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Saints, scholars and sinners: from dystopian vibrations to secular security in John McGahern's novels Mark John Richard Wakefield

D

2018



Mark John Richard Wakefield

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security in John McGahern's novels**

Tese realizada no âmbito do Doutoramento em Estudos Literários, Culturais e Interartísticos,
orientada pelo Professor Doutor Rui Manuel Gomes Carvalho Homem

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

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A special word of thanks must be given to my family: to Joana, whose incisive intellect and innate talent saved my efforts from derailment on a number of occasions. Without her love and understanding for my situation this odyssey could never have been conceived. To Alexandra: enormous quantities of hugs await you from your Papa, which I hope will, in some way, compensate for my inability to play with you and spend so much more time with you. Joana – you are a gift from God and Alexandra you are the proof of how great happiness can be further surpassed simply by being in the world. A final word of gratitude goes to Elisa and Crispim Gomes for their great kindness over many years.

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Declaração de honra

Declaro que a presente tese é de minha autoria e não foi utilizado previamente noutro curso ou unidade curricular, desta ou de outra instituição. As referências a outros autores (afirmações, ideias, pensamentos) respeitam escrupulosamente as regras da atribuição, e encontram-se devidamente indicadas no texto e nas referências bibliográficas, de acordo com as normas de referência. Tenho consciência de que a prática de plágio e auto-plágio constitui um ilícito académico.

Porto, janeiro 2018

Mark John Richard Wakefield

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My first choice of supervisor was always Professor Rui Carvalho Homem – a gentleman scholar, second to none in expertise and courtesy. His great stamina, patience and rich counsel merits enormous gratitude on my part. A sincere thank you to him. It would be remiss of me to neglect to mention Professor Fátima Vieira who evaluated my first written project of the doctoral programme. Her passion, confidence and competence was evident from the beginning and it helped me to focus and redouble my efforts to find a meaningful formula of words to advance what was then embryonic work.

Resumo

Esta tese foca-se na análise das forças culturais e sociais presentes na obra do escritor John McGahern (1934-2006) no contexto dos cinco livros que escreveu entre 1963 e 2002.

Durante a infância de McGahern um grande parte do capital cultural presente na comunidade estava carregado com considerações póscolonialistas que se dissiparam nas décadas seguintes. Vai ser também dada atenção à utilidade do conceito de capital cultural de Bordieu e à aplicação de teorias utópicas na obra de McGahern como crítica social.

Uma análise da mudança nas características da sociedade irlandesa não ficaria completa sem avaliar o papel que a Igreja Católica teve em McGahern como pessoa, artista e na comunidade em que viveu.

Palavras-chave: John McGahern, Literatura Irlandesa no Século XX na Irlanda, pós-colonialismo, Capital Cultural, Mudança de Paradigma.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with examining the cultural and social forces present in the work of Irish writer John McGahern (1934-2006) in the context of the five novels he wrote between 1963 and 2002.

Much of the cultural capital present in the community of McGahern's childhood was laden with postcolonial considerations that began to dissipate over the following decades. Attention will also be given to the utility of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and the application of utopian theory in the of McGahern's work as a social critique. Accounting for the change in the character of Irish society would not be complete without appraising the role of the Catholic Church on McGahern as a person, an artist and the community in which he lived.

Keywords: John McGahern, 20th century Irish literature, post-colonialism, cultural capital, paradigm shift.

Lista de abreviaturas e siglas

Amongst Women: AW

That They May Face the Rising Sun: TRS

The Barracks: B

The Dark: D

The Leavetaking: L

The Pornographer: P

Preface

The artistic talents of the late Leitrim-born writer John McGahern first came to public attention in the early 1960s when his early work began to be published. His contribution to Irish literary life and his *de facto* role as cultural chronicler made him a source of a rich fictive world that served as a critical catalyst for reflection and change. This thesis is concerned with analysing McGahern's six novels: *The Barracks* (1963), *The Dark* (1965), *The Leavetaking* (1974), *The Pornographer* (1979), *Amongst Women* (1990) and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002). While acknowledgment must be given to the existence of a notable body of short stories and plays by the same author, these other texts do not form part of the material subjected to interpretation in this academic endeavour. Three principal conceptual devices are to be brought to bear on this literary corpus, and they are: utopian theory, postcolonial readings and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and its associated manifestations and variations. This combination of conceptual resources will hopefully shed new light on McGahern's work, revealing another facet of the value of the work he produced.

It must be acknowledged that some decisions had to be made in deciding how much material should be subject to examination and analysis in this thesis. After much reflection it was felt that focussing exclusively on the novels would prove more productive since these texts contain virtually all the main features found throughout the author's short stories. In that respect, it was concluded that engaging in an analysis of that other material would not, on balance, provide any additional insights in respect of style, syntax or sources. With so much of Irish writing tinged with postcolonial issues, McGahern's work was found to be no different, and that perspective came to be part of a three-pronged approach that also included applying utopian theory and the notion of cultural capital. The latter two perspectives are intended to supply additional insights that shed light on the purpose and nature of not only the situations exposed in the novels, but also the values that comprise the nature of the contexts in which characters are observed. In particular, since writing is so often seen as a hopeful act of defiance or the assertion of the possession of one's free spirit, utopian theory provides a valuable perspective in accounting for how the characters in McGahern's early fiction struggle

against excessive restrictions in their lives and by inference, seek better conditions in which to live and express themselves. The fact that they are able to express their thoughts and are capable of forming a critical opinion against their oppressive situations demonstrates the importance of recognising how utopian aspirations can be infused into the writing process. At the same time, writing is sometimes, and was in McGahern's early writing, an act of defiance, which provides a means to raise consciousness and to educate one's desire¹, so one process empowers another.

With a view to offering a cogent critical narrative, the present writer has found it highly productive to provide a historical contextualisation that circumscribes the author's literary output and highlights the cultural forces that link in with particular events and incidences that influenced discernible parts of his fiction. Preceding this is a section dealing with the breadth and critical standing of McGahern's work, a text whose value is justified in exposing the respect and esteem that has been bestowed upon the writer's work over four decades. The final introductory section attempts to enunciate the three principal conceptual hubs that have provided the momentum for the overall analysis and also seeks to bring them in a subtle coalition to uncover necessary truths revealed by McGahern's social critique through his narrative fiction in novel form.

This thesis seeks to offer an new analysis, in a manner that exposes the cultural forces at work behind both the novelist's thinking and the end result of his own thoughts once committed to paper. A key argument of this text is that McGahern's work formed a central and inextricable part of the artistic enterprise in the Irish state from the mid-twentieth century. While it must be acknowledged that he shares certain elements with other writers in his mission to 'get his words right', McGahern's style and tenacity have the effect of reinforcing his faithfulness to original setting and themes. There was an undercurrent within critical commentary on his work that strongly suggested that he wrote in a repetitive style and that this element was one of the few areas which could be highlighted to show deficiencies in his approach or imagination. However, this charge was definitively countered by enduring comments made by Seamus Heaney in a 1975 review of McGahern's work:

¹ A phrase (i.e. 'the education of desire') associated in more recent times with the work of Ruth Levitas, particularly in her book *The Concept of Utopia* (Oxford et al.; Peter Lang, 2010), p. 223.

McGahern's imagination is ruminant. It chews the cud of the past, digests and redigests it, interrogates it for its meaning, savours for its bittersweet recurrence. This is the way to understand the compulsive return to certain landscapes and themes in his work...it would be a misunderstanding of his art to imply...that McGahern is repeating himself. He is rather retrieving himself, achieving a new self.²

These remarks are revealing not only of Heaney's respect for McGahern but the latter's purpose in returning to familiar themes, although differently each time, over the course of his long career. The artist revealed in later years how he found great value in self-representation, and, through it, release, through the process of his own writing:

As in reading, when we become conscious that we are no longer reading romances or fables or adventure but versions of our own life, so it suddenly came to me that while I seemed to be playing with words, in reality I was playing with my own life. And words, for me, have always been presences as well as meanings. Through words I could experience my own life with more reality than ordinary living.³

McGahern's view on the consequence of writing is mirrored by remarks made by Kate Ruttledge in his last novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. When asked why she liked to paint, she answers 'It brings what I see closer.'⁴ In the act of interpretation, whether in the form of the written word or the painted picture, the artist, in this instance, McGahern, offers the reader a refined representation of lived experience. Furnishing such an account relies on a trust in memory and the power of truth contained in the written word, a trust which McGahern held in common with W. B. Yeats – from whom he also took much inspiration.⁵ However, reading of his novels offered below does not seek to focus on connections of this kind, but rather to highlight

² Seamus Heaney, 'Shedding the Skin of Youth', *Sunday Independent*, 26 January 1975, p. 9.

³ Cited in 'Playing with Words', in *John McGahern: Love of the World, Essays* (Stanley van der Ziel, ed.) (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 9.

⁴ John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 67.

⁵ As mentioned by former student and respected literary commentator Declan Kiberd in his introduction to the *Love of the World* volume referenced above, p. xii. For an exploration of the link between Yeats work and McGahern's inspiration for his own style see Frank Shovlin (2016) *Touchstones: John McGahern's Classical Style* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 60-67; 150-51.

what one may term the cultural forces that shape and ultimately came to be shaped by the reflections and reactions on the author's part as much as the public's. It is hoped that this thesis will identify and explain these cultural currents in a manner that leaves the reader with a much improved awareness and appreciation of how they impact on the character of McGahern's work.

The writer himself provided the reader with a *living manifesto* of his work through a remark made in 1991:

Art is an attempt to create a world in which we can live: if not for long or forever, still a world of the imagination over which we can reign, and by reign I mean to reflect purely on our situation through this created world of ours, this Medusa's mirror, allowing us to see and to celebrate the totally intolerable.⁶

The world which McGahern creates offers the committed reader an opportunity to reside in a rich imaginary place of creation sustained by the power of human spirit that in turn drives the powerhouse of the imagination and the fictitious multiverses that spring from it. Thus, it is by seeing and embracing not only what is beautiful, loving and what makes one feel beautiful and loved, but also more melancholic and darker shades of the mind, that visitors to this world may access a clearer and more authentic portrait of human experience.

⁶ Originally written by McGahern in his *The Image* (1991), cited in *Love of the World: Essays*, (op. cit.), p. 7.

1.1 John McGahern: life, work and critical standing

The subject of this thesis is the detailed examination of the fiction of the late Irish author John McGahern. The centrepiece of this analysis is a dissection of the six novels McGahern produced during his lifetime, which are turn compared and read in conjunction with insights from his other literary creations. Seeking to illuminate what has hitherto been an unexplored facet of the author's work, a three-pronged approach involving the revealing perspectives of post-colonial theory, utopian theory and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital will be brought to bear on the selected corpus. However, this body of analysis will be undertaken at a later stage as structural and theoretical expediencies demand. Of more immediate concern is sketching a profile of the author himself, his work and the manner it has been received and dealt with to date. Due attention will also be directed toward exposing key dates and events that serve to demonstrate the evolution of McGahern's personal and literary fortunes.

On 12 November 1934 John McGahern was born in Dublin to his Garda (police officer) father Francis McGahern and schoolteacher mother, Susan McManus McGahern and was the eldest of seven children. McGahern's parents lead separate lives and do not cohabit in the family home in rural northwest Ireland. What was to become a central and defining event in McGahern's life – the death of his mother – occurs in 1945. Following this bereavement he takes up full-time residence with his father in the latter's place of work in a police barracks in Cootehall, county Roscommon in the heart of the rural northwest of the country.⁷ This change of residence sees him to come into contact with the Moloney family just as he commences his secondary school studies at the Presentation Brothers in Carrick on Shannon. His friendship with the Moloneys grants him access to extensive reading material belonging to the family, from which he borrows to indulge his artistic interests.⁸

McGahern graduated from University College Dublin in 1957 and this year coincides the beginning of his writing on fiction that was to be published in April 1961.

⁷ David Malcolm, *Understanding John McGahern* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), p. xiii

⁸ Denis Sampson, 'John McGahern: Biographical Outline', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Special Issue on John McGahern (Jul., 1991), pp. 91-92, p. 91

The stage in his life where McGahern reaches the capital city of the Republic of Ireland is, as O' Connell (1984) notes, the point where he 'completes a territorial circle which would also enclose most of his characters.'⁹ April 1961 sees McGahern completed work (which had started in 1957) on an abbreviated form of the novel, "The End and the Beginning of Love", which is then published in *X: A Literary Magazine*. The following year brings his first literary award, the AE Memorial Award sponsored by the Irish Arts Council in recognition of an abstract from his first novel, *The Barracks*. The year 1963 marks the publication of the full text of *The Barracks*, work which elicits great acclaim from critics,¹⁰ which contains many similarities and characters reminiscent of his own childhood.

McGahern continues to enjoy success on foot of his work when, in 1964, the Macauley Fellowship bestowed him with an award of Fellowship that facilitates his ability to take a sabbatical of one year away from teaching at his school Scoil Eoin Baiste in Clontarf, Dublin. This twelve-month period is spent outside Ireland, the majority of which is in England, a period that was to prove the most peaceful in his life for a while before he experienced darker times.¹¹

In 1965, McGahern marries Finnish theatre director Annikki Laaksi and also sees his novel *The Dark*, published for the first time. This novel is immediately banned in Ireland after which he is relieved of his position at his school in Dublin once he returns to work after the summer holidays, a situation which prompts his immediate involuntary re-location to London for a number of years.¹² This experience served as a direct inspiration for part of the storyline of *The Leavetaking* (1974), McGahern's third novel.

During period of 1965-1968, McGahern makes a living by working on building sites in London and in employment as a supply teacher. He gradually begins his re-entry into writing activities by engaging in review work and literary adaptations of nineteenth century fiction for the radio division of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Such work leads him back into more frequent writing when he is made Research Fellow

⁹ Shaun O' Connell, 'Door into the Light: John McGahern's Ireland', *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1984), pp. 255-268, p. 256.

¹⁰ Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2003), p. xii.

¹¹ Maher, xii

¹² Sampson, 91

at the University of Reading, where he remains for one year.¹³ McGahern emulates his experience in Reading on accepting appointment of his first of several spells at Colgate University, New York, where he teaches for a semester in 1969. The writer was to return to this institution a number of times for varying periods of up to one year in 1972, 1976, 1978-9 and 1983-84 where after he was to be appointed to temporary positions in other institutions including the University of Victoria, Canada (1987), Trinity College, Dublin (1988) and University College, Dublin (1996).¹⁴

As the decade of the 1970s drew to a close, the author's fourth novel, *The Pornographer* (1979) became publicly available and complimented McGahern's collection of short-stories *Getting Through* (1978) published shortly before. It was to be seven years until the author's next literary contributions were to be released for public consumption, this was to be another collection of short stories in the form of *High Ground* (1985). Arguably, it is unsurprising that McGahern produced a notable corpus of text between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s since this period coincided with a time when the writer enjoyed more fertile circumstances in which he could permit his imagination to bear greater fruit in the absence of overt Irish political pressures.

A greater artistic freedom thus enveloped Ireland, while the banning of *The Dark* (1965) ensured the writer endured a degree of embarrassment, shame and a period of involuntary exile outside Ireland, the ironic feature of this event had the effect of accelerating a change in the law in 1967 that resulted in a liberalisation of the censorship regime in Ireland¹⁵. However, it still suffered from notable constraints. Indeed, such was the persisting, although steadily waning power of the Irish Catholic Church in 1979 that McGahern's novel of that year, *The Pornographer*, can be seen to have resonated with the liberal spirit of legislative changes made in 1979 on foot of legal action in 1973 that obliged the government to permit the availability of contraceptives, albeit under relatively restrictive conditions.¹⁶

¹³ See note 5

¹⁴ Maher, xii-xiv

¹⁵ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), pp. 265-6.

¹⁶ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 291

Being in a position whereby McGahern became a sought-after and a respected literary figure in institutions of higher learning and other fora at home and abroad marked his transition from denigrated outcast to an acknowledged social commentator on Irish society. Indeed, while it was not the explicit intent of the author to engage in social critique, respected Irish literary critic and Trinity College, Dublin scholar Terence Brown is cognisant of how:

“For all the obsessive subjectivity of McGahern’s work, each of his novels also signals that the author is attending to social and historical fact in the manner of the realist writer as social commentator (...)” and also acknowledges this process is not a hermeneutic one since “What happens to his various characters is governed not only by the weather of feeling but by the social climate as it is affected by historical change (...)”¹⁷

While McGahern’s work contains much evidence of recollection and critique of cultural and political events, there is a tendency in this literary edifice to be concerned with recurring themes that do not always feature the same order of events as they happened in the socio-historical record. The publication of McGahern’s fifth novel, *Amongst Women* (1990)¹⁸ is illustrative of just such a situation as it features a central authoritative paternal figure as the principal protagonist who exercises enormous power over his family, particularly over his daughters, when the socio-cultural stage had long begun to witness a much greater acknowledgement of the role and rights of women in Irish society. Evidence of this is to be found in the 1989 passing of new legislation which made it possible for women to obtain limited legal remedy for situations whereby their marriages broke down irretrievably. Additionally, renewed pressure from liberal sections of political opinion ensured the issue of abortion was put to referendum in 1983 as well as Divorce in 1986¹⁹, both of which failed to attract sufficient support to change the Irish constitutional positions on such matters²⁰. They did, however, ensure that these

¹⁷ Terence Brown, *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 226.

¹⁸ Siobhán Holland, ‘Re-citing the Rosary: Woman, Catholicism and Agency in Brian Moore’s *Cold Heaven* and John McGahern’s *Amongst Women*’, in Liam Harte and Michael Parker (eds.) *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*. (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 56-78, p. 57.

¹⁹ T.W. Moody & F.X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History* (Dublin: RTÉ/Mercier Press, 2001), p. 316

²⁰ Keogh, 382-3.

issues remained on the agenda. Divorce, alluded to in McGahern's *The Leavetaking*, where the protagonist controversially marries an American divorcee, was then illegal in the Republic of Ireland, a somewhat anomalous situation in the Western world that was partially alleviated with a legislative amendment some years later.²¹

In *Amongst Women*, with its stern patriarchal figure in the form of Michael Moran, head of the household and widower, stands in striking resemblance to Francis McGahern, the writer's own father and indeed mirrors many of the details and circumstances of the McGahern family dynamics. Notable features that correlate with the author's background include the rural setting of the novel, the lone father undertaking all the parenting by himself and numerous children in the family.

McGahern's only work to be performed on stage, *The Power of Darkness* was published in 1991 and performed in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in October of that year. This text is broadly reminiscent of McGahern's own childhood in the 1940s and shares its setting with these circumstances that can be traced to a rural Irish community. The next major body of work by the author came to be published in 1992 under the title *Creatures of the Earth: New and Selected Stories*, which was republished in 1993, 2006 and 2007 in paperback format. This collection of short stories are comprised of what was then new work combined with existing stories appropriately arranged for public digestion. John McGahern's last major work of fiction, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* became available in 2002.²² In the United States the book was given the title *By the Lake*. The author dedicates this work to his wife, Madeleine whom he had married in 1973.²³

In this literary work the writer depicts the terminal decline of the traditional rural way of life in Ireland and as he does so also demonstrates some of the major changes that have affected Irish society between his first novel published in 1963 and the onset of the new millennium. What was a hegemonic and patriarchal church-state power axis had by this time become severely weakened in the wake of a raft of scandals involving the Catholic Church in Ireland pertaining to sexual abuse of children in permanent care

²¹ This issue is discussed in greater length in the historical context section.

²² Belinda McKeon, 'Beyond Chronicle: The Deceptive Realism of John McGahern's Fiction,' *American Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 8 (2011), pp. 77-92, p. 82.

²³ Maher, xii

in residential institutions owned by the state and managed by church authorities or their agents. *That They May Face the Rising Sun* also provides an acute insight into how the local community had made the transition from fearful parishioners to assertive citizens whose faith had weakened to such an extent that it became possible for them to reject the hegemonic control formerly exercised by the clergy over community and state. McGahern himself had long lived a post-Catholic, even a post-faith lifestyle and this work reflects how a very significant proportion of other Irish citizens have made the transition to this position of the assumption of a more secular character in a wealthy, liberal modern Irish state.

McGahern's autobiography was published in 2005 under the title *Memoir* and publication followed in the United States in 2006 under an alternative title of *All Will Be Well*.²⁴ Valuable as it is in situating and grounding much of the material and events that inspired the artist's work, it was not universally welcomed as some critics charged that it removed much of the mystery from the essence of McGahern's world of fiction. For the discerning reader it represents a confirmation of the fact that the author wrote from a reservoir of direct personal experience in moulding the circumstances and characters of his literary world. A great deal of what McGahern wrote about was the universal nature of so many events and experiences that are common to people the world over, each as comparable to personal sensations and sufferings of a man in Leitrim as it is to any other person from Liberia to London. In leaving the earthly plain in March 2006, McGahern gave the ultimate meaning to his own life and work: experiences of a finite life-time resonate with all those who choose to engage in the finding of a meaning in the human condition.

The writer's artistic enterprise in attempting to accurately depict selected moments in rural Irish life has been subjected to its own process of critique, much of it laudatory and complimentary. McGahern received much praise in his lifetime for his artistic achievements where one critic, Denis Sampson affirms that the writer's work clearly takes its inspiration from first-hand knowledge of what were familiar surroundings to him: Roscommon-Leitrim of the 1940s to the 1960s and Dublin of the

²⁴ McKeon, 85.

1950s and 1960s. His style stems from these settings and particularly in the inherent beauty of the quotidian in its violent, sexual, death and mysterious facets. Hence, this also includes both the visceral and mystical forms which he uses to define his intimate and confessional style.

For McGahern, every aspect of each scene of his fiction needs to be filled with appropriate representational images in a fiction he has compared to a continuing saga of opposing forces and because of this he structures his writing by relying upon circular narrative patterns in conjunction with making the most of confrontations, contrasts and repetitions. A certain sense of immediacy for what is genuine is played out in each frame of McGahern's artistic representation of the world, something which emanates from the text in the form of a tension in style that readers find alluring.²⁵

Dermot McCarthy (2010) declares all of McGahern's novels to be concerned with demonstrating protagonists struggling from darkness toward light, where this light represents a form of self-understanding and self-possession to which he pays inchoate homage in the figure of his slowly dying mother in his fiction and it is from these points, power and emotions that flows between them which 'form the axis of memory that centres and vivifies his writing'.²⁶ For all its realism, McGahern's mode of writing is not that of the realistic, but rather a poetic preoccupation with the local and personal through psychological and social observation. In this way the tangible and definite detail of durable and delicate tragicomic Irish world can be presented as an act tantamount to faith in that it is done in the spirit of love and acceptance.

