Coopersmith discusses the effects of self-esteem on independence and creativity, we see that those with high self-esteem are less compliant, more independent, less apt to cave in to group pressures, and more able to present their own ideas with conviction. He shows us that it is, in fact, high self-esteem that allows the creative person to proceed. For on the cutting edge of genius/creativity there is a need for high self-esteem. There is a need to be “sure” of one’s own decisions and ideas. Not having to rely on others for approval allows the creator to introduce something untried, to risk being different.

This achievement area of high self-esteem is apparent in all of the writers we have just witnessed. They are not afraid to take risks. They are
on the cutting edge of the newness that awaits Ireland. It is not coincidence that brings these writers to the topics we have seen. They are cogently, ploddingly, and consistently telling us that Ireland's children are lacking self-esteem. They are hoping, I believe, to raise questions about the treatment received by Irish children and the value that the country bestows on them, or withholds altogether.

As referenced in the introduction, the economy of Ireland has left it backward in the twentieth century and the writers I have selected all address this theme in one way or another. In fact, recent studies support their concepts: mothers and fathers living in poverty treat their children differently. Several investigators, (Broman, Nichols & Kennedy, 1975) and (Farran, Haskins & Gallagher, 1980) show that, in general, these families live in smaller and less adequate housing while they tend to have children that are born more closely spaced. In addition, they talk to their children less, provide fewer age-appropriate toys, and spend less time participating with them in intellectually stimulating activities. They are also more strict and more physical in their discipline. These studies also suggest that they are more likely to be authoritarian.

These parental responses have several root causes. Some of these patterns of behavior are undoubtedly a response to the extraordinary stress of the poverty environment, while others may simply mimic the parent's own childhood, still others are a product of ignorance about children's needs. Not
surprisingly, children raised in poverty turn out differently. They have high rates of birth defects and early disability, they recover less well from early problems, they do less well in school, they are less likely to seek advanced education. They are also more likely to be poor adults, thus continuing the cycle through another generation.\textsuperscript{36}

This unrelenting cycle will repeat itself over and over unless these patterns are interrupted and unless education is provided. In reviewing Helen Bee's lists of the characteristics associated with unusually effective schools, we immediately notice two notable characteristics (both missing) from the schools in \textit{Paddy Clarke and The Country Girls} to select only two representative samples. Effective schools, Bee says, are more likely to give students real responsibility, place a strong emphasis on academic excellence, and place a lowered emphasis on classroom structure or behavior management. The reason most cited for successful performance in the school environment was a high expectation of performance placed on the pupil. These observations are also scattered throughout \textit{No Country for Young Men} and \textit{The Dark}.

Lastly, the patterns of moral development must be discussed here. Erik Erickson, Robert L. Selman, and Lawrence Kohlberg, have all conducted extensive research that shows important links between a child's social understanding, logical reasoning, and moral judgment. Like Piaget and

\textsuperscript{36}Helen Bee, Chapter 13.
Freud before them, they have endorsed the concept that all humans must progress from one stage to the next.

This undeniable aspect of development is extremely important because it means that if a key element is missing in Stage 1, one may not move on to Stage 2. Or conversely, if during Stage 1, hostile development occurred, these events will negatively affect how the child will enter Stage 2 (creating basic mistrust, for example, rather than basic trust). Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development are briefly defined as follows: Stage 1 defines punishment and obedience orientation in which the child decides what is wrong on the basis of what is punished, Stage 2 finds the child able to make judgments based on the rules and norms of the group the child belongs to, Stage 3 is where the family or small group to which the child belongs becomes important, Stage 4 introduces a shift in focus from one’s own family to the larger society. (In this stage laws are upheld and contributing to society is seen as a good thing to do), Stage 5 decisions are made because they achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. There is an awareness of different views and values, and lastly, for those few who achieve Stage 6, the person develops and follows self-chosen ethical principles in terms of what is right. She/he lives by the Golden Rule. Conscience dictates.

While most teenagers and adults do not move past Kohlberg’s Stage 4 (conventional morality) parents and teachers can foster or encourage moral behavior by creating opportunities for children to learn in several ways as
listed below: 1) by perspective taking, that is, by exposing them to high levels of reason, 2) by making them responsible for group action and decisions and 3) by using inductive discipline -- explaining why the child should not do some forbidden thing and explaining the consequences of other adverse situations.

It is apparent throughout the texts discussed in the earlier chapters, particularly in *Invisible Worm* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, that these writers believe their children and young adults are capable of making complex moral decisions, even if they are somewhat late setting out on the journey. As we have seen, the stages must progress in from 1 to 2, and 2 to 3 . . . however, it is never too late to move forward to the next stage once one has satisfied the necessary parameters.

A country's future is her children; Ireland must listen to the voice of her contemporary writers; they trumpet a call to the Irish culture that should not go unnoticed. Their personal, sometimes painful, studies paint for us a portrait of the Irish child, who is neither an antiquated Gaelic concept nor a fully integrated personality ready to move into the twenty-first century. Rather, we see an underdeveloped, sometimes fragmented, but always resilient personality ready to move on to the next stage.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