Recognition of this kind permits comparison of McGahern's work with such grand Irish literary figures as Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney, and to a lesser extent, Thomas Kinsella – a comparison that serves as a useful tool in determining where to place McGahern's work on the spectrum of recent Irish writing. McGahern's work in respect of Modernist masters the likes of whom include Yeats, Joyce and Proust, all of whom channelled their search for style into their art.²⁷

²⁵ As so asserted by Denis Sampson, 'Introducing John McGahern', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Special Issue on John McGahern (Jul., 1991), pp. 1-11, pp. 5-6.

²⁶ Dermot McCarthy, *John McGahern and the Art of Memory* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 56.

²⁷ Sampson, 'Introducing John McGahern', pp. 5-7.

In so adopting the writing style that he does, McGahern takes inspiration directly from his own intimate knowledge of and confidence in familiar terrain. At the same time he takes on the greatest challenge as an artist – “to hold the familiar eternally in love’s light.” Wherein the gloss of habitual modes of thinking of the familiar is removed so as to reach a closer vantage point for the observation of the banal in everyday life – a goal, which in many ways, seems so idealistic as to be unrealistic in an era where postmodernism has become almost a hegemonic form of film review produced for the print media. However, the hallmark of McGahern’s work is to be found in his enduring autonomy and continuous commitment to his own raw material as he seeks sources from nineteenth and twentieth century writing from which to draw inspiration to discover his own unique style.

For others, such as David Malcolm, McGahern’s vision forms part of a common strain in most twentieth century literature. Thus this vision can be described as a dark one, but even within that depressing environment it is still possible to identify the presence of some light of hope. In this context, as in others, the character Elizabeth Reegan (in *The Barracks*) is located at the pinnacle of creativity within McGahern’s work. Reception of this particular novel was quite positive. A rather desolate novel dealing with disappointment and death has always been well regarded by scholars and critics alike. Prior to the novel’s publication in 1962, McGahern was the recipient of the prestigious AE Memorial Award sponsored by the Irish Arts Council for sections of *The Barracks*, extracts of which were published in *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing* (of the parts of the novel that were published before 1963, all of the material came from the first chapter). Once the complete novel was published, McGahern received more accolades, including an Irish Arts Council Macauley Fellowship.²⁸

Furthermore, *The Barracks* relates to individuals and to their situations and experiences, but in such a way that these realities also have national reverberations. The tradition of literary realism is the style that learned opinion most frequently associate with *The Barracks*. Such a characterisation is made with reasonable justification as the novel does indeed supply the reader with a highly illustrated and faithful representation

²⁸ Malcolm, 8-11.

of the social and material facets of the lives led by the characters set in a conflicted lower-class environment that is often the theme dealt with by nineteenth and twentieth century realism. Others differ on this point, such as Denis Sampson who argues “it would be restrictive to think of *The Barracks* as a realistic novel” since in his view there are “personal and metaphysical” elements of experience contained in the novel (in itself, not entirely unusual in the canon of realistic fiction). Sampson’s motivation in making these claims lie in the common ground he sees between McGahern’s work and the work of Beckett and Proust.²⁹

Sampson is not alone in drawing such inferences as Mikowski relates *The Barracks* to the work of Proust and Beckett (in addition to Flaubert) and in so doing locates McGahern in more experimental and self-referential tradition. The latter claim is supported by Kampen who describes what he views as self-referential elements in *The Barracks*, aspects such as the character Elizabeth Reegan’s reflections in respect of knowledge, language and on texts (read and produced) and on another important aspect of the novel: focus on silence and being unable to communicate. Taken together, these opinions serve to reinforce a view that McGahern’s work is ambiguous in its relationship to literary tradition. *The Barracks* is no exception to this assertion. A number of features found in Beckett’s work such as waiting, silence and death can also be found in McGahern’s work. Similarly, the deep despair in Beckett’s work are also to be found in McGahern’s work, where, for example, the vision of the world in *The Barracks* correspond so closely to these sentiments. However, despite the many similarities identified above, it must be borne in mind that McGahern’s characters inhabit a world that is far more similar to realistic fiction than material written by Beckett.

In addition, insofar as *The Barracks* is concerned, the language employed by the narrator does not employ the same level of self-referentiality (in the context of encouraging attention toward itself as a text) than does any of Beckett’s work. Instead, McGahern’s texts are preoccupied with a particular linguistic configuration of the narrator’s language that is charged with making a nuanced suggestion in terms of ‘the

²⁹ See Malcolm, 25-26.

fluidity of consciousness rather than to draw attention to itself (...).' Such is the esteem in which *The Barracks* is held in the literary world that has been described as 'one of the most powerful, subtle, and moving works of the mid-twentieth-century fiction in English'.³⁰

"The idea McGahern's second novel seems to have grown quite logically out of *The Barracks*" remarks critic Jürgen Kamm. There is little doubt that *The Dark*, which Denis Sampson refers to as "this harrowing account of adolescence", contains many mirror images of the earlier work of fiction in terms of setting (a modest farm and its environs in western Ireland, at a time approximately at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s), characters (a tyrannical widower and his suffering family) and in some of its events (family politics and conflict within). However, in this novel, the focus is directed more toward a young male rather than a dying female, Mahoney, coming into adulthood in a challenging domestic situation. Despite these dissimilarities, what is common to both works is that the young man Mahoney in *The Dark* is every bit as rebellious in respect of his environment as is the female protagonist Elizabeth Reagan in respect of hers in *The Barracks*.

The inspiration for the title of novel came from a 1932 poem "The Choice" by W. B. Yeats. In this poem the speaker defends the notion that the human condition implies that choices must be made in life and if humans a refusal of the "heavenly mansion" will result in the person "raging in the dark."³¹

Critical appreciation was the reaction afforded to the publication of *The Dark*, while not escaping a small measure of scepticism. An opinion given by an anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* regards *The Dark* as being typical of contemporary Irish fiction in that "it is plotless, autobiographical in form and about growing up," and especially as it pertains to religion in respect of its role in influencing the Irish psyche. A reviewer for the *New York Review of Books*, Vivian Mercier shares a more encouraging opinion on the work by stating his respect for the "technique for this

³⁰ As so defended by Malcolm, 27.

³¹ Cited in Malcolm, 28.

brief, stripped down novel,”³² that features nameless principal characters, the omission of personal pronouns in the final chapter as well as the passages that represent the young Mahoney’s consciousness designed to give the reader an insight into this thinking process.

“So determinedly bleak” is how Cronin describes it in sum. An anonymous reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1970 shares Cronin’s displeasure at the work and so describes *The Dark* like *The Barracks* in terms of representing a “a sombre, sufferingly malicious view of contemporary Ireland.”³³ Not even the passage of some thirty-two years appears to have mellowed the critics’ opinion of the work with David W. Madden describing McGahern’s fiction in 2002, specifically taking *The Dark* and *The Barracks* together and labels them as a pair of “violent, brooding books that emphasize the ambushes of family life, and the vulnerability of children.”³⁴

Recognition of the violence, both physical and symbolic receives similar acknowledgement from Neil Corcoran, who, writing in 1997 remarks on the “hideously explicit violence of the father” in *The Dark* and reads into the title as being indicative of the dark “of ritual Irish hatred and self-pity, that obscuring and obscurantist darkness though which all of McGahern’s characters must fumble their way.”³⁵ He also comments on the prescience of the novel in that it broaches the issue of sexual irregularity where “decades in advance of current revelations about domestic violence and the text’s prescience, however, cost McGahern dear, and led to the novel’s banning in Ireland (...)”

Another integral facet of McGahern’s fiction, and particularly in *The Dark*, that has merited critical commentary is that of the narrative style adopted in the work. For Hedwig Schwall regards the narrative of the novel as “slightly experimental”, while

³² Vivian Mercier, “Growing Up in Ireland,” review of *The Dark*, *New York Times Book Review*, 6 March 1966, p. 50.

³³ *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 May 1965, p. 365.

³⁴ David W. Madden, “By the Lake,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2002), p. 163.

³⁵ Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 88-89.

Gerd Kampen highlights the unusual nature of the “you” narrator.³⁶ Neil Corcoran argues that the novel’s narrative strategy makes it amenable to be read as attempt to allow the text to function both in “autobiographical and generic” terms by bringing different points of view together in respect of the protagonist. This strategy gives the novel “a somewhat ironic undercurrent” according to James M. Cahalan³⁷, while Kamm, however, is critical of this technique since for him it “runs counter to the confessional mode” of the novel.³⁸

Malcolm (2007) retorts to such criticism of McGahern’s narrative strategy in *The Dark* by doubting Kampen’s argument that the work has no self-referential function. The former defends the position that a narrative of this complex nature inevitably attracts attention. The novel is not just account of the nature of actual events, it also forms part of the forces that shape those events, thus transforming it into an artistic artefact. Indeed, he also notes that it is a typical property of McGahern’s fiction that it persists in a borderland between the largely disguised conventions of realism and the more transparent art of other fiction types.

Van der Ziel (2005) takes issue with the manner in which McGahern adopted in writing *The Dark*. He deems the absence of a logical construction or traditional framework as forming the central thrust of what the novel’s meaning can be perceived to be. This can be understood in light of comments on the same work made by Denis Sampson who states: ‘the novel...does express a belief in uncertainty as a defining human experience, and the formal and stylistic characteristics that so many critics have faulted are actually due to the novel’s focus.’ In *The Dark*, therefore, the poetic vision set out by McGahern is to be located closer to that of Beckett, the master of failure and chaos, as opposed to the integrated and classical approach adopted by Joyce, which in

³⁶ Hedwig Schwall, review John Banville: *Fictions of Order*; by Ingo Berensmeyer, and *Zwischen Welt und Text*, by Gerd Kampen, *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 22 (March 2003), p. 221.

³⁷ James M. Calahan, *Double Visions: Women and Men in Modern and Contemporary Irish Fiction*. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p.110.

³⁸ Jürgen Kamm, “John McGahern.” In *Contemporary Irish Novelists* (Rüdiger Imhof, ed.) pp. 175-91. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

turn inevitably gives rise to the unfavourable comparison drawn between *The Dark* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.³⁹

The overarching vision projected by McGahern's work is explored by Grennan (2005) who finds the same to be that of utilising voice as '...a means of knowing, of experiencing, the world.'⁴⁰ For Grennan, the voice takes three forms in McGahern's work. One principal function of this voice is to 'allow him (McGahern) to register actions and facts with beautifully lucid objectivity. He cites an example of this technique from *The Barracks*:

The bright golds and scarlets of the religious pictures on the walls had faded, their glass glittered now in the sudden flashes of firelight, and as it deepened the dusk turned reddish from the Sacred Heart lamp that burned before the small wickerwork crib of Bethlehem on the mantelpiece. Only the cups and saucers laid ready on the table for their father's tea were white and brilliant.

The 'voice' in question here is that of a Dutch interior, including the expression dimensions of an oil painting, a moment captured and punctuated by the objects in and around its environs. McGahern possesses this voice at all times and deploys it in a different fashion in each novel. Despite the varying form of the voice, its desired end does not change in that its purpose remains to provide a stable basis of experiences from the quotidian to anchor the haphazard sphere of consciousness and complex morals.⁴¹

First published in 1974, McGahern's third novel, *The Leavetaking*, presents a challenge for critics since it has been printed in two different editions. The first was issued in 1974 by Faber and Faber in the United Kingdom, and by Little Brown and Company in the United States. McGahern once recalled that "several years after its publication," while collaborating with a French translator for an edition in that language of *The Leavetaking*, he resolved that it was necessary to make alterations as "it had to be changed" due to one of the ideas present in the text being written in too "blatant" a

³⁹ Stanley van der Ziel, 'All This Talk and Struggle': John McGahern's "The Dark", *Irish University Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Special Issue: John McGahern (Spring-Summer, 2005), pp. 104-120. p. 113.

⁴⁰ Eamon Grennan, 'Only What Happens': Mulling Over McGahern. *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, Spring/Summer 2005, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 13-27. p. 13.

⁴¹ Grennan (2005), p. 13.

fashion while it also suffered from a deficit of “distance.”⁴² Once he had taken this decision, he accordingly revised the second part of the novel for its republication in the United Kingdom in 1984. However, no such action was taken in respect of the U.S. edition, which, to date, remains in its original form.

The Leavetaking (as with the novel that followed it, *The Pornographer*) has enjoyed complex treatment at the hand of critics. Julian Jebb, in a 1975 review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, expressed an encouraging view of the work. Despite this positivity, he suggests that the book, is in fact, two texts that can be read separately. He does not, however, suggest that this trait is a negative one and acknowledges that McGahern has remained “true to the bleak vision” of the earlier novels but “has enlarged his view of the possibilities of life.” Furthermore, he believes that “*The Leavetaking* represents an achievement of a very high order and substantiates the belief that its author is among the half-dozen practising writers of English prose most worthy of attention.”⁴³ Other laudatory reviews came, for example, in the Dublin *Sunday Independent*, from such eminent writers such as Seamus Heaney who praises the novel. He stated that McGahern “has transformed situations and scenes common in experience into something rich and strange, something uncommonly beautiful.”⁴⁴

Peter Ackroyd writing for *The Spectator* sets out his discomfort for what he sees as a discontinuity persisting as between the two parts of the novel. He states his view by noting: “I can only assume, that there are two novels elbowing each other within the same covers. They do not complement each other.”⁴⁵ In the *New Statesman*, Peter Straub adopts an attack position on the *The Leavetaking* which he describes as “naïve, emotionally immature, almost adolescent, precisely adolescent, in fact.”⁴⁶ Writing of the *The Leavetaking* and *The Pornographer* in 1990, Jürgen Kamm declares they “are unsatisfactory novels on the level of writing and are more or less explicitly recognized as such by their author.”

⁴² John McGahern, “Preface to the Second Edition,” *The Leavetaking* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 5.

⁴³ Julian Jebb, ‘The Call of the Deep’, in *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 January 1975, p. 29.

⁴⁴ Seamus Heaney, “Shedding the Skin of Youth”, (review of McGahern’s *The Leavetaking*), *Sunday Independent*, 26 January 1975, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Peter Ackroyd, “The Twilight World”, *The Spectator*, 11 January 1975, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Peter Straub, “John McGahern: *The Leavetaking*,” *New Statesman*, 10 January 1975, p. 50.

The Leavetaking accommodates definite resonances of McGahern's earlier work. The location in which the story is set in the first part, i.e. small Irish rural communities- is similar in *The Barracks* as well as in *The Dark*. Minor, short sections of *The Leavetaking* are actually set in an Irish police barracks, as is the case in McGahern's first novel. Counterparts for characters can also be identified in earlier texts. For example, Kate Moran, the educated, sensitive dying mother inspires the recollection of the character of Elizabeth Reegan. Sergeant Moran is a pared-down version of the uncompromising father figures presented in *The Barracks* and *The Dark*.⁴⁷

Jürgen Kamm is also of the opinion that the text merits vigorous criticism since it lacks "...tension in it and that there is no connection between the novel's separate parts". Further disappointment in the work is detected by Alice Adams writing in the *New York Times Book Review* where she believes that the writer's talent has not been fully utilised, stating: "one is inclined...to wish that the highly talented Mr. McGahern had chosen to write about a more interesting and appealing subject."⁴⁸

For Seamus Deane, the work represents a candid and courageous examination of "the forces which have been dominating (McGahern's) work" up to that point, a work in which the author "enriches without softening his vision of the lives of quiet desperation."⁴⁹ A particularly optimistic view of the work is taken by eminent U.S. novelist John Updike in a piece submitted to the *New Yorker* in 1979. While he does label *The Pornographer* "an old fashioned novel," a view formed by Updike on examination of McGahern's assertion that adulterers feel guilty for their actions, which he credits as being "this vivid and involving novel," whose author is "a shrewd psychologist". His critique concludes with the remarks: "But let it be admitted – nay proclaimed – that by and large Mr. McGahern writes entrancingly, with a lively pace and constant melody".⁵⁰

McGahern posits an organic representation as an alternative to what cannot be elegantly communicated through conventional dialogue. Such a style is heavily tinged

⁴⁷ An opinion put forward by Malcolm (2007), p. 53.

⁴⁸ Alice Adams, "Mavis, the Colonel, and Sin Chastised," review of *The Pornographer*, *New York Times Book Review*, 2 December 1979, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, (London: Hutchinson, 1986) p. 223.

⁵⁰ John Updike, "An Old-Fashioned Novel," *New Yorker*, 24 December 1979, pp. 95-98.

by the story-teller's nuanced use of language that serves to discretely transmit a picture of the delicate and complicated nature of the representation of the world he presents the reader with. Exemplifying this is the material composing *The Pornographer* wherein a 'dead of heart' narrator wonders aloud whether: 'It must surely be possible to be out of our life for the whole of our life if we could tell what our life is other than this painful becoming of ourselves.' Infused in the text is a deliberate discomfiture so as to give the impression that the nature of the observation records the rough edges of tangible events the tone of which encourages the reader/listener to adopt a more intimate and attentive stance in respect of the information supplied by the teller/author confident in his own recounting abilities even in the face of a lack of continuity and collectedness of whatever object is subjected to his focus.⁵¹

Indeed, such is the respect held for McGahern's own integrity of self that Denis Sampson (1991) refers to its remarkable nature where he states:

...McGahern has performed an unusual feat in contemporary fiction: he has managed to write in a plain style and in a somewhat traditional manner which allows a large audience access to the fiction, and yet there is a quality of austere inner order and stylistic precision which indicate that an original and powerful imagination is at work.⁵²

Some critics judge McGahern's style of writing as forming part of a French tradition. This view is held by Vivian Mercier, who, in his review of *The Dark* states that his belief in this view comes from the fact that McGahern's work reflected his search for "the objective in the subjective"⁵³ in such a way as to justify the drawing of parallels with the work of Flaubert.

In respect of other work by McGahern, Robert Hogan writes in his 1984 essay that "the issue is in doubt" in respect of whether McGahern is capable of broadening his technique and subject. Subsequent to the 1985 publication of *High Ground*, a critical

⁵¹ Eamon Grennan, 'Only What Happens': Mulling Over McGahern. *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, Spring/Summer 2005, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 13-27. p. 15

⁵² Denis Sampson, 'Introducing John McGahern', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 17, Issue 1 (July, 1991), pp. 1-11, p. 3.

⁵³ Vivien Mercier, "Growing Up in Ireland." Review of *The Dark*, *New York Times Book Review*, 6 March 1966, p. 50.

consensus formed in respect of McGahern's confirmed ability to change his style⁵⁴. In the *London Review of Books*, Pat Rogers writes that McGahern's "strikingly good collection of stories" is demonstrative of "a subtler sense of the interaction of character and environment" that had been evident in past work up to that point in time⁵⁵. The author's broadening concern in his *High Ground* also attracts Denis Sampson's attention in the latter's book *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (1993). In this text Sampson notes:

These short stories of the early eighties extend the drama of opposites that shaped *Getting Through*, although even more than the earlier collection the book seems to be designed to reflect a coherence of preoccupation and style. Studies of personal vision and communal life are given a new emphasis by the introduction of longer perspectives, and a more overt concern with moral issues is joined to a sense of change that is social as well as metaphysical.⁵⁶

The Times Literary Supplement reviewer Patricia Craig remarks hold that McGahern "writes, as always, with authority and gravity and with an instinct for the most appropriate detail."⁵⁷ The collection has never been without strong praise. Rogers, for one, makes a comparison between McGahern's short stories with the fiction of William Faulkner and William Trevor. A contributing critic to the *New York Times Book Review*, Joel Conarroe offers a generous description of the work as "a fine new book" that serves to locate McGahern within "a charmed circle of contemporary Irish writers that includes Edna O'Brien, Seamus Heaney and Thomas Kinsella."⁵⁸

Considering McGahern's 1990 work *Amongst Women*, it must be acknowledged as by far the most successful and popular of his books. Critics tend to be generally charitable in their descriptions of it. Eamon Maher draws attention to the "almost

⁵⁴ Robert Hogan, "Old Boys, Young Bucks, and New Women: The Contemporary Irish Short Story" in *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History* (James F. Kilroy, ed.) (Boston: Twayne, 1984), pp. 169-215.

⁵⁵ Pat Rogers, "Street Wise", Review of *High Ground*. *London Review of Books*, 3 October 1985, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁶ Denis Sampson, *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993: 188-192, 197)

⁵⁷ Patricia Craig, "Everyday Ecstasies," *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 September 1985, p. 1001.

⁵⁸ Joel Conarroe, "Strong Women, Dreamy Men," review of *High Ground*, *New York Times Books Review*, 8 February 1987, p. 9.

universal” positive nature of responses to it.⁵⁹ In the *Times Literary Supplement*, Lindsay Duguid expresses her admiration for McGahern’s “fastidiousness of style” and holds that *Amongst Women*, should be regarded as “Rich yet spare, it is at once a portrait of a particular era and an survey of a nation’s past and future.” However, she also recognises that “for its Irishness...*Amongst Women* addresses universal themes.”⁶⁰ Indeed, more praise has been forthcoming from distinguished Irish writer John Banville who states in a review for the *New York Review of Books*: “Rarely nowadays, does one come upon a novel that one senses will outlast one’s own time. *Amongst Women*, despite the quietness of its tone and the limits deliberately imposed upon it by the author, is an example of the novelist’s art at its finest, a work the heart of which beats to the rhythm of the world and of life itself. It will endure.”⁶¹

Less favourable commentary which borders on and sometimes becomes sceptical in nature has also been made of McGahern’s work. Among those in this category is a review by John Lanchester for the *London Review of Books*, who receives this work of fiction with the assertion that it is “a risky book” as a result of its traditional technique it employs and because “it commits itself so resolutely to its ordinary story” (in other words, its traditionality). “Risky” is a term also used by Rand Cooper in the *New York Times Book Review*, whose opinion entails noting how to locate the work in a literary tradition: “To place this prose, one begins with Hardy and moves backward. It’s risky for a contemporary writer to express himself in bygone cadences. The reader may feel artificially enclosed by them.” *Irish Times* contributor Fintan O’Toole comments on the old-fashioned nature of McGahern’s technique in *Amongst Women* and expresses the view that it is inappropriate for contemporary Ireland.⁶² Robert F. Garrat’s 2005 article on *Amongst Women* in the *Irish University Review* concurs with this position. He directs readers’ attention to the authors “signature conservative style” but also puts forward the idea that some readers have been anxious

⁵⁹ Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2003), p. 97; 117.

⁶⁰ Lindsay Duguid, “The Passing of Old Ways,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 18-24 May 1990, p. 535.

⁶¹ John Banville, “Violent Times”, review of *Amongst Women*, *New York Review of Books*, 6 December 1990, p. 22.

⁶² Fintan O’Toole, “Both Completely Irish and Universal,” *Irish Times* (Dublin), 15 September 1990, Weekend Section, p. 5.

to understand the “reluctance” of the novel “to engage with contemporary Irish culture.”⁶³

In the interim between the publication of *Amongst Women* (1990) and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), two major works were produced by McGahern: a play, *The Power of Darkness* (1991) as well as a short story titled: “The Country Funeral.” The latter appeared in the author’s *The Collected Stories*, the first publication of which in the UK was 1992, with the U.S. version appearing in 1994.

McGahern’s sixth novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, was published in the United Kingdom in 2002, the same year as the U.S. edition. The latter, however, was issued with a different title; that of *By the Lake*. This alteration in the title, does in fact, provoke an alteration in the reader’s focus within the text. The original title clearly references death and last things. The U.S. version’s title, however, draws attention to the text’s focus on rurality and nature.

That They May Face the Rising Sun was welcomed by critics with high praise. In the *Independent on Sunday*, Paul Binding refers to the work as a “superb novel” and compliments the text’s careful, detailed and yet economical, representation of rural life and the natural world that includes its complex portrayal of the community that resides within its boundaries. Binding concludes his review by stating that the novel is an “extra-ordinary and original achievement.”⁶⁴ Similarly, distinguished novelist Hilary Mantel formulates a long and laudatory review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* in the *New York Review of Books*. Her main focus is on the complex relations that persist between the characters that prompts her to remark that the work merits the label “this simply constructed and gently paced book,” where there is a delayed yet powerful introduction of historical events into the body of the text that compliments the dignity McGahern sees in the mundane lives of the characters. Mantel notes the “grave integrity of the text” and that “by virtue of its simplicity the novel accretes power.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Robert F. Garratt, “John McGahern’s *Amongst Women*: Representation, Memory and Trauma.” *Irish University Review of Irish Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2005), p. 121.

⁶⁴ Paul Binding, “Welcome to Paradise, County Leitrim”, review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, *Independent on Sunday* (London), 22 January 2002, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Hilary Mantel, “Getting Through”, review of *By the Lake*, *New York Review of Books*, 23 May 2002, pp. 10-14.

David Malcolm (2007) remarks that “such universally positive responses are striking for *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is a peculiar text.” In this observation he is referring to the fact that the book does not have quite a number features of story material that would normally be expected to feature in a novel: a story line, which is usually more or less intricate that threads the text, conflicts, climaxes, moments of denouement and complex development of characters. In this respect, Maher writes that some readers have been “somewhat bemused by the lack of plot or of character development” in the book. Maher argues that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is “not a novel in the conventional sense, more a lyrical evocation of a particular place and its inhabitants.”⁶⁶

A central element of McGahern’s work is the power of the language he employs and the role he assigns to it in summoning the central image of his art – the defining characteristic of his book. As it does in Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* so does the language and style of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* supply the book with its founding fabric as well as providing a vessel for the meaning of the work. While Joyce’s work may well be linguistically superior to McGahern’s book, both works share integral features where ‘form is content, content is form...(The writing) writing is not about something, it is that something itself’ – a formulation authored by Samuel Beckett in respect of the language in Joyce’s ‘Work in Progress’ being instrumental in the establishment and centrality of meaning. This analysis can equally be applied to McGahern’s last major work of fiction.⁶⁷

Stanley van der Zeil (2004) takes McGahern’s work *That They May the Rising Sun* (2002) and compares it with the work of English film critic Anthony Lane, a critique of which Terry Eagleton supplies where he holds that this criticism can be directly applied to McGahern. It reads: ‘It is not that Lane writes so well about what he sees, but that he sees what he does because he writes so well. It is prodigious verbal imagination which unpacks these visual phenomena so resourcefully.’⁶⁸

McGahern’s artistic power of dedicated observation and faithful description has manifested its enormous truth and liberty of conscience through his literary work. This

⁶⁶ Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2003), p. 121.

⁶⁷ See Stanley Van Der Ziel, “The Aesthetics of Redemption: John McGahern’s *That They May Face the Rising Sun*”, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 372, (Winter, 2004), pp. 473-86, p. 480

⁶⁸ Cited in Van Der Ziel, 475.

body of work empowered an oppressed generation of Irish people to begin to open their eyes to the beauty and the banal in their everyday lives. One of the most significant of McGahern's talents and a major element employed in the construction of his literary world was his alacrity to expose two important facets that emerged with the development of Irish society., which Maher (2005) examines from the perspective of posterity as to:

When future literary historians evaluate his contribution they will undoubtedly concentrate on McGahern's courage in exposing hypocrisy, especially religious hypocrisy; on his sensitivity to injustice; and, perhaps most important, on his depiction of the demise of the rural Ireland in which he was reared.⁶⁹

In this way, the literary journey experienced by readers of McGahern's work is one of bearing witness to the displacement of a rural centred society to that of the urban, modern centred country. It is thus the concern of the foregoing section to examine the contexts in which McGahern wrote in attempt to gain a greater appreciation of the environment in which the artist produced his work.

⁶⁹ Eamon Maher, 'John McGahern and his Irish Readers', *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (Summer, 2005), pp. 125-136, p. 134.

1.2 The cultural landscape of McGahern's imaginative writing

There is little doubt as to the depth and quality of the narrative fiction left behind by John McGahern. Chronicling change in Irish life, McGahern's work provides a valuable and lucid insight into the legacy of the events surrounding the foundation of the independent Irish state. His work also charts the evolution of society and the changes these developments effected on the character of the country.

McGahern was born in Dublin on 12 November 1934 and was raised in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon in rural northwest Ireland, an environment which provided rich inspiration and many of the settings for the writer's work.⁷⁰ McGahern was born into a conservative, deeply pious Catholic Ireland, the latter of which was an integral part of Irish life. One of the fundamental tenets of this cultural environment was a stringent censorship regime. The Censorship of Publications Act 1929 was a clear reflection of the moral concerns of the governing classes of the new Irish Free State, of both governing and opposing political forces, each of which was wholly guided by Roman Catholic doctrine.⁷¹ The Act established three grounds on which publications could be officially banned:

- 1) Under Part II of Section 6 "in...general tendency indecent or obscene";
- 2) Under Part II of Section 7 where publications devoted "an unduly large proportion of space to the publication of matters relating to crime";
- 3) Part II of Section 6 where cultural products made reference to: "the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage."

Despite being created with the intention of protecting public morals, the public takes no part in the process since the Censorship Board is only answerable to the

⁷⁰ As so attested to by David Malcolm his *Understanding John McGahern* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), p.xiii.

⁷¹ Donal Ó Drisceoil, 'The best banned in the land': Censorship and Irish Writing since 1950, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 35, Irish Writing since 1950 (2005), pp. 146-160, p. 146.

Minister for Justice (Interior Minister)⁷² and the public are strictly precluded from obtaining any information that would shed light on the activities or qualifications of members of the body.⁷³ Even though the Act was liberalised to an extent in 1946 when changes permitted the constitution of a Censorship Appeals Board consisting of five members who were empowered to overturn bans, but in practice it had little effect since many of the titles blacklisted were already out of print for some time.⁷⁴ These earlier mild alterations took place while Éamon de Valera continued to occupy the office of An Taoiseach, however, further legislative alterations in 1967 took place in an era when de Valera had vacated executive political to take up the largely ceremonial role of President of Ireland. On 1st September 1966, Minister for Justice, Deputy Brian Lenihan Sr., brought a memorandum to cabinet seeking support from his government colleagues in order to reform the censorship laws. The document contained a proposal to set a defined limit on the duration of prohibitions, but it was quickly withdrawn without justification. Twelve weeks later, McGahern was one of fifteen recipients of an £800 bursary by the Arts Council of Great Britain to ‘enable writers to concentrate on their craft’ and at the same the Censorship Reform Society held its first meeting at the Gate Theatre in Dublin. A further three months were to elapse before concrete action was to emanate from central government where on 1st March 1967, Minister Lenihan revisited the issue at cabinet and was authorised to draft a new bill. Revisions ensued but the momentum for change was maintained and final version of the new Act was approved by Dáil Éireann in June 1967, which provided for the automatic unbanning of books after twelve years, but permitted further bans.⁷⁵

⁷² Up to the present day (since 1967) there have been no significant amendments to the censorship legislation, with the exception of the issuing by the Minister for Justice of a Statutory Instrument in September 1980 (S.I. No. 292/1980; available at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1980/si/292/made/en/print>) that sets out an updated regime for those who wish to complain to the Censorship of Publications Board and appellate bodies in respect of the conditions under which complaints can be made in respect of publications that should be considered for banning. This provision remains in force today and is regulated by the Department of Justice & Equality, the Interior Ministry of the Republic of Ireland. A summary of the current legislation in respect of the regulation of cultural content for public consumption can be found at: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/WP15000099>

⁷³ See Driscoll (2005) for additional detailed information on this incident.

⁷⁴ See note 4 above.

⁷⁵ Val Nolan, ‘If it was just th’oul book...’: a history of the McGahern banning controversy, *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 19, 2011, pp. 261-279, p. 274.

McGahern's first published work of fiction appeared in 1957 and his last appeared in 2002.⁷⁶ During this period and from the time of McGahern's own birth, notable changes were to be seen in Irish society. A veteran of the 1916 Easter Rising, Éamon de Valera had taken office as An Taoiseach in 1932, for the first of several terms, just two years before the author's birth.⁷⁷ That year also marked the holding of the International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, an event that augmented the already building momentum behind machinations undertaken for and on behalf of the Catholic hierarchy toward influencing a change in the character of the existing constitution. By 1935, while McGahern was still a young child, De Valera had resolved to draft an entirely new constitution and in 1936 he sought the opinion of the Irish Jesuit Province on the form the document could take.⁷⁸ In common with W.T. Cosgrave before him (Prime Minister between 1922 and 1932), but for different reasons, De Valera continuously made alterations to the existing constitution. He then decided to hold a referendum on the new constitution on the same day as the general election. On 9 March 1937 the cabinet authorised the draft constitution to the Dáil Éireann⁷⁹ 'with a view to the second reading being taken when the final text would be available'⁸⁰

The Catholic hierarchy made its views known relative late in the process of the formulation of the new constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*⁸¹. However, the manner in which it communicated its convictions on the matter was unequivocal and almost hegemonic in nature. This was in evidence in how Holy Ghost Father John Charles McQuaid – who held office as Archbishop of Dublin between 1940 and 1972 – began sharing his ideas with de Valera from November 1936. However, by early in the New

⁷⁶ Belinda McKeon, 'Beyond Chronicle: The Deceptive Realism of John McGahern's Fiction', *American Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 8 (2011), pp. 77-92, p. 82.

⁷⁷ Dermot Keogh & Andrew McCarthy, *The Making of the Irish Constitution 1937* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2007), p. 99.

⁷⁸ Keogh and McCarthy, 107-109.

⁷⁹ The lower and popularly elected house of parliament in the Republic of Ireland

⁸⁰ John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 16-17; R.F Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 511-32; J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 201-2.

⁸¹ The formal Irish language name for the Irish Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, meaning 'basic law.' See Brian Doolan. *Principles of Irish Law*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2003, p. 6. See also Raymond Byrne and J. Paul McCutcheon. *The Irish Legal System* (4th. Ed.) Dublin: Butterworths/LexisNexis, 2003, pp. 4-7.

Year McQuaid's frequency of contact with De Valera resulted in twice daily written suggestions in respect of the formers' exact designs for the document. Once De Valera was in receipt of these suggestions, he sought comment and approval from the Archbishop in relation to his own position on the matter before proceeding any further.⁸²

McQuaid's whole approach in respect of the constitution was enumerated in an undated document entitled *Directive Principles*, which drew on Portuguese⁸³ and other influences, declared that a constitution should be seen as a 'thesis of philosophy and theology.' In his view, such a matter as held to 'be guided and delimited by the teachings of Catholic philosophy and set forth what ought to be our Christian endeavour in social policy.' Furthermore, the Archbishop was of the unshakable conviction that church teachings must have a direct bearing on the character of law and noted as much: 'We desire within the vast freedom of the social encyclicals to achieve (the) common good of the nation on Christian lines and by Christian models.'⁸⁴

McQuaid was determined to maximise the opportunity to infuse the new constitution with a heavily Catholic character. He wished to build its provision on the fundamental nature of the Papal encyclicals and in this way it would be possible for the Irish Catholic Church to exercise hegemonic control over the future development of the

⁸² In a parallel with official opinion in Ireland, as early as 1925 the Catholic-tinged regime in Portugal under Salazar had already stated its objective was to engage in an '...active re-Christianization of Portugal was his openly avowed aim. The origin of political power, of sovereignty, lay not with the people, but with God...' See: Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, *Salazar: A Political Biography* (New York: Enigma Books, 2009), p. 29. There is little doubt as to the proximity between Salazar and the Portuguese Catholic hierarchy. The Patriarch of Lisbon, Cardinal Manuel Cerejeira held the Portuguese leader in high regard as is evident from a letter he sent him marking Salazar's 55th birthday in April 1944: 'Many will utter words of friendship to you today, and I don't want to absent myself. My Mass was dedicated to you, and I gave thanks to God for the exceptional gifts He gave you, for the historical mission He entrusted you with, and for the good you have carried out. I asked for the graces of light, strength, humility and consolation so that you may remain true to all that God and men expect from you (...)', see Ribeiro de Meneses (2009), p. 44.

⁸³ In this respect the remarks made by Richard S. Devane S.J. are instructive as they indicate the interest some Irish thinkers had in Portuguese affairs. He observed, "Out of the great wilderness of so-called Liberalism, with its religious, social and financial chaos, Salazar has led his people into the fair Land of Promise about which for so many years Portuguese poets and patriots sung and dream. (...) To-day Portugal has risen with dignity from the dust in which she has so long lain – while Ireland is still on her knees. Has Portugal's resurrection no lesson for Ireland?" op. cit., Ribeiro de Meneses, 176.

⁸⁴ Keogh and McCarthy, 108.

Irish state.⁸⁵ Once the new draft Constitution had been approved by Dáil Éireann, the Vatican expressed great satisfaction with its adoption⁸⁶ by means of a 1938 Vatican Christmas broadcast where the Church made its approval clear: ‘It is a Constitution which embodies the Catholic principles of the Irish nation – a Constitution which has its inspiration in the Papal encyclicals’.⁸⁷

With *Bunreacht na hÉireann* now a legally binding constitution which regulated all foregoing legislation, the Irish Catholic Church and their political plenipotentiary, de Valera, had fashioned a legally sanctioned means of engaging in a utopian exercise in Irish society and thus a re-organisation of Irish legal and social architecture⁸⁸. In 1943, less than a decade after the ratification of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, a speech which became known as the ‘Comely Maidens Speech’ was given in a St. Patrick’s Day national radio address given by de Valera in which he espoused his ideal values for Ireland:

The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit...The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live. With the tidings that make such an Ireland possible, St. Patrick came to our ancestors fifteen hundred years ago promising happiness here no less than happiness hereafter...We of this tie, if we have the will and active enthusiasm, have the opportunity to inspire and move our generation in like manner...ever remembering that it is for our nation as a whole that future must be sought.⁸⁹

The speech contains many of the principles of piety and idealism that the new constitution was designed to espouse and enshrine in the legal edifice of the Irish state. This constitution was the final legal tool which complemented pre-existing censorship legislation which was zealously enforced and augmented to regulate public opinion and

⁸⁵ Keogh and McCarthy, 173.

⁸⁶ By means of a referendum on 1 July 1937 with 685,105 votes in favour and 526,945 against. Cited in James Lydon, *The Making of Ireland: From Ancient Times to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p.372.

⁸⁷ See note 15.

⁸⁹ Donal Moynihan (ed.) *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera 1917-1973* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p. 466

negate the propagation of alternative visions of what Ireland was and what it could become.

In 1945 McGahern's beloved mother passed away and this traumatic event was to have a lasting effect on his life and influence on his work.⁹⁰ As a direct result of his bereavement, McGahern took up residence in a police barracks with his father, a life that was to be punctuated by the poverty that echoed the values De Valera's 'frugal comforts' explicitly alluded to above. Given the high levels of poverty and material deprivation that permeated every community across Ireland, the central concern for the majority of ordinary citizens was seeking a means to provide for themselves and their families. What was regarded by many as 'fanciful' artistic activities such the writing of poetry and the expansion of the literary corpus on the island of Ireland, remained out of bounds for most struggling citizens. Such was their predicament that in the late 1930s and early 1940s severe shortage in basic materials ensured that sporting events and race meetings were seldom held and there was no sugar available for home-jam making, newsprint was very scarce as were fertilizers and copper sulphate provisions. Only doctors and the clergy escaped the ban on the use of private cars. Beyond this, severe limitations on the supply of coal also caused a notable reduction in the output in electricity generation.⁹¹ Tom Garvin's analysis of Irish society in the period immediately after the Second World War identifies attitude differentials between the ruling elite and the quotidian reality:

In 1945, what had become, at least in iconography, de Valera's independent Ireland had reached a tragic crossroads. (...) Once the divisions over the Treaty of 1921-22 softened with the passage of time, public politics, whatever about elite politics, settled into a mainly agrarian pattern and still revolved around the plough versus the cow, land redistribution and the fantasy of settling as many families on the land (as possible). There was certainly a less than full acceptance of the proposition that the future might actually be post-agrarian and urban (...) Ireland's leaders were recently urbanised countrymen, and a dislike of urban mores, combined with sometimes amounted to an inability to understand cities and city life, was common. The Ireland they

⁹⁰ Malcolm, xiii

⁹¹ Cormac Ó Grada, *A Rocky Road: The Irish Economy Since the 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 9-11.

celebrated was rural, racy of the soil, an almost Jeffersonian rural democracy, pious, disciplined and folksy...⁹²

Under such challenging conditions, Irish writing continued but faced with an elite market, low-income consumers severely conditioned by religious ideology and a strong censorship regime, a number of authors left Ireland altogether. This situation as a whole contributed to a continuing poverty of means that in turn contributed to a continuing poverty of ideas in governing policy that lead to a stagnant economy. The electorate responded in kind and the general election of 1948 resulted in the removal from office of De Valera's Fianna Fáil from government. The eventual victors of this election, a Fine Gael-led multi-party coalition, governed under straitened circumstances and faced the direct wrath of the Catholic hierarchy. However, temporary relief was to be experienced by some before political realities re-asserted their presence. The former Master of the High Court and Fine Gael minister, Patrick Lindsay, recorded in his memoirs how he drove into Tuam (a town in County Galway) and parked diagonally to the footpath in order to ask a garda⁹³ if there was any news from Dublin. The reply was direct: 'At ten past five this afternoon, Mr John Aloysius Costello was elected Taoiseach of this country.' When Lindsay inquired about parking his car properly, he was told firmly: 'Leave it where it is. We have freedom for the first time in sixteen years.' The new government was one of the most ideologically diverse governments the country had ever seen and its most cohesive point was a common desire to exclude De Valera and Fianna Fáil from power and to remain in office for as long as possible. At the first cabinet meeting of the new government, it was agreed that a telegram to the Vatican would be sent desiring 'to repose at the feet of your Holiness, the assurance of our filial loyalty and of our devotion to your August Person, as well as our firm resolve to be guided in all our work by the teachings of Christ, and to strive for the attainment of a social order in Ireland based on Christian principles'.⁹⁴

⁹² Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland so poor for so long* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), pp. 62-63.

⁹³ In the Republic of Ireland police authorities are referred to as 'Garda' (singular) or 'Gardaí' (plural).

⁹⁴ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), pp. 191-2.

The reasons for the dispatching of such a message were explained by a junior Irish diplomat, Denis R. McDonald, on 1 April 1948, to J. Graham Parsons, assistant at the US mission to the Vatican: No Irish Government could afford to be suspected of anti-clericalism or anything less than ardent Catholicism. Accordingly, when de Valera had been replaced by a coalition somewhat more liberal in complexion, it had been necessary, for political reasons, to demonstrate its devotion to the Holy See. However, it was most unlikely that the Vatican would have viewed a change of government as a threat to its authority in Ireland. There was some discomfort in government buildings in respect of the subservient language used in the message as the secretary of the Department of An Taoiseach (Prime Minister's Office), Maurice Moynihan, let it be known that it was his view that it was inappropriate that civil should 'repose at the feet' of the pope. Unsurprisingly, his objections were noted but the message remained unaltered.⁹⁵

Although this government was only to last until 1951, it would return to office again in 1954 until 1957 and thus provide slightly more moderate governance in contrast to De Valera's heavily pious administrations. The archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, enjoyed warm and cordial relations with members of the new government. On this basis and the history of his involvement in causes of mutual interest, McQuaid acquired a lasting expectation that he had the right to be consulted on all matters of government business touching upon Catholic affairs, much of this was also as a result of directly deferential behaviour displayed toward McQuaid by members of the cabinet. Indeed, at least four inter-party ministers were members of the Knights of St. Columbanus: the Tánaiste and Minister for Industry and Commerce; William Norton, Minister for Lands, Joseph Blowick; Richard Mulcahy as Minister for Education (and Fine Gael party leader); and also the Minister for Justice, Mr. Seán MacEoin. When a terminal crisis in government erupted in 1951, one which was to result in the collapse of the government, An Taoiseach, Mr. Costello was to tell the Dáil: 'I am an Irishman second: I am Catholic first' and also professed his unquestioning Catholic piety: 'If the hierarchy give me any direction with regard to

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Catholic social teaching or Catholic social teaching, I accept without qualification in all respects the teaching of the hierarchy and the church to which I belong.⁹⁶

What was to become known as the ‘Mother and Child Scheme’ was actually conceived under the auspices of the Department of Health and the then Minister Dr. Noel Browne. It was a scheme that was to be offered, without a means test, on both a pre- and post-natal basis to mothers and their children up to the age of sixteen. The proposal immediately caused alarm within the leadership of the Catholic hierarchy who instructed their secretary James Staunton to write to the Taoiseach Costello to inform him of their opinion that it represented an attack on the rights of the family and of the individual and that it was liable to ‘very great abuse.’ It was further asserted that the measures in the scheme would ‘constitute a ready-made instrument for future totalitarian aggression’. As far as the Church believed the role of the state to be that of a supplementary player not an agency that could supplant the role of ecclesiastical authorities and the responsibilities traditionally exercised by them in the social sphere.⁹⁷ Staunton further communicated that the Catholic Church had clear moral teachings on such sensitive areas as physical education of children, a right that belonged exclusively to the family rather than the state:

Education in regard to motherhood includes instruction in regard to sex relations, chastity and marriage. The State has no competence to give instruction in such matters. We regard this the greatest apprehension the proposal to give to local medical officers the right to tell Catholic girls and women how they should behave in regard to this sphere of conduct at once so delicate and sacred....Doctors trained in instruction in which we have no confidence may be appointed as medical officers under the proposed service, and may give gynaecological care not in accordance with Catholic principles.⁹⁸

Staunton advanced his argument further by noting that the proposed scheme seriously endangered the confidential relationship persisting between patient and doctor. In economic terms it represented the elimination of an important source of income for

⁹⁶ Keogh, 214-5.

⁹⁷ Foster, 571-2.

⁹⁸ Keogh, 216-7.

doctors which would be subsumed by a state-supported service. Minister Browne eventually received news of the Bishops position via a letter delivered to the Taoiseach. Thereafter the Department of Health drew up a response to the hierarchies complaints and issued it in writing in March 1951. After carefully deliberating on the matter, the Bishops responded once more citing their original concerns that had been communicated in October 1950 and forwarded their absolute rejection of the scheme on 3 April.⁹⁹

From the perspective of the Catholic hierarchy, there was a distinct conviction that the proposed scheme also constituted a situation whereby ‘the state must enter unduly and very intimately into the life of patients, both parents and children, and of doctors.’ The issue of the imposition of a tax that was, in effect, to be carried by the whole community would have to be implemented to support the scheme and as such it would adversely affect private incomes, ‘gravely the self-reliance of parents, whose family-wage or income would allow them duly to provide for themselves medical treatment for their dependants.’ Moreover, there remained a belief on the part of the hierarchy that it could yet be possible ‘with reflection and calm consultation,’ to engineer a scheme capable of acknowledging the ‘traditional life and spirit of our Christian people.’ Such was the level of pressure generated by the controversy that an emergency cabinet meeting was held on 6 April where Browne was severely criticised by all of his cabinet colleagues. On 10 April Browne was finally forced to resign and was further humiliated when the entire private correspondence between him and his critics was published in *The Irish Times*, a respected national newspaper. Bitter recriminations reverberated within Browne’s own party and the coalition began to collapse. A general election was held on 30 May 1951 that resulted in an ignominious defeat of the governing parties and a return to office for De Valera and Fianna Fáil.¹⁰⁰

It is unsurprising that a Catholic society dominated by the clergy should seek to jealously guard the female anatomy and sexuality from any encroachment of state

⁹⁹ James Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923-1979* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), pp. 447-8.

¹⁰⁰ Brian Farrell, *Chairman or Chief: The Role of Taoiseach in Irish Government* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), p. 56; Brian Farrell, *Séan Lemass* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), p. 84; Noël Browne, *Against the Tide* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1986), p. 188.

policy, whatever the justification. After all, this was a period in which one of the principal policy objectives was the stabilisation of rural farm society was a well-established, dearly-held and vigorously defended ideological concern that was firmly supported by a wide cross-section of the population. De Valera also publicly favoured this position. Influential figures in society such as Jeremiah Newman, a well-known priest who later served as Bishop of Limerick and an influential academic sociologist, enjoyed high-proximity relationship with the government. In a revealing remark made in 1962 he revealed the contours of the favoured ideological agenda that defended middle-sized farm families on the assumption and expectation that such families tended to produce more young men for the priesthood. Newman noted that the ratio of the population to priests had gone from 1,376 to in 1871 to 558 to in 1961. Meanwhile the Catholic population had declined during that period by 23 per cent, although the number of priests had actually increased by 87 per cent.¹⁰¹

Newman also argued that Latin had to be taught to all males in secondary schools so as to prepare them for the priesthood regardless of any practical utility or intellectual or cultural value it may provide. The statistics, Newman noted, showed that a rural family atmosphere was more conducive to providing recruits for the seminary than an urban one. Of the 429 students who gained entry to the Maynooth seminary between 1956 and 1960, 311 or 72.5 per cent came from what was referred to as ‘the open countryside’ or from small towns and villages. It was on this basis that figures like Newman defended the notion that government policy should reflect the priority to preserving the rural farm society so that a ready supply of young men would be available for the priesthood. The economy, it was felt, existed not to serve society or people, but to service the needs of the Deity and his earthly representatives.¹⁰²

This action was part of an agenda that included the achievement of a parochial, rural, neo-Gaelic and Catholic utopia that formed the central abiding enterprise of Irish educations, clerics, planners and politicians for many years after Independence.¹⁰³ Not everybody was convinced of the value and necessity of such a strategy. Writing in the

¹⁰¹ Garvin, 45-6.

¹⁰² Garvin, 46.

¹⁰³ Garvin, 46.

journal *The Bell* in April 1945, Sean O' Faolain cast a critical eye on the matter when he wrote: 'Between the hard ambitions of these men (the new national bourgeoisie) and the simple and pious conservatism of the peasant, the intellectuals of Ireland were ground to bits – unless they came to terms, and the Church quite approved of that because churches do not much like intellectuals.'

In common with the majority of students at the Maynooth seminary of his era, McGahern's origins were rural and modest and he was to be drawn to the capital and its environs in search of a more stable professional career. McGahern undertook the necessary one-year training course to become a teacher in St. Patrick's Teacher Training College in Dublin and graduated in 1954, the year after which he embarked on a teaching career at primary level in the same city. He completed his Degree studies at University College Dublin in 1957 and continued with his career.¹⁰⁴ While McGahern's life was yet to be blighted by any dramatic development, progress was soon to materialise in a wider national context. However, the conservative forces of Catholic Ireland were soon to assert even greater legal control over the supply and distribution of written and photographic material through The Obscene Publications Act 1959. This law was intended to bolster existing legislation to take account of pornography and it provided that a book could be deemed obscene if it could be regarded as having the potential to 'deprave and corrupt' the reader.¹⁰⁵

Change had begun to set in throughout Irish society which was opening itself to the world and with the founding of the national broadcaster, RTÉ (Raidió Telefís Éireann) in late 1961. Television and radio facilitated much more extensive discussion on societal developments and the nation's desires.¹⁰⁶ As Irish society gradually began to modernise, writers acquired greater courage to write about matters that would have been nigh-impossible in a previous era. Thus, while not entirely innocuous, the publication of

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm, xiii.

¹⁰⁵ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2012/2009), pp. 361-2.

¹⁰⁶ Keogh, 251

McGahern's first novel *The Barracks* (1963), was welcomed by critics and did not give rise to scandal on a large-scale.¹⁰⁷

In 1965, some three years after Bishop Newman's remarks (cited above) the inception of a radical catalyst for change was witnessed. Education Minister Dr. Patrick Hillery commissioned a 'Survey Team' to look at shortfalls and suggest necessary reforms in late 1962 and this initiative received limited financial support from the *Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation* (OECD). The group was concerned with producing recommendations that would affect the development of society in the future. Its report was published under the title *Investment in Education Report* in October 1965 and proved historic in what it uncovered and the remedies it advocated. One of the key findings of the report stated that the Irish educational system was grossly neglectful of children from lower social classes and also noted that 53 per cent of all students left education before the age of thirteen. The concluding remarks of the report stated that 'Although this figure is undoubtedly exaggerated, the annual emergence of such a large number of young people who apparently have not reached what is commonly considered a minimum level of education, can hardly be viewed with equanimity.' Among Irish people who had left to start new lives abroad, the report identified them as living in a situation where: 'In short, unemployment and emigration appear to be predominately associated with lack of skills or other professional qualifications, while at the same time it is apparently necessary to import highly skilled people'.¹⁰⁸ A series of factors including restrictive hiring practices by banks and other employers ensured that employees were placed while still in their teenage years thereby precluding them from reaching graduate status at secondary school or university level which may have been the case had they remained in full-time education. The culture of language teaching in Irish secondary school also suffered from dysfunctional characteristics in that the greatest focus was given to English, Irish, Latin and Greek.

¹⁰⁷ Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003), p.xii.

¹⁰⁸ Garvin, 192-3.

French and German were almost non-existent, while Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic suffered absolute neglect.¹⁰⁹

While the landmark report into the Irish education system was released in October 1965 and promised major progress, from McGahern's perspective his professional prospects quickly evaporated on the publication of his second novel, *The Dark*, in that same year. This novel was received with outrage by the Catholic hierarchy and was banned by the Censorship Board and as a result once McGahern returned from his annual summer leave he was dismissed from his teaching post in Dublin. Some years later it was made public that the manager of the school in which McGahern taught terminated his employment under direct instruction from the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. John Charles McQuaid.¹¹⁰ Some 260 copies of *The Dark* reached Dublin addressed to 'Messrs. Eason' on 5 May 1965 with the obvious intention of being distributed in the city. What was particularly notable about this even was that, as *The Observer* newspaper remarked, '260 copies' was 'a much-higher-than-average advance order from Dublin booksellers' and it was also the first time authorities had apprehended an entire delivery of a book in such a spectacular fashion under sub-section 1 of section 5 of the Censorship of Publications Act 1946. Commentators strongly believed that Custom and Excise officials had almost surely received advanced warning of the delivery and were determined to ensure that the 'dirty' book would not reach an Irish audience.¹¹¹

Some members of the public felt strongly enough about the controversy to communicate their thoughts in writing to *The Irish Times* under the title 'In the Dark.' On 10 May 1965 one writer, Sean Collins from Dublin called the banning of *The Dark* 'a clear indication of the narrow, puritanical, and boorish mentality which still prevails in bureaucratic circles' at a time when 'our small, childish little parochial traits should have given way to a more mature and enlightened way of thinking.' He also thought the censorship laws were 'archaic' and an example of 'the contempt which this country

¹⁰⁹ Garvin, 192-93.

¹¹⁰ Julia Carlson (ed.) *Banned in Ireland: Censorship & The Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.56; Eamon Maher, "A Glimpse of Irish Catholicism in John McGahern's Amongst Women", *Doctrine & Life*, Vol. 51, No. 6, (July/August, 2001), pp. 346-55, p. 347.

¹¹¹ Nolan, 262.

metes out to its ordinary people.’ Employing some humour in respect of dealing with the matter at hand, Collins also further opined that ‘it is also rather ironic that new work by a native author should be seized just now, with the Buy Irish campaign in full swing.’ On 17 May, an artist Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick wrote in his letter that ‘the worst thing’ about the seizure of McGahern’s novel was ‘the lack of reaction to this disgusting, prurient and philistine act’. On the following day, the then leader of the Labour party Brendan Corish raised the matter in Dáil Éireann and requested a statement on the matter from Finance Minister (and future Taoiseach) Jack Lynch. Minister Lynch claimed that *The Dark* was, ‘in his opinion, a book which ought to be examined by (Censorship) Board.’ Corish was then joined in the parliamentary debate by Labour TDs Dr John O’ Connell, Sean Dunne, and Fine Gael TD Patrick Lindsay and the following discussion ensued:

O’ Connell: ‘Will the Minister state whether the book, in actual fact, was read by the Customs officer before the seizure of the book?’

Lynch: ‘That would hardly be physically possible but under the subsection I have quoted, a customs officer may at any time, on the importation of a book, refer it to the Censorship Board. He may do so if he considers that any book ought to be examined by the Board under the Act. He is not required, in advance, to read the book. That requirement is for the Censorship Board.’

O’ Connell: ‘Will every new book which arrives in the country be held by the customs officer?’

Lynch: ‘Not necessarily.’

Dunne: ‘How does he tell that this is suspect?’

Lynch: ‘I am sure that the Customs officer does not live in the clouds.’

Lindsay: ‘How could he form an opinion, without reading it?’

Lynch: ‘The first sight is very often a great help.’

An *Irish Times* journalist attending the debate noted that Dáil was ‘scantily attended for the occasion’ and the atmosphere ‘neither tense with righteousness nor simmering with indignation.’ What was apparent in the journalists’ view was the debate took on the form of something ‘light-hearted’ and a ‘pun was made on the book’s title as appropriate to the state of mind of the Customs authorities.’ This was perhaps, indicative, that there was some sympathy in official circles for the actions of the

customs officials.¹¹² A semi-autobiographical account of McGahern's personal experience in the banning of *The Dark* forms the basis of the plot in his third novel, *The Leavetaking* (1974).¹¹³

The year after "the McGahern Affair"¹¹⁴ (as it became known), the original commissioning Minister of the *Investment in Education Report* was succeeded in the Department of Education by Donough O' Malley, who found himself in an environment more conducive to progress. Despite facing trenchant opposition from the Catholic Church, the Irish National Teachers Organisation and other vested interests, and justifying his strategy with direct reference to the *Investment in Education Report*, O' Malley announced in September 1966 that the government was to implement 'free post-primary education' so that as many students as possible could attend school up to the age of eighteen and obtain their Leaving Certificate¹¹⁵ at the end of their secondary schooling.¹¹⁶ Parents took advantage of this new assistance and their enthusiasm was reflected in student numbers where between 1966 and 1969, the number of students in secondary education increased from 104,000 to 144,000 or as much as it had in the previous decade in the space of three years. Consequently, the numbers reaching higher education also rose necessitating the founding of two new institutes of higher education in the 1960s in Limerick and Dublin (later to become the University of Limerick and Dublin City University, respectively).¹¹⁷

Where advancement in the modernisation of the Irish education system succeeded in giving opportunities to more students to achieve a higher level of studies,

¹¹² Nolan, 264-5.

¹¹³ Keogh, 264.

¹¹⁴ Soon after the circumstances of the banning of *The Dark* and McGahern's dismissal entered the public domain, Senator Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, who, at the time, was described as 'veteran anti-censorship campaigner' tried to seek redress the Senate. His endeavours were rebuked when the presiding officer of the chamber Cathaoirleach Liam O'Buachalla ruled out a debate on the matter 'as there is no ministerial responsibility involved'. Senator Sheehy-Skeffington then went on to publish 'The McGahern Affair' in the spring issue (vol. 2, no. 2: 27-30) of *Censorship: A Quarterly Report on Censorship of Ideas and the Arts*. The title of his article emulated a similar phrase that had appeared in an opinion piece published in *The Irish Times* newspaper on 10 February 1966.

¹¹⁵ Such a document attests to a students' successful completion of secondary school education in the Irish state. Further information on the mechanics of this programme can be found on the official ministry website at: <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Post-Primary/>

¹¹⁶ Garvin, 199.

¹¹⁷ J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 362-63.

one major area of instruction remained static. This was where the Catholic Church continued to use the school system to further its own agenda and it was by this means that young Irish children were imbued with Catholic doctrine. An uncompromising level of moral discipline and excessive amount of curricular time was given over to deliver teaching on the Church's ritual practices, where rote learning of the catechism and reverence for rules and regulations formed an integral part of the overall system. Indeed, it was through the school system that the Church was in a position to reach the family home and supervise the manner in which mothers raised their children. With the advancement of each new generation of offspring through the Catholic education system, parents are faced with a situation that where they may have themselves lapsed in rigid moral teachings, the church reinvigorates this belief system through the instruction of the new and upcoming generation. However, the Church's control over education requires continuing cooperation with the state where official policy holds that each child has a right to a Christian education that must also be consistent with their parent's system of values. In turn, Catholic parents have an obligation to ensure their children receive a Catholic education consistent with the manner prescribed by the church hierarchy.¹¹⁸ By the late 1980s, 3,400 of a total 3,500 national (primary) schools in Ireland were under Catholic management.¹¹⁹ While Irish education advanced, McGahern bided his time in London making a casual living there on building sites and by working as a supply teacher. In the Ireland of the mid-to-late 1960s, as much greater numbers of students were able to avail of secondary education, there was a corresponding growth in the numbers entering higher education, McGahern himself is offered the first of several guest lecturing opportunities, the first of which was at Colgate University, New York.¹²⁰

Another key development in the history of the relationship between the Catholic hierarchy and the community at large occurred in 1968: the issue of the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This encyclical re-doubled the Vatican's implacable opposition to

¹¹⁸ A situation which is now changing with the founding of secular schools known as *Educate Together* educational co-operatives.

¹¹⁹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p. 55.

¹²⁰ Maher, xii-xiv.

artificial birth control. Many practising Catholics in Ireland were greatly alienated by this new position and this prompted a comment by Fine Gael Senator Dr. Garrett FitzGerald (Taoiseach 1982-87) that the publication of *Humanae Vitae* coincided with when the ‘dam burst’. In FitzGerald’s view the document represented a position that was regarded by the public at large as ‘non-credible in rational terms...and once the church took up a position which was non-credible in rational terms its authority over the whole sexual area disintegrated. At the worst moment for us, when pressure on the dam was great already, you suddenly put a hole in the dam...everything fell’.¹²¹ FitzGerald later campaigned for Ireland to join the European Economic Community and the country’s application to join that entity eventually succeeded and was approved in a referendum in 1972, paving the way for the country to formally adhere to the community in January 1973.¹²² This in turn provided the means for an influx of greater investment and the maturation of more progressive attitudes, although both took time to accumulate to any significant extent.

There was a notable improvement in living standards in Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s, but this was not without some notable failures. Sub-standard housing conditions located in poorly-planned areas, many of them in major cities provided fertile settings for the propagation of anti-social behaviour in the form of theft and the sale and consumption of illegal substances. Situations of this kind forced many to live their lives in quiet desperation in the midst of challenging economic and social conditions. Small-scale studies suggested that in the 1970s that at least one-quarter of the population and even perhaps even one-third, lived below the “poverty line” on the basis of the level of social security payments made throughout the country.¹²³

Despite the bleak nature of the Irish society of 1970s, *Irish Times* journalist James Downey felt it could be still be described as being “alive, vivid and thrusting.” Another writer, Kevin O’ Connor was to remark in the 1980s that the decade, despite its apparent indifference to social injustice, there was energy which manifested itself in the 1980s that was: ‘...fuelled by the folk memory of a race almost extinguished. A hunger

¹²¹ Ferriter, 364.

¹²² Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2004* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 268-9.

¹²³ Brown, 252.

for things...the thrust of an age that is energetic, affluent, declamatory. The 1980s in Ireland there was no homogeneity between those who were born poor with those who were not.' Indeed, in respect of the capital, Dublin, O' Connor saw: "a capital with courtiers, multi-nationals, new-rich bores, careerists," within an artistic feeling permeating an Elizabethan atmosphere of expectation of a community about to start out on its life. It was also a society in search of success that viewed poverty as something 'self-inflicted and ostentatious' if somewhat unsympathetic. Constructs of this kind differed greatly from the Ireland sought prior to independence and to the idealised state of being projected by De Valera during his austere years in executive political office.¹²⁴

It would be inaccurate to claim that this concern with material advancement and social mobility occurred in an environment devoid of the power of the Catholic Church. An official visit from Pope John Paul II to Ireland was to revive sagging levels of faith in Ireland, if only temporarily. The pontiff visited seven venues around the country and was greeted by crowds numbering 2.5 million between 29 September and 1 October 1979, this at a time when the total national population of the Republic of Ireland was 3,368,217.¹²⁵ What was regarded as a euphoric reception to the 1932 International Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin came to be used as an analogy to the positive feeling generated by this more recent event that served as a reminder of the conservative morals that were once held in such high esteem by a large majority of the community. At this point the stage was set for more than a decade of tense relations between Church and State.¹²⁶

Attempts in the 1970s to liberalise family planning legislation were fiercely resisted by the Catholic Church and allied interest groups. Similarly, conservative inertia in policy making bodies prevented the approval of an unmarried mother's allowance until 1973. Indeed, this same year marked a Supreme Court decision that the privacy of the institution of marriage did enjoy protection under the Constitution, which permitted access to contraception for married couples. A Mrs Mary McGee had sought

¹²⁴ Brown, 253.

¹²⁵ Figures compiled by the Central Statistics Office and published in Part VII, Commentary Section of Official 1979 Census figures. Information available at:

http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census1979results/volume1/C_1979_V1_Entire_Vol.pdf

¹²⁶ Keogh, 349-50.

to import contraceptives from England for her own personal use, but Irish customs officials apprehended her parcel. McGee then challenged this action in the High Court and received financial assistance from the Irish Family Planning Association to do so. Her High Court action failed. She did, however, succeed in her appeal to the Supreme Court which ruled in December 1973 that the ban on the importation of contraceptives under a 1935 act was unconstitutional.¹²⁷

As a result of this development, in February 1974 Justice Minister Patrick Cooney of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition announced the government's intention to legislate in accordance with the McGee judgement. On 27 March 1974 a draft law entitled 'Control on Importation, Sale and Manufacture of Contraceptives Bill' was put before parliament and it proposed that contraceptives could be imported and sold under licence to married couples under medical prescription. The previous day, Senator Mary Robinson (a future President) had introduced a bill on contraception but had seen her initiative defeated by 32 votes to 10. Now the government had sufficient votes to secure the passing of the law. However, the government bill was also to be defeated on a vote taken on 16 July 1974 where even the Fine Gael Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave voted against his own government's bill as did six other Fine Gael TDs. The final vote against the bill was 75 to 61 and this caused much surprise and rancour.¹²⁸ Legislative recognition of this judgement was eventually granted in the form of The Family Planning Act 1979. A lack of political will on the matter was at least partly attributable to pressure exerted on the governing elite by the Catholic hierarchy.¹²⁹

McGahern's third novel *The Leavetaking* (1974) deals with the issue when the main character's American wife, Isobel, whom he married in a civil ceremony in London during his sabbatical year away from teaching. She had had several abortions and for the Irish society from which her husband Moran comes, such acts constitute a grave sin. Similarly, in McGahern's fourth major novel *The Pornographer* (1979) there is a storyline and characters that reflect many of the concerns that came to the fore in

¹²⁷ Louis Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. 209.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2005), p. 666; Brown (2004), p. 292.

the Ireland throughout the 1970s as a conflict of values that arise between the protagonist, a liberal and care-free male who enjoys sexual relations and his relatively conservative lover who refuses to use contraceptives. Once she becomes pregnant, she dismisses all attempts to persuade her to have an abortion, while the father of the child categorically rules out any possibility of marriage despite her repeated pleading. Fearful of her family's reaction to the news, the mother of the child takes up residence in London, while the father remains in Ireland and disavows any further involvement with mother or child. Thus, the issue of traditional Roman Catholic family values relating to marriage, procreation and family planning is dealt with in a far more liberal manner in the novel than the wider incidence of society at large would be expected to behave. A storyline such as that found in *The Pornographer* also served to highlight notable divergences with these particular values that were held by increasing numbers of people in Ireland.

Perhaps what could be called McGahern's best-known and most well-received novel, *Amongst Women*, was published in 1990 in an Ireland that was quite different to the cultural atmosphere in which his earlier works were received.¹³⁰ In the Presidential election of November 1990, Mary Robinson came to be the first woman to be elected head of state of the Republic of Ireland with a final vote of 51.9 per cent. Robinson was elected ahead of two male candidates from the main political parties and prevented the Fianna Fáil party from occupying the Office of President for the first time since the foundation of the state.¹³¹ *Amongst Women* revolves around the life protagonist, widower patriarch and former IRA fighter, Moran who is a devout Catholic and rules the household and modest family farm in a tyrannical fashion. Although Moran has dominated his daughters and two sons throughout their lives, as he ages his younger second wife and adult daughters and son become the source of care and strength he requires in his old age. The women in his life take on more importance and responsibility, just as women in Irish society gain greater respect and authority, their

¹³⁰ John Cronin, 'John McGahern's "Amongst Women"', *Retrenchment and Renewal, Irish University Review*, vol. 22, No.1, *Serving the Word: Essays and Poems in Honour of Maurice Harmon* (Spring-Summer, 1992), pp. 168-176, p. 168.

¹³¹ John Coakley and Michael Gallagher (eds.) *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* (3rd. Ed.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 107; Ferriter (2005), p. 699.

role and rights further acknowledged by the passing of the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act 1989¹³² which relieved women of the legal duty to reside with their husbands if their marriage had irretrievably broken down.

A further feature of *Amongst Women* is that of Moran's past as an IRA freedom fighter and his great disillusionment at the nature of what transpired in the character of the Irish State after independence in 1922. His disillusionment with the post-independence Irish political system mirrors the competition that quickly arose between parties in favour and those against the 1922 Anglo Irish Treaty that resulted in a de-facto legal acknowledgment of the partition of Ireland and a civil war before constitutional politics prevailed over disorder.¹³³

Divisive campaigns surrounding constitutional referenda on the issue of abortion arose in 1983 and 1992 and divorce in 1986 and 1995.¹³⁴ Such was the force of political capital amassed on the part of the Irish Roman Catholic Church that abortion on demand remains illegal in the Republic of Ireland and divorce only became legal by a tiny majority – (50.3 per cent in favour, 49.7 per cent against) following a divisive constitutional referendum held in November 1995.¹³⁵ By this point, liberal attitudes had gained a foothold, but only incremental change could be expected at this juncture in time, however substantial changes may have been in their own right.

Although the margin in favour of approving divorce was a narrow one, it was indicative of the growing, if gradual shift in public opinion to a more liberal and tolerant one that represented a repudiation of the traditional conservative values promoted by the Catholic Church. For informed commentators, this was not an entirely surprising development. In this context it must be acknowledged that according to Inglis (1998) “the numbers of priests, nuns and brothers decreased by over one-third or 35 per cent

¹³² For full details see Irish Statute Book page containing this Act as a whole at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1989/act/6/section/2/enacted/en/html#sec2>

¹³³ T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History* (Dublin: Mercier Press/RTÉ, 2001), p. 422.

¹³⁴ Ferriter (2005), p. 716.

¹³⁵ Brown (2004), p. 372; Moody and Martin (2001), p. 336.

and in the same period “the number of vocations dropped from 1,409 in a year to 111, a decrease of 92 per cent.” Ireland and Irish attitudes were indeed changing.¹³⁶

A further catalyst toward a greater secularising trend in Irish society came in the form of news item that was reported on an Irish national daily radio show *Morning Ireland* in May 1992 concerning improper sexual conduct of the incumbent Bishop of Galway while he was serving as Bishop of Kerry (1969-76). Bishop Casey was found to have fathered a son with an American divorcée and then denied his paternity and withheld financial support. At this point it was claimed that Casey had misappropriated diocesan funds to attempt to buy the silence of the mother of his child.¹³⁷ Such revelations stand in grave contrast to the austere and puritan-like clerical figures that appear in McGahern’s work.

Glaring statistical indications of a dramatic reduction in vocations are highly illustrative of the changes coming over Irish society, these trends allied with the perusal of political initiatives that would previously have been thought of as being unthinkable such as the decriminalisation of homosexual sexual relations in 1993 serve as another potent reminder of the chasm of difference that has appeared between traditional Irish Roman Catholic values and the hyper-evolution of modern Irish social attitudes. This stood in stark contrast to Irish attitudes in April 1983 when the Irish Supreme Court roundly rejected a challenge by a Mr. David Norris (who would later become a member of parliament as a senator) seeking a ruling on the unconstitutionality of two acts inherited from colonial-era Ireland that outlawed homosexual conduct. Justice T.F. O’Higgins made direct reference to the preamble of the Irish Constitution which “proudly asserts the existence of God in the most Holy Trinity and recites the People of Ireland as humbly acknowledging their obligation to ‘Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ’” and argued that the preamble could not be utilised to strike down the operation of laws “which had existed for hundreds of years prohibiting unnatural sexual conduct which Christian teaching holds to be gravely sinful”.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Tom Inglis, *The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), p. 231.

¹³⁷ Fuller, 251.

¹³⁸ Brown, 339; 372.

While 1993 marked twenty years of Irish membership of the European Union with all its inherent manifestations of wealth and modernity, the Irish Catholic Church was still capable of causing powerful reverberations in the Irish political system. Perhaps the last major occurrence of this nature was arguably the Father Brendan Smyth affair in 1994, which had almost identical consequences to the ‘Mother and Child’ Scheme controversy of 1951. The situation arose whereby in 1993 Smyth was convicted in Northern Ireland of numerous counts of sexual abuse of children over a thirty-five period. His actions were known to clerical authorities who took no action against him other than to move him from post to post in varying geographical locations. An official request that was made by the Northern Ireland Police, the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) to extradite Smyth had remained unresolved in the hands of the Republic of Ireland Attorney General Harry Whelehan, for a period of seven months. At that time, the sitting Fianna Fáil Taoiseach Albert Reynolds wished to appoint Whelehan to the presidency of the High Court in Dublin. This ambition was gravely frowned upon by his Labour coalition partner leader Dick Spring who insisted that the undue delay be explained. Reynolds insisted on pursuing the appointment whereafter the Labour party withdrew from the coalition in protest and the government collapsed in November 1994.¹³⁹ A further revelation of clerical transgression in the area of sexual conduct made its way into the public domain in 1995 concerning a priest, Father Michael Cleary who had died in 1993. His housekeeper claimed they had lived together as man and wife for twenty-seven years and had begotten two children as a result of the relationship. Fr. Cleary had been a very well-known and respected cleric and along with Bishop Casey had acted as masters of ceremony for the visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland in 1979. These revelations caused a further credibility deficit to develop in public opinion of clerical authority on moral issues.¹⁴⁰

In McGahern’s *The Dark* (1965) there is an incident between father and son that clearly presents itself as sexually inappropriate (if not abusive) behaviour against a minor:

¹³⁹ Fuller, 252; Ferriter (2012), p. 452-3; Brown, 368-9.

¹⁴⁰ Fuller, 252.

The worst was to have to sleep with him the nights he wanted love, strain of waiting for him to come, no hope of sleep in the waiting...Watch the moon on the broken brass bells at the foot of the bed. Turn and listen and turn...He was coming and there was nothing to do but wait and grow hard as stone and lie.¹⁴¹

Further exploration of dysfunctional behaviour in respect of sexuality is found in the same book where a Priest who is a distant cousin of the protagonist, Mahoney – a young boy – arrives uninvited in the middle of the night to join his cousin in the bed in which he staying of the parochial house during a period he is considering joining the priesthood. While Father Gerald lies semi-naked in the bed beside him, Mahoney doubts his ability to discipline himself for the priesthood. Father Gerald enquires of the boy:

“Have you ever wanted or desired to kiss?”

“Yes, father,” came the reply while the boy wept.

“Did you take pleasure in it?”

“Yes, father.”

“(...) This is the most reason why you’re not sure, why you think you’re not good enough is it?”

“Yes, father. Do you think I might be good enough?”

“I don’t see any reason why not if you fight that sin.”

Fr. Gerald proffers some predictable to young Mahoney in respect of his difficulties: “You must pray to God to give you Grace to avoid this sin (...)”¹⁴²

McGahern’s last novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* was published in 2002. According to Peter Guy (2010) this work offers ample evidence of the increasingly secular type of society that had taken hold in Ireland by the late twentieth-century.¹⁴³ A conversation ensues between central characters in the novel in respect of religious beliefs and their public manifestation. One neighbour challenges another, Rutledge, as to why he avoids attending Mass:

¹⁴¹ John McGahern, *The Dark* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 17.

¹⁴² McGahern, *The Dark* (1965), pp. 72-74.

¹⁴³ Peter Guy, “Reading John McGahern in Light of the Murphy Report”, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 99, no. 393, (2010), pp. 91-101, p. 100.

‘I’d like to attend Mass, I miss going.’

‘What’s keeping you, then?’

‘I don’t believe,’ he mimicked. ‘None of us believes and we go. That’s no bar.’

‘I’d feel like a hypocrite. Why do you go if you don’t if you don’t believe?’

‘To look at the girls. To see the whole performance,’ he cried out, and started to shake with laughter. ‘We go to see all the other hypocrites.’¹⁴⁴

This conversation clearly reveals the greatly liberalised and secular attitudes that have now been adopted by ordinary citizens in modern Ireland. Strict adherence to conservative Catholic values no longer forms part of the priorities of ordinary citizens and thus the power of the Catholic hierarchy over public morals and personal opinions can be seen to have severely weakened. While *Humanae Vitae* represented a strong point of divergence between the clergy and the Irish populace, it was only one episode in a series of events that eroded trust in institutional Catholicism in Ireland.

That They May Face the Rising Sun also makes reference to institutionalised abuse perpetrated by members of Catholic religious orders upon people committed to residential institutions who came from broken homes or were abandoned or forced by their families or state or catholic authorities. The central couple of the story, the Ruttledge’s receive a habitual visitor in their home, Bill Evans. The reader is given a description of Evans’ origins:

(...) He would have known neither father nor mother. As a baby he would have been given into the care of nuns. When these boys reached seven, the age of reason, they were transferred to places run by priests or Brothers. When he reached fourteen, Bill Evans was sent out, like others, to his first farmer. They were also sent as skivvies to the colleges: they scrubbed and polished floors, emptied garbage and waited at tables in the college Ruttledge attended. He recalled how small the boys were in their white jackets, the grey stripes of their trousers, their crew-cut heads, the pale faces tense and blank. No words were allowed to pass between them and the students.¹⁴⁵

Not only were such people abused, once they left full-time residence of the institutions in which they were raised, they faced acute discrimination and reticence

¹⁴⁴ John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, pp. 10-11.

from the community around them. McGahern once more provides information on this aspect of Evans, one of many thousands who were subjected to such treatment:

When Jackie was drawing to the creamery Bill had to ride on the trailer behind the tractor in rain and wet, get down at gates and throw those heavy cans up on to the trailer. When the cans were full he was barely able. (...) As soon as the can touched the trailer Jackie would lift his foot off the clutch and turn up the throttle. Bill had to run and scramble up on the trailer after the cans. There were times when he fell. Jackie would kick him if he had to stop the tractor and climb down.¹⁴⁶

An excessive reverence for the moral standing and authority of the clergy had the effect of muting growing awareness and subsequent public concerns at the conduct of some ill-tempered and other more violent members of the cloth. Physical and sexual abuse occurred at virtually every church managed residential institution. An extensive litany of misdeeds eroded already falling levels of trust. In April 2000 the government of Ireland constituted a Commission of Inquiry to investigate Child Abuse as means of providing some measure of redress for victims. The Commission was given responsibility to hear victims' stories, to thoroughly investigate allegations made and to publish a general report on its findings for public consumption. Reflecting a largely permissive and subservient attitude that was pervasive in the Ireland of the 1940s a comment was proffered which attested that attested to such an environment: 'The Lord has been very good to us in allowing the discovery (of child abuse) to have been made by the prudent Dominican Fathers – rather than the civil authorities.' Other accounts presented to the Commission included a reference to a 1941 visitation report that recounts the events relating to a complaint about an abuser and the response of his superior that read: 'so bad are the charges that I could not conscientiously allow him to remain with the boys any longer.' This account strongly suggests that senior Christian Brothers, Gardaí as well as members of the medical and legal professions were acutely aware of the gravity and extent of sexual abuse. However, in this case, the accused was simply moved to another institution instead of being reported to law enforcement agencies. It transpired in evidence given to the Commission on Child Abuse, '40% of

¹⁴⁶ McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, p. 13.

former residents of the institutions were in Britain. Most had submerged themselves in a British identity and many had not told spouses or children of their background.’ It is also noteworthy that two of the most prominent victim support groups, *One in Four* and *Survivors of Child Abuse* were founded in London in 1999 and not in Ireland. Such a development was an ironic twist to a convoluted story for many where England had been held up as an example of a land of sin which contained the most potent dangers to Irish sexual mores. Such was the volume of alleged abuse, a further inquiry was set up under the chairmanship of Judge Seán Ryan. His findings were published in May 2009 entitled *The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* and ran to some 3,000 pages. The Ryan Commission investigated claims of systematic physical and sexual abuse of children in residential care managed by religious orders and funded by the state between the 1930s and 1970s. The Department of Education is singled out for stringent criticism on account of its deferential attitude toward religious congregations during this period of time. The Commission received testimony from 1,700 people with over half of them reporting to have been sexually abused throughout some 216 institutions, an extraordinary number of centres given the size of the country.¹⁴⁷

Arguably, the Catholic Church in Ireland was the supreme authority in the country until at least the mid-twentieth century when its power and influence reached a crescendo. A gradual decline gathered momentum and accelerated to eventually cause a breakdown in the subservient relationship the populace lived with under the Catholic clergy and their hierarchy. In many respects, such was the ideological proximity between the clergy and the political system, Ireland took on many of the characteristics found in theocracies, but remained a confessional democratic state.¹⁴⁸

As the series of scandals (detailed above) took their toll on the credibility of the Catholic Church, a widening chasm appeared between official Church doctrine, particularly on social matters, and that of the nature of the ‘moral compass’ by means of which ordinary citizens established and judged certain kinds of behaviour. The Church was simply no longer trusted and revered as it once was. By 2002, the year of

¹⁴⁷ Ferriter (2012), pp. 323-33.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Andrew Auge, Louise Fuller, John Littleton, Eamon Maher, ‘After the Ryan and Murphy Reports: A Roundtable on the Irish Catholic Church’, *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (Spring, 2010), pp. 59-77, p. 61.

publication of McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun* trust in the Catholic Church was at a low ebb. In an attempt to overturn the 1992 'X Case' Supreme Court decision permitting suicide as a ground for allowing an abortion, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's Fianna Fáil government formulated the *Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill*, 2002. The Catholic Bishops were pleased with the provisions of the Bill and remarked that 'Catholic voters should feel free in conscience to support this measure, even if it is viewed as less than might have been desired.' The bill was put to a Referendum on 6 March 2002 and was heavily supported by Fianna Fáil and their junior coalition government partners, the Progressive Democrats. The Bishops issued no less than twenty-four pastoral letters during the weekend before the poll took place. However, the measure was lost 50.42% to 49.58% in a result that closely mirrored the 1995 Divorce Referendum outcome. In an editorial in the *Irish Times* the day after the referendum, the paper noted that despite the 'grand alignment of Fianna Fáil, the Catholic church and the official Pro-Life campaign has, for the first time, failed to produce a majority on a sensitive moral issue in middle Ireland after a lengthy and co-ordinated campaign'.¹⁴⁹ After the confirmation of this result, the Catholic Church in Ireland was never again able to exercise its previously heavily persuasive power over the Irish psyche¹⁵⁰. The stage was set for fundamental alterations in social legislation and the public mind in the Irish state in the times to come.

¹⁴⁹ Fuller, 249.

¹⁵⁰ Subsequent radical alterations of public law fall outside the period in which McGahern's work was published and it is for this reason they are not directly referred to at this juncture of the text. The implications generated by these later changes will be examined in the conclusion of this thesis.

1.3 Through a tinted looking glass: towards a three-pronged analysis of John McGahern's novels

John McGahern was raised in an Ireland that had achieved its independence prior to his birth, but which continued to engage in political and cultural enterprises in pursuit of a more clearly defined national identity. This process began prior to the achievement of a partial political solution to nationalist demands for full control over the island of Ireland that continued thereafter in the shadow of a colonial legacy. A significant body of ideas that formed a central part of the political narrative in the Irish Free State and later the Republic of Ireland trace their origins to a long tradition of nationalist rhetoric. Such a narrative, particular its literary and cultural aspects, was sustained by the artistic classes, who in turn honed the national consciousness to accept the possibility of an alternative way of life. Where a country was not in the hands of its own people, as was the case in the first two decades of twentieth century Ireland, a catalyst needed to be found to force change.

Declan Kiberd aptly captures the dilemma faced by artists who wished to align themselves with a new national paradigm in the midst of hostile conditions they faced 'a constricting environment and its accompanying forms: since freedom cannot be won in them, it must be won from them.'¹⁵¹ In an Ireland subject to British overlordship until 1922, nationalist ambition sought to bring peoples of opposing traditions on the island of Ireland together as a means of achieving a unitary Ireland. This task came to be taken on by the artist who supplies the imaginative space to secure creative and personal liberty for proponents of national assertion and in so doing they furnish the means by which national recovery can be realised.¹⁵²

The coveted state of a free Ireland inevitably relied upon a myth of an agreed and unified national character that could be allowed to take on its true form once independence was achieved. However, had Ireland never really been conceived, English power would have dictated its arrival to the known world as the country was viewed only as a series of conflictual fiefdoms which was then conquered and the name Ireland

¹⁵¹ Cited from Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 115

¹⁵² Kiberd (1996), p. 124 advances just such a view in noting the power and importance of the artist in contributing to conditions of freedom for, in this instance, the Irish nation.

given to it. In so doing, the English colonial power was intent on imposing its own administrative agenda that was dependent on the existence of an agreed notion of the Irish character. Only a negligible minority of English authors gave the slightest consideration to the possibility that the Irish could conceivably have the right to state their case of resistance.¹⁵³ And as such, Ireland took on the form of a void of space in English writing, a species of utopian “no place” which supplied an opportunity whereby these lords could read their ‘deepest fears and fondest ideals.’¹⁵⁴

For Oscar Wilde, this situation represented an opportunity for the Irish to create their own narrative through the language of the oppressor. Wilde exclaimed to Edmond de Goncourt, “I am Irish by race, but the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare” and furthermore the Saxons had taken “...our lands from us and made them destitute...but we took their language and added new beauties to it.” The Wildean moment is ‘that moment in which all polar opposites are transcended’ which is in evidence when Wilde exclaimed to actress Marie Prescott that it was his view that this was “the desire of any very intensified emotion to be relieved by some emotion that is its opposite.”¹⁵⁵ Upon further inspection, this relatively sardonic comment yields more than a grain of truth in that it illustrates how the audience is itself acting every evening and requires an appraisal of its performance. The world is then seen to seek to replicate the utopia portrayed in the play as opposed to mirroring lived experience, where the utopia is posited as a cumulative foundation on the basis of which all hierarchies can be turned on their heads in preparation for a coming revolution. In this sense, in the context of Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the butler starts off the play by employing subversive witticisms that better those of his master that in turn acts as a catalyst toward the master reverting to a search of his half-suppressed

¹⁵³ On this point of resistance, imperial efforts at deliberately misrepresenting the Irish to frustrate endeavours toward self-governance are well explored by Edward Hirsh in his ‘The Imaginary Irish Peasant’ in PMLA, Vol. 106, No. 5, pp 1116-1133 (The Modern Language Association, 1991)

¹⁵⁴ Cited Kiberd, 9-12; See also Victor Kiernan, “The British Isles: Celt and Saxon”, pp. 1-35 in Mikulus Teich, Roy Porter (eds.) *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), provides an excellent overview of the linguistic origins and cultural politics that characterised Irish history up until home rule was achieved and well into the late decades of the twentieth century.

¹⁵⁵ *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, R. Hart-Davis, R (Ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 50.

double.¹⁵⁶ By revealing the ghosts that help define the whole self, a truer picture can be acquired of a genuine identity, that of the Irish identity that had been suppressed for so long by the British Empire. By employing a device of this kind, Wilde highlights how the denied double serves to dictate the creator's agenda who then in turn becomes its unwitting slave. At the time of Wilde's remarks in late nineteenth century, the Irish Parnellites in the British House of Commons were acting out this very dynamic when they were able to exert considerable influence over the political agenda by repeatedly paralysing parliamentary proceedings in order to extract concessions for their nationalist agenda. From this position Wilde set about his search for a no-place, otherwise taken to be Utopia, which he hoped either Ireland or England could be gradually disposed toward becoming. Thus, through *The Importance of Being Earnest* the fraught Anglo-Irish relations are dramatized and the play can be read as a dramatized instance of such relations.¹⁵⁷

The Ireland of this period (i.e. the late nineteenth and early twentieth century) was presented with a choice between two alternative kinds of freedom: the adoption of a pre-colonial Gaelic character, long-denied yet hungry for expression, or the constitution of a national identity *ab initio*. Both involved difficulties of different kinds; the first ignored a great deal of past events that were heavily marked by centuries of colonial rule and was espoused most particularly being Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera and the political elites they represented. The second also required the adoption of a collective amnesia, but more selective in its operation that made liberation available in the form of freedoms manufactured by writers and artists who were intent on bringing about a situation where it would be possible "to make us citizens, by anticipation in the world we crave."¹⁵⁸ While it may have been possible to advance in one of a number of directions, challenges remained on all fronts. A "return to source" model was problematic to the extent that very little original material was available any longer beyond a miniscule quantity of scattered Irish speakers in the west of Ireland who were unenthusiastic about the ideals nationalism sought to project. The character of Moran, a

¹⁵⁶ This is an argument drawn upon at length by Kiberd, 35-41.

¹⁵⁷ Wilde's agenda in this instance is interpreted as such by Kiberd, p. 48.

¹⁵⁸ R. Poirier, *A World Elsewhere* (Wisconsin, 1985), p. 210.

former IRA fighter in McGahern's *Amongst Women* (1990) reveals his acute contempt at what became of the Irish nation post-independence, he one of many in his community. Similarly, in *The Leavetaking* (1974) the protagonist seeks refuge from his problems outside of Ireland to avoid sanction from state authorities for private conduct regarded as an affront to accepted values.

Indeed, as Ireland approached the point at which it would step outside the imperial net, the need arose to confront its past before it could meaningfully engage with its future. In this respect, the argument put forward by Frantz Fanon, a respected major source of insights into what has come to be called the post-colonial predicament is of particular potency as it recognises that a past that is so petrified by preconception has effectively lost the future to come and with it its ability to 'challenge and disrupt' which stands only as an admirable object of consumption where its followers come to resemble tourists in their own land where heritage sites such as museums are capable of being visited or conceived by a simple act of will. The people resident in these communities are coaxed by their leaders to "become drunk on remembrance" where the past is an object of reverence that consumes its observers so comprehensively that they step outside the active movement of historical processes.¹⁵⁹

Once the overlord of one-third of the Earth's inhabited land area, the British Empire declined steadily with the onset of the World Wars and the success of indigenous independence movements throughout the globe. A strong and persistent imperial attitude provided much of the stamina and stability in policy formation designed to continue the subjugation of individual colonies. Influential cultural critic Edward Said has illustrated the nature of the British imperial attitude of disdain toward controlled peoples under their rule. In a chapter entitled "The Scope of Orientalism" from his seminal work *Orientalism* (originally published in 1978), Edward Said quotes the remarks of the influential, if infamous, British politician Arthur James Balfour, whose statements on 13 June 1910 to the House of Commons provide a revealing exposition of the British imperial mind-set and provide a good example of the imperial attitude applied to Ireland. In this case, Balfour was concerned with the administration

¹⁵⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1961), p. 135.

of colonial Egypt and was careful to qualify his remarks by setting the difficulties encountered there with more local issues “affecting the Isle of Wright or the West Riding of Yorkshire.”¹⁶⁰

In responding to a challenge put down by a Mr. J.M. Robertson, M.P. for Tyneside, Balfour re-interpreted his questioner’s query in asking the question: “What right do you have to take up these airs of superiority with regard to people whom you choose to call Oriental?” The choice of this term itself was canonical and its use could be traced back to figures such as Chaucer, Mandeville as well as Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope and Byron. The term circumscribed Asia and the East as a whole from a geographical, moral and cultural perspective and such was its nature it was possible to apply an elastic definition to it so as to appropriate the term in such a way as to imply the association of an alliance between despotism and Oriental. In this way, the mind-set that gave rise to that kind of thinker was also available to many others which allowed them to understand the term in the manner in which it was intended.¹⁶¹ In his speech, Balfour applied the term for his own ends and such was the depth of understanding in contemporary political opinion, his logic did not require further justification or comment:

I take up no attitude of superiority. But I ask (Robertson and anyone else)...who has even the most superficial knowledge of history, if they will look in the face the facts with which a British statesman has to deal with when he is put in a position of supremacy over great races like the inhabitants of Egypt and countries in the East. We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately; we know more about it (...) ¹⁶²

The content of Balfour’s speech demonstrates his complete lack of consideration for the possibility that Egyptians may wish to manage their own affairs independently free from outside interference. Where Egyptians wish to act autonomously they are treated with disdain and regarded suspiciously as the “agitator (who) wishes to raise difficulties” as opposed to the ‘good native’ who chooses to ignore “difficult” aspects of

¹⁶⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2003/1978), p. 31.

¹⁶¹ Said, 31

¹⁶² Said, 32

foreign control of his country. Under English governance, the assertion made about Egypt is that its occupation is the “very basis” of its contemporary civilisation and it was believed it could not survive in its absence. Balfour and his contemporaries made use of several terms to indicate their belief that the Oriental was to be regarded as irrational, depraved, childlike, “different”, descriptors that conveniently contrasted with the European who was to be naturally regarded as rational, virtuous, mature and “normal.” (...) the intelligibility and identity of the Oriental world is not credited to its own efforts but is instead attributed to a series of intellectual manoeuvres designed to interpret the Oriental world for Western ends.¹⁶³

In the context of a discussion in relation to the impact of *Orientalism* in 1994, Edward Said identifies a key element to his motivation for writing his work:

My aim, as I said earlier, was not so much to dissipate difference itself – for who can deny the constitutive role of national as well as cultural differences in the relations between human beings – but to challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things.¹⁶⁴

Given the similarities that exist between the mission expressed in the above quote and the work undertaken in the same field by scholars in Ireland, Eóin Flannery¹⁶⁵ has remarked that there seemed to be little doubt that Said’s ‘aim’ in the above cited quote has become the critical methodology for Irish postcolonial studies. Indeed, for those like Seamus Deane, the critical objective is focused on highlighting the multi-faceted character of Irish history and to enunciate the inconsistency in the way Ireland has been subjected to British labours to impose an undeviating line where the character of Irish society is attributed to the forces of developmental historical progress. Deane does not believe that this process should be concerned with accounting for oppositional confrontation or with formulating new theoretical conventions, but rather as Said has argued: ‘of rethinking and re-formulating.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Said, 33-40.

¹⁶⁴ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Knopf, 1993), p. 350

¹⁶⁵ Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies: Theory, Discourse, Utopia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ Sai, 351.

Endeavours to rethink existing paradigms in respect of accepted knowledge of the past inevitably involve changing perspectives in relation to the methodologies applied to read such historical periods and events. As a result of this necessity the different thinking that emerged came to be known as the 'Atlantic Archipelago' and the 'New British' history models. In a more altruistic treatment of historical events, both of these models marked a departure to some extent from the habitual approach of modern British historiography to remain in an amnesiac stance in respect of the British imperial record. 'New British' history concerns itself with the common points of contact in relation to English state formation and the extension of English control over the whole of the British Isles, whereas the 'Atlantic model' has expanded in nature so as to permit a greater appreciation of the relationship in respect of developments on the home front and Britain's expansion into the west on into North America and the Caribbean.¹⁶⁷

The effects of British colonialism on Ireland can then be re-examined in light of the adoption of this more enlightened approach. In the first instance it can be seen there exists a past history of colonial treatment, conquest and the associated manifestation of this including, confiscation of land, religious persecution, famine, mass immigration, and the loss of the Irish language. In the second instance, it can be found that a more recent post-colonial history is available to those who wish to examine it: a civil war whose conclusion saw revolutionaries either exiled or executed, a Free State that emulated colonial institutions, but that met and even exceeded the revolutionary aspirations of 1916, and a state-supported Catholicism that abused its power to such an extent that it has almost completely exhausted the enormous spiritual authority it once possessed. Another more obvious feature of this situation is the fact that postcolonial Ireland is an island that occupies two separate states. To a large extent the colonial legacy still haunts the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In this respect, postcolonial theory is most potent when it seeks to break down claims made by factious traditional nationalist narratives. Where much of modernization theory seeks to justify, overlook or exclude accounts of the suffering of the population under colonial

¹⁶⁷ Joe Cleary, "Misplaced Ideas? Colonialism, Location and Dislocation in Irish Studies" in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds.) (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), pp. 16-45, p. 16

conditions in favour of praising the positive effects of contemporary economic achievements, by the same token traditional nationalist narratives, tinged by either republican or unionist sympathies, also attempt to discount its own actions in the part it plays in present suffering perpetuated by a politics of exclusion at the expense of foregoing a more inclusive political position that would allow the emergence of more promising prospects.¹⁶⁸

A further complication on the road to navigating this complex experience is how Ireland has experienced a more complete integration into England more than any other former British colony. Consequential to this development was the annihilation of the Irish language and the complete saturation of Ireland by the language legal¹⁶⁹ of English as well as similar effects through academic means as well as present day mass-media outlets. This has meant that achieving any kind of significant intellectual or cultural decolonization has become even more fraught allied with the fact that the nature of the identity of Irish people in the modern era is strongly stimulated by existing Irish and English influences as well as American cultural and capital penetration of Irish shores.¹⁷⁰

Postcolonial theory remains a central element of dominant practice in literary and cultural criticism within the area of Irish studies. Much of the momentum of what Lloyd (1993) has termed Ireland's 'putative postcolonial condition' was driven by the work of the *Field Day Theatre Company*. A number of leading Irish intellectual and artistic figures including Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel, Stephen Rea and Tom Paulin, the critic and writer Seamus Deane and were chiefly responsible for Field Day's founding and operation. Treated by many as the *de facto* spokesman for the *Field Day* conglomerate, Deane has, in effect, determined the parameters and direction of a great deal of Irish critical, literary and historical deliberation up to the turn of this century. While it does not diminish the magnitude, quality and essential role played by the *Field Day* enterprise in the formulation of postcolonial criticism in Ireland, acknowledgement must also be extended to the contribution to this effort provided by earlier initiatives

¹⁶⁸ Carroll and King, 1-2.

¹⁶⁹ This phrase is intended to mean the jurisprudential constructs that English law provided to justify certain concepts.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 4

housed in the publication *The Crane Bag*, published under the management of Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman between 1977 and 1985. Indeed, *The Crane Bag*, as has *Field Day* and a host of other postcolonial critiques of the course of Irish history and society has been sustained by what Szabo (2005) has defended as part of this utopian impulse conceived ‘to supply challenging visions on Irish culture, history, tradition and identity and to fill the gaps between the overused binary oppositions that dominated previous approaches to cultural discourse in Ireland.’ *The Crane Bag* was defined by a content of themes ranging from catholic to critical, including literature, politics, theatre, philosophy, gender politics, the Northern ‘Troubles’ and the Irish language. In this mission the editorial policy adopted by *The Crane Bag* proffered deconstructive interpretations of deeply rooted Irish political and cultural tenets. Its publication activity came to an end in 1985 in the wake of no longer receiving funding from the Irish Arts Council subsequent to its decision and realisation of an interview with then Chief of Staff of the IRA.¹⁷¹

Observant commentators such as Stephen Howe have noted that high rates of economic growth in a relatively short period of time do have the consequence of bringing about substantial changes in society evidenced in cases such as heavy secularisation and the liberalisation of attitudes and values, despite some inertia being present in the more mature segment of the population in relation to these developments. At least up to 2002 the observance of religious practice remained comparatively comparable high and quite probably the highest in the European community with perhaps Malta offering the only exception. Political crises in the Republic of Ireland, in the vast majority of cases, have been as a result of tensions stemming from religious instruction and public morality, rather than nationalist issues. It may also be the case that the very high concordance between Catholic values and public conduct, until relatively recently, assisted to a considerable extent in maintaining Ireland’s high level of stability and thus starving more extremist political elements of any opportunity to gain a foothold. Factors that may provide an explanation as to why these values have survived for so long would include mass emigration, a situation that has conspired to

¹⁷¹ Cited in Flannery, 19-21

ensure that secularisation has been slow and uncommon. A final aspect that could also account for this persistence is migration, whereby (usually considered in the main for economic reasons) individuals avail of this facility to bypass the constraints of tradition instead of mounting a frontal assault against such values.¹⁷² This meant that the economic prosperity enjoyed by the Irish state in the period in the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s and earlier economic progress beginning in the 1960s meant that much more employment was possible than was previously thus allowing more members of the community to remain in the country of their birth where they were then in a position to make their views known and demand change as their values matured over time.

While Irish people sought economic refuge with many other nationalities in the United Kingdom after the Irish State gained its independence, Irish people particularly in the early decades of the Irish state were unable to escape racialized discourses that also affected Indian colonial subjugates. This was despite the fact that conventional associations between race and colonialism were defeated by the fact that Irish people were seen as European and the fact that class and religious differences took centre ground ahead of race in accounting for conflicts. Under such circumstances, Stephen Howe (2000) calls into question whether racism is an appropriate and accurate term for English attitudes toward Irish people, a question which in turn suggests that colonialism is difficult to achieve in the absence of racism. On the other hand, Irish postcolonial writers have prioritized how the impact of colonialism and racial stereotyping has affected an understanding of Irish identities of the present day. In common with other colonial 'subjects', the Irish played their part in providing a means by which the English could shape their identity and sense of imperial aloofness. In contrast to this idealised state, Irish peasants were disparaged and regarded as unclean, irrational, deceitful and unbridled people. Further labels such as immature, wild, reckless and superstitious were attached to the Irish who detested English enterprise and civilization, thus bringing the eternally present 'Irish problem' into being.¹⁷³

¹⁷²See Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 167.

¹⁷³ Robert A. Huttenback, *Racism and the Empire: White settlers and coloured immigrants in the British self-governing colonies, 1830-1910* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 17

The uncertainties about the Irish historical process highlighted above have cast some doubt over the appropriateness of the concept of ‘modernisation’ for discussing Ireland’s history. As Conor McCarthy notes the problematic theorisation of modernisation in respect of Ireland “modernisation theory assumes the fundamental stability of the social, economic and political system in which it is deployed. It cannot deal with a situation in which that dispensation is open to question, hence its tendency to shut out alternative thinking”.¹⁷⁴ McCarthy ventures further in this argument by adding ‘the blockage to critical views of Irish modernisation has worked on the level of ideology, where a particular set of ideas has been accepted as “common sense”, and very little space is available in which to assess the adequacy of this theory to the Irish case, or to suggest alternatives’.¹⁷⁵ Essentially, McCarthy exposes the agenda applied to society in order to maintain a certain form of organisation of culture. In this way the shutting out of alternatives, itself a part of key strategies of ruling political classes to ridicule oppositional alternatives relating to how Ireland could otherwise progress its development. In Flannery’s view, visions of the future can then take on a utopian character and this aspiration can become ideological. Once this ideology has been implemented it can take on a hegemonic form.¹⁷⁶

Another desired state of belief defended by hegemonic institutions is that the present is an exemplification of the idealised result of historical progress, which is a discourse that excludes any deviation from this philosophy and that is successful for the greater part since utopian desire for a better community is relatively easy to extinguish. This critique then forms part of Blochian tradition of utopian thought¹⁷⁷ that holds that even within despair the utopian survives as it seeks to achieve objections that are projected into an imagined construct of the future. This is where the future is heavily influenced by the character of past events. As Raffaella Baccolini remarks, what persists

¹⁷⁴ Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 22

¹⁷⁵ McCarthy, 12

¹⁷⁶ Flannery, 12

¹⁷⁷ In his *Principle of Hope* (Vol. 1) (1996), Ernst Bloch holds that man is obliged to intervene to attempt to realise the possible or face the prospect of being enveloped by fear as against hope. This contention is made in the context of man pushing his boundaries further beyond their original positions in the hope of advancing his fortunes. See pp. 165-66; 198 and 246-7 of same.

between past and present resonates strongly with the desired change that manifests itself in the Irish postcolonial narrative:

The utopian value of memory rests in nurturing a culture of memory and sustaining a theory a theory of remembrance. These actions, therefore, become important elements of a political, utopian praxis of change, action, and empowerment: indeed, our reconstructions of the past shape our present and future. Memory, then, to be of use to Utopia, needs to dissociate itself from its traditional link to the metaphor of storage and identify itself as a process. As Utopia is a process, so memory needs to be perceived as process, not a fixed or reachable, but in progress.¹⁷⁸

A fellow scholar-colleague of Baccolini's in the field of utopian studies, Tom Moylan advanced a contribution for a 2007 special edition of the *Utopian Studies Journal* in which the editor (Moylan himself) observes the relatively anomalous nature of the fact that relatively few 'individual scholars have written about utopian aspects of Irish culture.'¹⁷⁹ Moylan's above cited work draws upon historical utopian figurations of Ireland as an 'alluring, summoning idyll on the horizon of the European mainland'. In this spirit he invokes Graham's *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001) where he takes the opportunity to compliment Graham's approach:

He (Graham) interrogates the tensions and differences between apparently stable 'realities' of Ireland and its 'other' possibilities. In this perspective, his recognition of the contested meanings of 'Ireland' and its anticipatory possibilities points toward a way of understanding how utopian imaginaries have, and can, work in Irish history to break open to new meanings, new concrete possibilities.¹⁸⁰

While Moylan and his colleagues' objectives are conducted within a cultural sphere, their contributions are also complimented by a growing body of critique dealing with the political economy aspect of Irish societal development. These other critiques have been driven by nationalism and social radicalism but do not converge with the

¹⁷⁸ For a wider exposition of this interesting point see Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, 'Introduction: Utopia as Method-Vision', in *Utopia-Method-Vision: The Use of Social Dreaming* (Oxford and Berne: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 13-23.

¹⁷⁹ Tom Moylan, 'Introduction: Tracking Utopia in Irish Culture(s)' pp. 295-298 in *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 18, No.3, 2007.

¹⁸⁰ Moylan, 296

priorities pursued by neo-colonialist theories or assimilated versions of Republican economic nationalism. Thus, it is in this light that we can read historian J. J. Lee's lament for Irish economic failure that treats postcolonial dependence as a psychological phenomenon rather than an economic condition. A situation where the lack of intellectual mobilisation to interrogate the reasons for such a state of being in this case is said to be attributable to 'the dependency syndrome which had wormed its way into the Irish psyche during the long centuries of foreign dominance'.¹⁸¹

In a key contribution to *The Irish Review* titled 'We Are All Revisionists Now' Roy Foster (1986)¹⁸² noted an important departure in the thinking of a segment of historians concerned with Irish affairs in how he recognised that '(...) scholars have learned to appreciate half-tones, to be sceptical about imputing praise or blame, to separate contemporary intentions from historical effects (...)’ in a manner that is cognisant of the fact that ‘dangerous nostalgia makes it all the more necessary to look at the state of affairs now (...).’ In making these remarks, Foster attempts to persuade those interested in Irish history to avoid unquestioning belief in nationalist myths. Highlighting what was then a relatively neglected area of inquiry, a Maynooth-based historian is cited by Foster as he highlights an important aspect of necessary further investigation:

The creators and custodians of mainstream Irish mythology have succeeded over a period of generations in blurring a salient fact about Irish nationalism, namely, that since the early nineteenth century at least it has been essentially an expression of the felt needs, social and psychological, of the Irish Catholic body, including their apparent need to challenge other Christians on the island in various ways.¹⁸³

What Foster refers to as 'revisionism' is defined as:

...a desire to eliminate as much as possible of the retrospectively 'Whig' view of history which sees every event and process in the light of what followed it rather than what went

¹⁸¹ J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 627.

¹⁸² See Roy Foster, 'We Are All Revisionists Now', *The Irish Review*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-5, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1986).

¹⁸³ R.V Comerford, *The Fenians in Context* (Dublin, 1984), p. 30.

before: the effort to get behind hindsight. Along the way, many simple assumptions need to be questioned.¹⁸⁴

These many simple assumptions indeed refer to fundamental values about how a community or even a nation operates and frequently require interrogation before any real alternative narrative providing for genuine change can occur. In this way the artist can provide the creativity and the imaginary space for this activity to commence which may take the form of applying utopian thinking. As Declan Kiberd so aptly notes, art (e.g. literature) is, under such circumstances, a manifestation of man's continuous effort to set out another form of living to the reality in which he finds himself in. It is through this ability to imagine the world as it is that permits the capacity to imagine evolution of that change to be possible. As yet unrealised dreams of the future present themselves in fictions and as they do so supply a means by which people can begin to grasp the state of affairs in the world in which they live.¹⁸⁵ This fundamental facet of the artistic endeavour accords closely with J. C. C. Davis' construction of utopia as having to do with man's dreams of a better world, which expanded further provides for an interpretation of where 'utopias are those aspects of culture...in which the possible extrapolations of the present are explored.'¹⁸⁶

(...) But to find citizens ruled by good and wholesome laws, that is an exceeding rare and hard thing. But as he marked many fond and foolish laws in those new-found lands, so her rehearsed divers acts and constitutions, whereby these our cities, nations, countries, and kingdoms may take example to amend their faults, enormities, and errors. (...)

First Book, *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More (1997/1516), p. 27

The standards implied by the above cited quote from More's *Utopia* are highly indicative of the essence of the nature of some utopian dreams to correct perceived flaws in an existing system and replace the dysfunctional mechanisms with something better directly inspired by greater ideals. In this way ideal standards have been sought as a means to reach a higher plane of civilised living, to alleviate certain difficulties,

¹⁸⁴ Foster, 2

¹⁸⁵ Kiberd, 118

¹⁸⁶ J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 12.

minimise perceived ills and to protect against the erosion of newly established lifestyle patterns that seek to leave undesirable living behind. In order to reach a realisation that such issues exist and require remedying, a meaningful catalyst comes about or is introduced into a system of living so as to activate that awareness. Knowledge of perceived faults demands the production of a plan of principles to amend these faults, the details of which often seeks the application of radical reform rather than incremental change. Radical reforms cannot be implemented in the absence of achieving significant modifications in prevailing attitudes within a defined polity. On the occasion of such change one can observe the presence of what Thomas S. Kuhn (1962) described as a 'paradigm shift.'¹⁸⁷ The would-be architects of this possible future alternative mindscape are unable to act alone and thus engage in enterprises designed to attract attention to their cause. Their audience also requires persuasion of the merits of the project prior to subscribing to efforts at bringing about a new archetype.

Human character is, by nature, complex, often unpredictable and heavily prone to being governed by emotion, petty jealousies and greed. Few would discount the necessity for a system of rules, universally applied upon all guaranteeing equal treatment, rights and responsibilities. However, disagreements quickly manifest themselves as soon as the details of such systems come to be discussed particularly in respect of who arrogates the right to make rules, how they can be applied and policed across a defined community.

On the one hand, transforming the perspectives and prospects of public opinion necessitates the identification of deficits in the status quo. On the other hand, it also requires the production of an alternative philosophical or political architecture to correct these shortcomings. Such efforts have long pre-dated the detailed early critique advanced by Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) which gave birth to the name of the discipline concerned with supplying the creativity and momentum for this kind of thinking. Moreover, utopian visions frequently come into existence to supply the basis for solutions (e.g. cultural change) to the current configuration of a particular territory or community.

¹⁸⁷ A more comprehensive exploration of this term shall be offered later in this text.

Irish culture has proven to be a fertile environment for inspiring utopian longings throughout the ages. Its origins can be found in early Irish literature, with its Celtic Otherworld and Christian heaven, the hopeful waiting for a situation that an alternative space will resonate (otherwise transformed and re-calibrated) down through the centuries. In the *aisling* poetic tradition, the other place is the Ireland of the past, lost and gone but which still stirs considerable interest that inspires occasional calls for its re-birth¹⁸⁸. So too does it appear in the political realm in anticipation of a nation, oscillating between the lost and the yet to be won, so often evoked in songs, manifestoes, speeches and physical manifestation in art discernible to the naked eye. This was conceived to awaken desire in the ‘occupied, oppressed moment of the present.’ It is within these dreams of a better life that an elusive image of the “Ireland” so earnestly sought has changed form with varying demands of different generations up to the present day as people seek greater quality in their lives and better prospects for their children. In essence then, the Irish imaginary houses a tendency to grow people’s social dreams in such a fashion as to give rise to a *topos* wherein those dreams can be accommodated and expanded upon so with a view to functioning as estranged reformulations of what possibilities may lie in an alternative life.¹⁸⁹

Instances of utopian literature abound throughout the Irish literary repertoire. A text of particular notoriety in this respect is indeed, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) which satirises the features common to utopian fiction. Swift’s Gulliver makes quite a number of visits to an institution known as The Academy of Lagado, a place that clearly mirrors Salomon’s House in Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1626) and which has the purpose of

¹⁸⁸ This term has its origins in eighteenth century national poetry which involved setting out an image of an idealized figure, most often a helpless Irish virgin seen in a dream-vision who is ravished by the masculine English invader. It served as a reminder, as Richard Kearney has noted, idealising and allegorising ‘both the physical reality and the political identity of the (colonized) land as female’ (see Richard Kearney, ‘Myth and Motherland’ in S. Deane et al. *Ireland’s Field Day*, pp. 61-80, (Derry: Field Day Theatre Company, 1985).

For a broad outline of this tradition in Irish literature see Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, ‘Thinking of Her...as...Ireland’: Yeats, Pearse and Heaney, *Textual Practice*, Vol. 4, (1990), Issue 1, pp. 1-21; Katherina Walter, ‘From *aisling* to *chora*: female allegories of the nation in contemporary Irish women’s poetry’, *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 21, 2013, Issue 3, pp. 313-325; Mireia Aragay, ‘Reading Dermot Bolger’s *The Holy Ground*: National Identity, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Colonial Ireland’, *Links & Letters*, 1997, pp. 53-64.

¹⁸⁹ Tom Moylan, ‘Irish Voyages and Visions: Pre-figuring, Re-configuring Utopia’, *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (2007), pp. 299-323, pp. 299-300.

ridiculing the conduction of scientific experiments viewed as ‘genuine wonders’. Swift’s intention here is to attack the utopian contention that it would be possible to simply develop education and learning to such an extent as to make it possible for even the most intellectually disinterested individuals to become men of learning with the minimum of efforts. His contention is that the new technology of the seventeenth century cannot hope to deliver upon its promise of improving the organisation of learning to such a degree as to permit the ‘amelioration of the human condition.’ Although not a utopian text itself, *Gulliver’s Travels* does engage extensively with the utopian discourse but does so, for amongst other reasons, to critique the creation and operation of an ideal society found in the land of the Houyhnhnms, whose organisation is said to be highly rational.¹⁹⁰

The present writer argues that another set of texts that engages in arguing the merits of religious conviction and the freedom to worship one’s own faith is to be found in the form of *A Voyage to O’Brazeel* (1752) – an issue of particular import given the religious forces at work in McGahern’s novel. This text was translated from an Irish language manuscript by the narrator, Manus O’ Donnell. Claiming texts are of such heritage was a familiar device in eighteenth-century English language composition where the notion of an impartial editor engaged in the translation of late sixteenth-century or early seventeenth-century Irish language text seeks to bolster the case for authenticity in a fantastical tale through an ironic tone. *A Voyage* describes a fictitious journey to a phantasmal island located outside the reaches of the lands then subject to the forces of conquest and colonization. During this voyage, the visitors to this mythical place, who are themselves subject to displacement by settlers, engage with the island’s residents in discussion on the dynamics that regulate the relationship between government and culture, with religion being a particular focus of their postulations. The narrator attempts to locate the text in a wider socio-cultural and literary context, and by extension to explore the role of the ideal society represented by *O’ Brazeel* in it and related works. A principal argument in this respect is that *A Voyage* is a direct reflection of early Patriot efforts to reconceptualise the relationship persisting between native

¹⁹⁰ Chloë Houston, ‘Utopia, Dystopia or Anti-utopia? Gulliver’s Travels and the Utopian Mode of Discourse’, *Utopian Studies*, Vol 18, No. 3 (2007), pp. 425-442, pp. 431-32.

Catholics and Protestant settlers by appealing to the content of Gaelic history and literature. With the onset of the 1780s these efforts became encapsulated within the radical Patriotism of the time that saw Irish Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters becoming represented as a single nation with Milesian forebears. *A Voyage*, then is concerned with making a strong assertion that Protestantism should be regarded as the purer form of Christianity while simultaneously relying upon Gaelic mythology and in so doing represents the pre-conquest élite as a people of civilised, reasonable and ‘good’ traits. The text does, however, present a reversal of roles in that Protestants are advanced as the natives who suffer stress as they witness the arrival of Catholic settlers that in turn generates ambiguity that is unaffected by the apparent resolution when the O’ Donnells make their way back to Irish shores.¹⁹¹

A Voyage, the longest piece in the overall Miscellany which contains it and the text chosen to open it, joins other items in the collection that harks back to a Gaelic past. Mattheo and Honora, an extensive poem set in Kilkenny, contains a Patriot redaction of Irish history in relation to Henry II’s invasion is the fulcrum around which Ireland moved from being a nation at liberty and prosperous to being poor and oppressed:

When England’s Henry, second of the name,
To make a conquest of this island came;
Call’d oe’r at first to help an injur’d
king;
Oh fatal call! What mischiefs did it
bring?
The Irish sea, the British forces past,
Help’d Dermot first, but help’d
themselves at last.
The people’s property the did devour,
And so, by force, usurp’d the sov’reign pow’r.¹⁹²

A generation later saw paramilitary Volunteer companies play a key role in fomenting the proliferation of a radical Patriot version of history where conquest of the past was viewed as having taken place in a land of milk and honey, a view that took on popular legitimacy as it was propagated through songs, pamphlets and newspaper

¹⁹¹ Michael Griffin and Breandán Mac Suibhne, ‘Da’s Boat; or, Can the Submarine Speak? “A Voyage to O’Brazeel” (1752) and Other Glimpses of the Irish Atlantis’, *Field Day Review*, Vol. 2 (2006), pp. 110-127, p. 113

¹⁹² *The Ulster Miscellany* (n.p., 1753), p. 236. The lineation adopted here respects the format adopted in the original cited source.

articles. Dr. William Crawford (c. 1739-1800), Presbyterian minister of Strabane, took interest in this content and produced a respected scholarly redaction of this narrative in the form of his two-volume *History of Ireland* (1783). Crawford, whose own brother became deeply involved in the United Irishman cause, provided a portrait of the history of the Irish nation from what he called ‘our Milesian ancestors’ up to the point of the acquisition of legislative independence in 1782. In that same text he also refers to Irish as ‘our native tongue’ and further acknowledges what may be termed a skewed view of history adopted by Protestants, ‘the light in which the designs of the Roman Catholics, from the time of Queen Elizabeth, are here viewed, differs greatly from that in which they have been placed by the generality of Protestant historians’. His examination of the Rising of 1641 informs readers of the view that this was ‘the most partial, the most exaggerated, and the most absurd’ commentary that would be best subsumed into the obscurity of oblivion. Crawford voiced his conviction that the prudent course at the time meant Catholics should be given the franchise and he hoped his book would ‘be instrumental in promoting the interest of a set of men who, both in respect to their religious and civil rights, have, until of late, laboured under intolerable oppression’ that in turn could bring about a ‘united, happy and powerful nation’.¹⁹³

Belief in a promised land, of a better future, a possible transformation to a greater good, is to be found in Irish folklore relating to O’Brazeel (also Hy-Brazil, from the Irish Uí Bhreasail) became embedded in the popular culture of Irish coastal communities many centuries ago. An Irish Atlantis, in the form of a submarine island only magical present and seldom seen due to the presence of thick fog who sometimes referred to it as Tír fé Thoinn (The Submarine Country), Má Meala (Plain of Honey, or Fortunate Isle), Í na mBuadla (Land of Talents) depending on the opinion sought. Certain communities had more confidence in their belief in that place, such as the people of North Donegal, as they managed to acquire souvenirs from the location. In that respect, the 1500s saw the surfacing a horn of a ram said to have been captured by Murchadh Mac Suibhne on the Fortunate Island that later came into use as a wine vessel at Killydonnell Friary (est. 1471). By the end of the seventeenth century the magical

¹⁹³ Griffin and Mac Suibhne, 121.

island had made its way into English-language texts as a topos of religious and political allegory. An example of this was in 1674 which saw the publication of *The Western Wonder* by Richard Head (d. 1686), a text that straddles arcadia, imaginary voyage and ethnic allegory. On the occasion of that text Londoners are seen to sail for O' Brazeel which they never reach since they are shipwrecked on 'Montecapernia', or the Mountain of Goats, which was intended as a cypher for Ireland. The ghost island represented in that text thus represents the delusion of colonialism. Here, Head's intention is to demonstrate his disappointment with the population of Montecapernia that in turn suggests that a utopian state of affairs cannot be reached. The dilemma found here is that which lies with those who seek transformation over assimilation, to essentially corrupt the mythical by forcing into contact with the trappings of commercial living so closely linked with the mercantile system.¹⁹⁴

The *O' Brazeel* texts are taken as political rather than religious allegories and they are definitively Anglo-centric in cultural terms. *A Voyage* is written in a way that resonates closely with the narrative of the Gaelic textual character of O' Brazeel in how it demonstrates evidence of religious services making use of the ram's horn in the 1500s. These narratives also tended to display Christian salvation in allegoric form. It also takes on the mission of dealing with the themes of piety and salvation but in the context of colonization and postulates that believers of diverging faiths are not amenable to harmonious inter-community relations within the same polity.¹⁹⁵

While *A Voyage* does summon colonial themes onto the readers' horizon, it does not offer a comprehensive treatment of them. However, an anti-colonial perspective is advanced by the anonymous editor who offers his stance safe in the knowledge that the residents of *O' Brazeel* shall not be subjected to a campaign of conquest:

Tho' I am going to give the world an account of a most delicious country, and a happy people, it is not with a view of stirring up any enterprising prince or general to go and conquer it. I would not willingly make men worse than they are, by throwing a bone of contention among them. (...) We have too many instances of the cruel barbarity of conquerors in our times, who have laid

¹⁹⁴ See note 36.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid: 123.

whole countries, destroying the bodies of inhabitants in order to save their souls (...) My chief aim to reform mankind and win them to a love of a practical piety and virtue, by shewing them how far others have excelled that way, and how gloriously they were rewarded even in this life.¹⁹⁶

Working within the early modern era of Irish society while colonisation continued to be manifested through military action, peace was a major desire before other goals could receive the space they required for pragmatic realisation. In a later era, once the Act of Union of 1801 had made its provisions fully felt, a strong yearning for self-determination re-asserted itself in Irish society after the disruption suffered during the Great Famine. This initiative was known as the Home Rule movement which began formally in 1870 before being suppressed in 1918.¹⁹⁷ The latter part of this period also played host to the crystallisation of Irish utopian aspirations in the form of the Gaelic League from 1893 which was to pave the way for Irish independence. As a principal element of Irish cultural nationalism, the Gaelic League defended patriotism and self-sufficiency as part of its utopian initiatives to mould the social and political agenda of Irish society well into the twenty century. One of the major figures of this movement was W. B. Yeats who was well-aware of the origins of the success of the movement which he believed was to be found in the final decade of the nineteenth century¹⁹⁸ when “a new kind of Ireland, as full of energy as a boiling pot was rising up amid the wreck of the old kind and...the national life was finding a new utterance”.¹⁹⁹ Founder member of the League, Douglas Hyde²⁰⁰ indicated the wide vision the movement espoused when he remarked that as a movement “they were really building up inside the Gaelic League a little Irish nation, which would become big some day – he hoped, please God, so big as to absorb the entire island.” Writing in a 2007 edition of the *Utopian Studies* journal, scholar Joachim Fischer, recognises the utopian character of the work undertaken by the

¹⁹⁶ *Ulster Miscellany*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁹⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ W. B. Yeats, “The Literary Movement in Ireland,” in *Ideals in Ireland*, ed. Lady Gregory (London: Unicorn, 1900), p. 88.

¹⁹⁹ Riona Nic Congáil, “Life and the Dream”: Utopian Impulses Within the Irish Language Revival, *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2012), pp. 430-449, p. 431.

²⁰⁰ Hyde would become the first President of Independent Ireland in 1938 in the year after the adoption of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2001), p. 277.

League where “members of the Gaelic League imagined a cultural revolution which would result in a totally de-anglicised Gaelic-speaking Ireland, a utopian vision if ever there was one.”²⁰¹

The Gaelic League took great interest and centred many of its key activities on the Aran Islands on the west coast of Ireland. It sought to use this island space as attempting to realise a retreat from the modern world at the fin de siècle, and it was on the Aran Islands that the League imagined and created a Gaelic utopian community that was intended to serve as a blueprint for the re-Gaelicized Irish nation. On one of the islands that make up the chain known as the Aran Islands, Inis Meáin was chosen for its purity of Irish language where a microcosmic Gaelic utopian community would be established to demonstrate the possibilities for the protection, preservation and extension of the Irish language. Administrators of the League implemented specific measures to encourage Island residents to conform to the League’s vision of linguistic and cultural purity. As part of that strategy, residents were subject to persuasion to remain on the island instead of opting for emigration to the United States. The League also took it upon itself to introduce changes to the way social life was conducted on the islands so that it would conform more closely to the ideals of Gaelic Ireland. However, by introducing modern structures to preserve traditional standards the net effect was to defend social cohesion, gender equality and the presence of competitions, dances and festivals which ironically brought many of the trappings of the modern world to these otherwise insular islands.²⁰² This nationalist cultural movement directly inspired leaders of the political classes that founded the Irish state through figures such as Padraig Pearse, Douglas Hyde and Eamon De Valera and ensured the survival of the desire for the creation of an independent Irish nation through the challenging times that came with the onset of the Great War and the 1916 Rising.

These utopian visions are the manifestation of a form of hope. Hope may be treated as an inspiring or motivating factor and as a key ingredient in the formulation of replacement structures for the regulation of man and his social environment. However,

²⁰¹ Joaquim Fischer, “A Future Ireland Under German Rule: Dystopias as Propaganda During World War I,” *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (2007), p. 369.

²⁰² Nic Congáil (2012), pp. 434-5.

prior to the implantation of this factor in the minds of men a process of awareness must first come to pass, knowledge of possibilities, of processes, of means. A nuclear group of thinkers present certain ideas which are then subject to public dissemination and consumption. Once in the public domain the community has the opportunity to reflect on the content and a process of assimilation ensues through continuous exposure to the said ideas and eventual subconscious enactment is observed. Therefore, suggestion rather than choice is the key factor in ensuring planned projects come to fruition in some form or another. Essentially, this process could be labelled ‘the education of desire’.²⁰³ Once this desire has been activated specific ideas may be formulated and propagated. In this respect, Ruth Levitas opines ‘whoever seeks a perfect organisation starting from an abstract principle is utopian’.²⁰⁴ She also acknowledges the more specific mechanics required to sustain a utopian enterprise which involves ‘a conception of social improvement either by ideas or ideals themselves or embodied in definite agencies of social change’.²⁰⁵ Moreover, other theorists also highlight the practical effects of utopia from the perspective of the realistic element of its realisation. In this respect Portolano (2012) asserts that utopia would be better regarded as a kind of symbolic expression of hope for a better world, immaterial of the fact whether it concerns a tangible future, a fictional context or spiritual plane in a positive or negative perspective.²⁰⁶

The fiction of John McGahern, particularly, the six novels between 1963 and 2002, charts the course of the lives of characters who have experienced and been influenced by the consequences of the campaign for Irish National autonomy, which was arguably a utopian project, gained remarkable momentum with the ascension of Eamon De Valera to executive political office in Ireland. De Valera’s conservative agenda inevitably created cultural ripples across space and time. It also forms a central element of the circumstances under which the earlier McGahern works were inspired. As Tom Moylan has noted, the principal objective of utopian thinking is to ‘tell us what

²⁰³ Joyce Oramel Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought*. (Octavo, 2000/1922), p. 272.

²⁰⁴ Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Oxford and Berne: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 74

²⁰⁵ Levitas, 22-3.

²⁰⁶ Marlana Portolano, ‘The Rhetorical Function of Utopia: An Exploration of the Concept of Utopia in Rhetorical Theory’, *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 23, No.1 (2012), pp. 113-141, p. 114.

is wrong with the world as it is' but seeks to remedy perceived flaws by means of radical reform rather than incremental improvement.²⁰⁷ De Valera was at the forefront in securing the implementation of a mechanism that would secure such radical reform, in the form of a new constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*. The constitution was designed to embody conservative Roman Catholic principles of governance and social policy and was directly inspired by papal doctrine.

A common currency links both More's *Utopia* and De Valera's puritan agenda: a strong religious ideology and the presentation of a political and legal architecture designed to ensure the implementation and maintenance of a stipulated set of social standards. McGahern's work can be said to act as a prism through which the effects of such an agenda are refracted allowing closer inspection of the end product.

Another happenstantial point of convergence between De Valera's Ireland (and its projection into the fictive world of John McGahern) and More's *Utopia* is the manner of the administrative organisation of the wider community. The Irish state was and remains comprised of twenty-six counties including the county of the capital, Dublin, the latter of which share the same name. These counties are grouped into four provinces. Likewise, Antonis Balasopoulos notes how Amaurot stands as the capital of More's ideal state and is itself subdivided into four equal districts that are eventually seen to comprise twenty-five equally-sized quarters. Inhabitants are governed primarily by a micro-state household, with "the oldest of every household" as the ruler, with the chain of command running from husband to wives, parents to children and elders to young.²⁰⁸ The central and fundamental role afforded to the Roman Catholic Church and the family in De Valera's extensive new model constitution for Ireland, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, promulgated in July 1937, codified and gave a direct legal basis for a conservative system of patriarchal authority that also echoed the prevailing values in More's *Utopia*. In this respect, it would be foolhardy to deny its intent to create an ideal society in a manner that could be described as having been conceived as part of 'a total social environment.' Therefore, it can be seen that this utopian approach is

²⁰⁷ Tom Moylan, 'To Stand with Dreamers: On the Use Value of Utopia', *The Irish Review*, No. 34 (Spring, 2006), pp. 1-19 (Cork: Cork University Press), p.4

²⁰⁸ Antonis Balasopoulos, 'Utopiae Insulae Figura: Utopian Insularity and the Politics of Form', *Transtext(e)s Transcultures: Journal of Global Cultural Studies*, pp. 22-38.

‘distinguished by its approach to the collective problem and its vision of a total perfect, ordered environment’.²⁰⁹ An approach of this nature may be found in conjunction with what is referred to as utopian rhetoric that is utilised through symbolic communication with the specific objective of shifting the current condition of human affairs toward a position whereby current circumstances coincide with the imagined, idealised state of affairs that have been the object of the utopian enterprise employed to bring about these changes. This utopia is then said to be one shared by the community, or one invented by the speaker or a combination of the two.²¹⁰ A close analysis of the public utterances and political philosophy appropriated by Eamon De Valera particularly in the period leading up to and in the times after the ratification of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* yields credible evidence of the fact that, to a certain extent, he relied upon his own personal interpretation of historical events intertwined with mythological imagery to create and sustain utopian designs on the evolution of the Irish state.

It is in the fictive world of John McGahern that readers are given a glimpse into the practical effects of utopian projections onto political institutions and public life. What may be termed ‘McGahern’s World’ is that which comprises the stifling cultural conditions under which fictitious characters labour under excessively conservative cultural values that permits little respite for those who cannot wholeheartedly commit themselves to living within the parameters of established norms. These stringent conditions are primarily inspired and mandated by the constitutional regime in force that permeates all aspects of McGahern’s world are comparable with what Lyman Tower Sargent has noted in respect of a substantial body of utopias, but not all, which are concerned with key elements of life such as ‘... families, the workplace, recreation, and all other aspects of life as well as with economic, politics and religion’.²¹¹ Indeed, in making the family a pillar of society as per Article 41.1.1 of the Irish Constitution the state is obliged to recognise the family as a ‘...fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.’ Under the hierarchy of power espoused by Catholic

²⁰⁹ Levitas, 188

²¹⁰ Portolano, 115-6.

²¹¹ Lyman Tower Sargent, ‘Five Hundred Years of Thomas More’s Utopia and Utopianism’, *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2016), pp. 184-192, p.188.

doctrine, it is the man of the house that heads the family and yields hegemonic authority. This was the reality in McGahern's world, a decline which becomes evident in his last two novels, *Amongst Women* (1990) and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002).

The Irish context bears close resemblance to the goal of the utopian mode identified by J.C. Davis which is noteworthy for "its pursuit of legal, institutional, bureaucratic and educational means of producing a harmonious society".²¹² Moreover, an examination of the Preamble of Irish Constitution reveals a clear desire to find that harmony:

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom
Is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all
actions of both men and States must be referred,

We, the people of Éire,
Humbly acknowledge all our obligations to our
Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers
Through centuries of trial,

(...) And seeking to promote the common good,
with due observance of Prudence, Justice and Charity, so
that the dignity and freedom of the individual may be
assured, true social order attained, the unity of our
country restored, and concord established with other
nations,

Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this
Constitution.²¹³

Under such circumstances, it is the rule of law that imposes the kind of utopia sought for the desired form of ideal society.²¹⁴ Debate in Dáil Éireann in the period

²¹² J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 371.

²¹³ This paragraph reproduces the lineation exactly as it appears in *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

prior to the holding of the referendum on the final adoption of the constitution ensured that the public became more aware of the issues under consideration. Such was the concentration and focus given to the matter in parliamentary proceedings that it had the effect of over-shadowing other events in a manner that arguably made its own importance seem paramount. So, in a binary choice between approval or non-approval, the only viable option seemed to support the document once put to a ballot. This would seem highly emulative of a situation whereby the utopian initiative challenges the bourgeois mind-set and supplies the means by which imagination can be empowered to envision an alternative climate which Thompson (1977)²¹⁵ argues that makes it possible to see and consider particular choices or even a situation where it imposes itself as a necessity of its own. Such was the prestige attached to the near-mythical De Valera it was possible for him to present his model constitution as something closely-resembling an instrument that would unlock a utopian state of being for the Irish nation. In taking this course of action De Valera and his allies built upon what some commentators have referred to as the ‘genuine justification that is based on the lived experience of man in society’ to ensure that his utopian proposal would resonate with those whose consent would ensure its adoption and survival.²¹⁶

It was believed in so taking that course of it would be possible to achieve previously impossible goals such as full national sovereignty, unrestricted access to international diplomacy and an officially sanctioned state-sponsored faith for the people: Catholicism. It was the faith that provides the binding force that legitimised the ethos and operation of much of the doctrine that inspired that administration of the Irish state and characterised its jurisprudence. Since this then became the agreed model for governing the Irish state, the legal instruments employed thereafter, including the pre-existing Censorship legislation, the cultural environment that took hold thereafter

²¹⁴ See Shulamit Almog, “Dystopian Narratives and Legal Imagination: Tales of Noir Cities and Dark Laws”, in *Law and the Utopian Imagination* (Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, Martha Merrill Umphrey (eds) (Stanford: Stanford Law Books/Stanford University Press, 2014), p.155; Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent (eds) *The Utopia Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 1

²¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, ‘Postscript: 1976’, in *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. (London: Merlin, 1977), pp. 798-99.

²¹⁶ Keith Taylor and Barbara Goodwin, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Ralahine Utopian Studies Series) (Oxford and Berne: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 16

closely parallels what Robert Nozick in his *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1999) referred to as design devices applied to ensure faithful respect of the desired defining parameters.²¹⁷ This made deviation from agreed norms very challenging as the characters in McGahern's early novels (i.e. *The Dark*, *The Barracks*) are seen to experience. Characters in these novels are castigated for desires that fall outside accepted values that are strictly enforced by patriarchal authority in the home and by clerical prestige beyond the immediate environs of private dwellings in the public domain. These characters also live under the shadow of the above mention factor of censorship which provided direct support to a conservative regime eager to remove temptations from those members of the community with more liberal tastes and strong motivation to seek alternative ways of life and the cultural practices and cultural goods necessary to sustain them. A situation of this kind could also disrupt the continuity of an established or progressing system of values and thus necessitates the intervention of the governing classes of a community to ensure that such desires are discouraged and denied. This process has been recognised by Nozick in how a situation may arise where the placement or availability of goods or services could come to be the site of desire of certain people from a particular stratum or segment of the community (or several thereof) which would represent an obstacle that would have the effect of several retarding, if not absolutely frustrating the process of indoctrination, or which would endanger the maintenance of a system where such a process has already been completed. In such an event the intuitive reasoning applied would come to dictate that such wants should be eradicated entirely, notwithstanding the fact that it would completely disrupt the accomplishment of that desire. Therefore, it is believed to be desirable to avoid the occurrence of such situations by means of preventing it ab initio by promoting and executing the total removal of these wants.²¹⁸

However, given the exceedingly complicated character of man, his wishes, hopes, fancies, insights, affections and the depth of the interrelationships that persist between people, the unpredictable complexity in attempting to direct many people's action toward a single, agreed, result, the emergence of a consensus is extremely

²¹⁷ Robert Nozick. *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 313.

²¹⁸ Nozick, 303.

improbable in respect on the ideal depiction of a possible future society. Acknowledging and combating such a dilemma requires the adoption of a set of filter devices to reduce a large set of alternatives to a more manageable and realistic probable setoff realizable alternative schemes. Two key determinants play a vital role in this process itself (i.e. what it is design to exclude) and the particular nature of the kind of alternatives it is required to examine (and how this set of data is compiled). Where a determined designers are in possession of only a limited knowledge this kind of filtering process is ideally suited to their needs since it produces results that fully respect parameters which cannot be breached so as to exclude violations of the desired contours of a desired order.²¹⁹ Under such circumstances it would then stand to reason to consider that the primary Irish utopian enterprise – sovereign home-rule – was transmuted into the implementation of De Valera's *Bunreacht na hÉireann* from 1937 which, from the moment of promulgation conditioned popular desires through controlling the function and operation of political institutions and the character of public policy and private morals. However, the continuation of the established lattice of norms requires the regulation of desires so as to deprive citizens of the intellectual freedom and cultural goods necessary to explore tangential trajectories. To that extent claims that Nozick's assertion that the 'total removal of these wants' stands as a valid strategy encounters difficulties once the desire for an alternative lifestyle outweighs the fear felt by an individual of transgressing current norms. They may well take great risks in order to satisfy such longings and as such come into collision with the power structure erected to limit their desires and consumption. From the perspective of McGahern's fiction it is in the situation outlined above that the writer's characters, particularly in *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*, illuminate the gulf that exists between their own personal experience and the official narrative on accepted norms for personal conduct and cultural practice. It is this disparity between what characters were taught to believe and what they later realise to be a different condition that reveals a deficit in terms of the level of supply of information and cultural goods within the community they reside in. Static values and monolithic institutions thus come to exemplify a state mechanism that stands between

²¹⁹ Nozick, 313-14.

individual liberty and the conservation of tradition. It is arguable then that this process of conversion from one state of being or life-philosophy to another contrasting with previous experience can be experienced by characters left with little choice due to the circumstances under which they find themselves. In this way what began as a utopian project becomes a darkened dream that displays many of the features and hegemonic authority proper to a dystopian narrative.

Just as it is challenging to come to a consensus in a community as to the optimum parameters and nature of what would constitute an ideal utopian form, it is also challenging to find universal agreement that utopian social engineering is inherently positive and necessary. Since there is no universal agreement on what certain ideals represent, disagreement inevitably follows once certain terms begin to become crystallised or experience in practical reality and in their application. For some utopian designs can represent hope and salvation, for others it represents an unwanted intrusion into their lives and living conditions and may actually represent something sinister in their view. It at this point of divergence that what may be described as a dystopia begins to emerge or indeed its existence becomes apparent.

As Goodwin and Taylor (2009) aptly state: ‘The intimate relationship of utopia to ideals which are themselves debatable poses problems from the start of the application of the term. One man’s Paradise is another’s inferno.’²²⁰ Where one person or group might regard state intervention as necessary and welcome, others often regard such actions imprudent and hegemonic. Well-intentioned intervention can result in something entirely different that may end up resembling something disquieting and harmful. Recognising such a possibility Claeys remarks²²¹ “...the desire to create a much improved society in which human behaviour was dramatically superior to the norm implies an intrinsic drift towards punitive methods of controlling behaviour which inexorably results in some form of police state.”

Since utopias are concerned with only their own strict goals one would find it difficult to differ from the assertion made by Katarzyna Bartoszyska that recognises:

²²⁰ Taylor and Goodwin, 6.

²²¹ Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 108.

“...Utopias, by virtue of being “perfect,” are singular entities that struggle to accommodate pluralism’.²²² From just such a perspective it would seem inevitable that conflict will arise when any singular concentration of discord emerges against established norms within the utopian community and thus provokes the emergence of a deeply claustrophobic existence for citizens in discord with the system. This system could well be regarded as having all the trappings of cultural nationalism but with revolutionary elements still prevalent in certain pockets of society that manifested themselves on occasion. With the passage of time these militant elements became ever more isolated and sporadic, thus leaving legitimacy accrue to more peaceful narratives led by the ruling political class in Ireland in close alignment with the doctrine espoused by the Catholic clergy. These in turn make their influence felt through reverberations in McGahern’s fiction.

Indeed, in accordance with the central thrust of the present author’s argument, fiction has a central and crucial role to play in the mapping of the development of utopian thinking, both in its well-regarded and criticised deleterious forms. Where utopia becomes dysfunctional and injurious it can be referred to as a dystopia, which Fátima Vieira (2010) explains, ‘Literary dystopia utilizes the narrative devices of literary utopia, incorporating into its logic the principles of euchronia (i.e. imagining what the same place – the place where the utopist lives – will be like in another time – the future), but predicts that things will turn out badly; it is thus essentially pessimistic in its presentation of projective images’. Further defining dystopia in terms of two key ideas, Vieira (2010) asserts that dystopian discourse has come to be defined in terms of its association with the notion of totalitarianism and scientific and technological progress, which have been corrupted into becoming tools that play a central part in the erection of dictatorships.²²³ Correspondingly, Gregory Claeys (2010) notes how the terms ‘dystopia’ and ‘anti-utopia’ are used interchangeably in contrast to that of utopia or ‘eutopia’ (good place), to characterise the nature of society that is suffering from the effects of negative social and political changes. The term has also been applied to

²²² Katarzyna Bartoszyska, ‘Persuasive Ironies: Utopian Readings of Swift and Krasicki’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4, (2013), pp. 618-642, p. 619

²²³ Fátima Vieira, ‘The concept of utopia’ in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 16-18.

satirical writings with utopian aspirations intent on highlighting their myths, or take on the role of serving to demonstrate, what B. F. Skinner has warned about in respect of ‘ways of life we must be sure to avoid – in the unlikely event that we can agree on particulars...’.²²⁴ Indeed, such warnings have been issued from earlier times with one particularly striking statement being made in the year that the Second World War ended where Karl Popper in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies* issues a stinging rebuke of attempts to advance the creation of utopian social architecture, ‘Even with the best intentions of making heaven on earth (utopianism) only succeeds in making it a hell – a hell which man alone prepares for his fellow-men’.²²⁵

As Lyman Tower Sargent (2016) adeptly observes, most dystopian texts and utopian satires are inherently designed to alert readers to the fact that something is gravely wrong. These kinds of texts may, and often do this either by projection of the current situation into an even more degenerate future to draw attention to what is perceived to be maladjusted. Hence, authors writing in such contexts take it upon themselves to identify problems in the present (their own moment) and suggest an alternative, or at a minimum they identify situations that necessity remedying without advancing a solution, instead this need is referred to by implication. The dystopia is then, in many instances, a warning that this will happen if the current course remains the one to be followed into the future and if that behaviour continues unchanged serious problems will arise. But the implication also extends to the fact that change is possible since a dysfunctional situation has been noticed and may be changed.²²⁶ Once the situation has been presented it is the fate of a specific subject or character that becomes the principal focus of a text that seeks to portray what may be termed a dystopian situation through reflecting both the present and the future believed to be that which is to come and how it has affected the fate of individuals to date.²²⁷

It is precisely this that can be found in the early novels of John McGahern’s literary corpus. Through the suppression primarily of sexual desire and personal

²²⁴ Claeys, 107.

²²⁵ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945), p. 168

²²⁶ Tower Sargent (2016), p. 190.

²²⁷ *Law and the Utopian Imagination* (Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, Martha Merrill Umphrey (eds) (Stanford: Stanford Law Books/Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 156

ambition, McGahern's characters suffer considerable personal distress as they attempt to realise more ambitious goals than can possibly be enjoyed under highly restrictive social and cultural conditions specifically designed to penalise conduct with the objective of deviating from expected standards.

Prevailing schemes of societal organisation depend on continuous patterns of behaviour determined by social and political norms and the maintenance of social and cultural standards. Educational systems and cultural regulators play a vitally important role in determining the values appropriated by members of society and in turn these values largely determined the patterns of conduct that characterise the organisation of communities. In this sense, the concept of 'habitus' is a highly instructive and useful concept that is of particular operative value for my object in this thesis. The function fulfilled by the 'habitus' was described by Bourdieu as:

...is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification (*principam divisionis*) of these practices. It is the relationship between the two capacities which define the habits, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted.²²⁸

Habitus is necessarily found in different forms just as the circumstances in which it is found are varied and the systems in which it persists give rise to their own generative systems that are re-propagated by acts of transfer to an almost limitless number of practices, whose differences are so structured as to represent and duplicate the systematic constellation of characteristics read by agents in possession of the necessary interpretive filters and ability to discern, interpret and evaluate their most apposite qualities that ultimately serve as principles toward pursuing a particular kind of lifestyle.²²⁹ Indeed, the internalization of the system promoted by a particular kind of habitus further sponsors the division of classes as according to a specific perception of the social world held to be valid by the value system inherent in the habitus. The principal net effect of such a reality is the fact that the habitus inevitable transmits a

²²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010/1984), pp. 165-66.

²²⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 165-66.

structure of systems inserted within the lived experience of an individual within a particular location within that structure that have been established as the elementary and governing principles of that part of the social stratum. In this way the habitus acts as a sophisticated regulator as between nuances and contrasts that arise between varying conditions and as such classifies them as appropriate according to the differences found between classified and classifying practices, that are themselves generated at the interface between other habitus, thereafter deploying an objective perceptibility so as to present these distinctions as a natural occurrence.²³⁰

Bourdieu (1973)²³¹ held that the habitus possessed by a person develops in tandem with the level of cultural capital a person has. For instance, a member of the lower social classes realises that people from that stratum are usually in possession of a low level of cultural capital and that in the absence of higher levels of this capital, educational attainment and success is unlikely to be a realistic possibility for such people. Accordingly, students originating in lower social classes are inclined to self-filter themselves away from higher education as a result of their perspective of what is considered to be a viable life prospect or otherwise. However, while it is rare and unusual, it is also possible that highly motivated and capable students from modest backgrounds may come to a position whereby they regard the accumulation of cultural capital as a means of surpassing others at the same level of the social stratum.

In their important book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron²³² assert that the cultural arbitrary is imposed by means of reliance on pedagogical authority, there is an expectation and a necessity attached to the pedagogic agency to fulfil its central role in facilitating the reproduction of the fundamental principles of operation of that cultural arbitrary. The agenda of such a practice is determined and propagated by dominant groups or classes in a society, the said agenda is then delivered via delegated authority so as to ensure circulation on a

²³⁰ See Bourdieu, 167.

²³¹ A careful study of the original text: Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." pp. 71-112 in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change: Papers in the Sociology of Education* (Richard Brown, ed.) (London: Tavistock, 1973), is indispensable to understanding the import of the perspective of the argument employed here.

²³² Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (trans. Richard Nice) (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), p.31.

wide-scale throughout the community at large. Authority to engage in large-scale inculcation is entrusted to the educational process that involves pedagogical work, a practice intended to act as a catalyst ensuring long term instruction in order to secure manifest and robust training that is capable of altering the habitus in such a way as to achieve the internalization of the principles set out by the cultural arbitrary causing the perpetuation of such principles and ideals beyond the duration of the said training. Enduring change in the habitus can only be assured by long term action designed to impose and inculcate an arbitrary, an end that is best achieved by means of the appropriate utilisation of pedagogic work. Characterising the differences between the latter and pedagogical action are those isolated and rare incidences of symbolic violence.

Pedagogical action confers its effects over a very considerable length of time, such a chronological interval is necessary for it to be effective in its assigned purpose beginning in the early years in the life of a person. This purpose is taken to be the incubator and protector of the values comprising recognised tradition that are regulated by an inertia found in educational institutions, whose objective seeks to reproduce themselves involving as little change as possible. In the high-incidence and wide-variety of situations in which this process is successful, the result becomes part of the psyche and concrete practices of training, essentially the habitus, in the reproduction of the culture. Cultural capital is propagated then, in several ways, the most direct and reliable method of which is through pedagogical training.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) are in no doubt as to the strength and utility of such a strategy in terms of its efficiency of conveying information, especially in instances like Arts Faculties where the central concern is the manipulation of words. However, social class is a key determining factor in relation to whether students will experience the same level of efficiency of success of inculcation action. Undeniably, it can be argued that specific levels of efficacy regarding pedagogic work (excluding that performed by the family) is closely related (i.e. a function of) to the distance persisting between the habitus subject to inculcation (i.e. advanced mastery of scholarly language) and the habitus that has been subject to inculcation by the cumulative effects of

previous pedagogical endeavours, as well as that of the family in respect of labours aimed at mastering the mother tongue.²³³

Given that pedagogic work, regardless of whether it is provided by the School, a Church or a Party, results in the provision of individuals who are said to demonstrate whose values have been resiliently and systematically altered by means of a sustained adjustment scheme that permits the endowment of this same lasting, transposable training (i.e. *habitus*), noted for its shared systems of thought, appraisal and action. This is due to the fact that the process of production that is capable of supplying of a sufficient quantity of agents who are themselves in receipt of corresponding training and of equally preserving and assimilative mechanisms owing to the periods of time required to produce a catalytic action designed to bring about transformative action that will take at least as long for the repetitive reproduction of ‘transformed producers’, i.e. those agents who act consistently with the need to perpetuate their own training in others. Therefore, since the educational institution is the solely recognised entity to possess full powers to select and train, it is entrusted with the undertaking of perpetuating and installing sufficiently resilient norms of self-perpetuation. Achieving the latter is dependent upon its ability to engage in a reappraisal of external exigencies, a process that relies on the capability of teachers to realise their role as the most complete end product of the system of productive, who, among other things, are assigned the role of reproducing the system in which they reside.²³⁴

Navigating social life with a high level of cultural capital frequently yields a positive return where the effort is properly structured and is focussed. Additional deployment of other forms of capital such as linguistic capital can produce higher returns in specific interactive situations. Possession of appropriately sophisticated linguistic capital can be a key factor in unlocking social meanings that may otherwise never materialise. *Habitus* also affects speech patterns and conditions discourse as according to its own character found in the individual possessing it. Thus, maximisation of their knowledge and cultural capital moderated by their own *habitus* furnishes the means by which such speakers can control meaning and manipulate the agenda to

²³³ Bourdieu & Passeron, 71-72.

²³⁴ Bourdieu & Passeron, 196-97.

reflect established priorities. Supervision of the discourse in this way acts as a way to infuse the narrative with ideological concerns that merit direct, if subtle attention. An enterprise of this kind seeks to conduct debate and interaction within the parameters of the legitimate language, outside of which discussion is not entertained.²³⁵

Ultimately intelligible understanding of language relies upon an imposition of meaning through accepted structures of interpretation. This is a necessary from time to time so as to correct situations where words mean something although refer to nothing. Thence, exercising formal rigour provides a mask so as to overcome semantic freewheeling. Such words that act as vessels of meaning, but are often devoid of meaning in themselves are often utilised by religious theologies and political theodicies. Taking advantage of this capacity requires the careful composition of language that exceeds the boundaries of intuition and indeed empirical verification to furnish affirmations that respect formal rules but that remain semantically vacuous. Where the agent exercises a technical competence of communication in an deficient manner he may escape debilitating scrutiny by carrying his acts under the guise of ritual, which results in a social competence is performed, that of legitimate speaker. This speaker is bestowed with the right to speak and to do so with sanctioned authority.²³⁶

However, it is not sufficient to simply possess the necessary and recognised linguistic capital bestowing particular capacities of eloquence to deliver a message; the speaker must also be seen to represent sufficient authority in society to enable him to garner attention when he produces any utterance. This authority further extends to acknowledging that speaker's right to be heard in all situations where it is regarded as opportune to affect such a communication. On the other hand, where a speaker or speakers suffer from an acute deficit in respect of being in possession of recognised competence, they become excluded from the social domains in which membership is dependent on the said competence or are forced to accommodate the position of having to remain mute. This capacity to speak, then, is not what is regarded as uncommon but rather what is rare is that capacity to produce utterances that exude the ability to appropriate the legitimate language. Legitimate language draws much on social

²³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 37-39.

²³⁶ Bourdieu, 41-42.

inheritance and gives form to distinction through the transduction of social distinctions into symbolic logic derived from differential deviations. Where a speaker can appropriate, with official sanction, approved (i.e. authorized) forms of linguistic communication, there may be situations in which a particular narrative is designed to specifically preclude forays into undesired territory. A narrative that is designed to limit explorations of specific issues can be regarded as being intended to delineate sanctioned parameters of discussion and essentially represents attempts to impose form and even deny form to certain concerns.²³⁷

Those agents in the social world who seek to impose a certain legitimate vision, exercise their ability to do so commensurate with the amount of power they have obtained in proportion to the level of symbolic capital, i.e. how much a group or a community bestows recognition and thus possession on by acknowledging that individual's standing in the social hierarchy. Underlining the authority granted to such an agent is that of the power of discourse known as *a percipi*, a being-known, that thus facilitates the imposition of a specific construction of understanding of the social world, or permits the establishment of a consensus in relation to the meaning of the social world on particular grounds that allow it to be imposed officially, that is in a manner that would be carried out in the public eye and on the public's behalf.²³⁸

Authority is attributed to language from outside itself, a datum well exemplified by the *skeptron*, in Homer, where the orator is given possession of the same before he speaks and cannot speak with any authority until he yields this tool. In this way it can be seen that language is representative of authority and is not an authority of itself. However, it can manifest and symbolise the presence of authority. Moreover, there is a rhetoric that permeates all discourses of institution, i.e. an official manner of speech appropriated by authorised speakers on behalf of an institution, where the nature of the power delegated by the institution coincides exactly with the limits of authority that characterises the power exercised by the official delegate of that power. Notable stylistic features of the discourse adopted by priests, teachers and all institutions in general, in common with routinization, stereotyping and neutralization all owe their

²³⁷ Bourdieu, 55

²³⁸ Bourdieu, 105-106

nature to the position in the competitive field from which the authorised delegate originates.²³⁹

It is almost invariably the case, with one exception in McGahern's last novel, that the authorised speaker is usually a patriarchal figure, usually the father in the family. However, this figure quickly yields to clerical authority immediately on coming into contact with a representative of ecclesiastical authority. With the passage of time it is possible to observe the movement of the *skeptron* to other characters that do not represent patriarchal authority as a notable fissure develops between the original location of concentration of cultural capital and its eventual yielding by speakers that do not readily identify with the traditional values of the founders of the cultural context in which they operate. There may be a number of factors that may account for the existence of this change, but it is arguable that principal among them is a context which Thomas S. Kuhn (1962) referred to as a *paradigm shift*.²⁴⁰ Under such circumstances it is possible for other speakers to participate in cultural activities that have the effect of augmenting the levels of cultural capital available for consumption and the means by which it can be maximised. In this way different groups reside in a position within a culture which permits them to accumulate cultural capital and to partake in the process that determines what values comprise such capital.

Acceptable utterances that take the form of agreeable statements in respect of the hierarchical values are thus an integral part of symbolic reproduction, manifested in its many forms, which is governed by the depth and force of censorship imposed upon it and additionally, which permits the subsistence of competencies that work towards the satisfaction of this interest without breaching the outer parameters of the imposed constraints. The dominant class provides the territory on which conflicts are played out in respect of principles of hierarchization. Fractions of the social strata emanating from the dominant class enforce their right of legitimacy for dominance by means of employing such practices through their own symbolic reproduction and perpetuation of conservative ideologues. Moreover, to ensure effective implementation of this ideological agenda concerted efforts are made to reproduce situations that perpetuate a

²³⁹ Op. Cit.: 109

²⁴⁰ My emphasis.

system that encourages respect for what is deemed the legitimate ideology so that it is misrecognised as being in the interests of those who are expected to abide by it. This promotional enterprise is purposely designed to create a direct relationship between ideological production and social class fields so as to ensure the survival and prosperity of the preferred ideology of the governing classes.²⁴¹

It is possible then, to discern the difference between ‘Symbolic systems’ in its appropriation by a group or alternatively by a body of specialists engaged in autonomous (although limited) of production and propagation. Such is the importance of this observation that Bourdieu points out that:

The history of the transformation of myth into religion (ideology) cannot be separated from the history of the constitution of a body of specialized producers of religious rites and discourse, i.e. from the development of the division of religious labour, which is itself a dimension of the development of the division of social labour, and thus of the division into classes. This religious division leads, among other consequences, to members of the laity being dispossessed of the instruments of symbolic production.²⁴²

In light of this pertinent observation, it is noteworthy to recall that the most specific functions of ideologies are directly attributable to the social conditions in which they were formed. Ideologies may also be regarded as being formed in such a way as to function in a doubly determined fashion whose characteristics can be traced back to the interests of the social strata they from which they originate. Furthermore, since products proffered by the political field can be regarded as valid instruments of characterising the social worlds, however, the level of dissemination and discussion of opinions of this information depends extensively on the working order of appropriate instrumentation. Dominant classes also erect morphological obstacles in the way of citizens establishing a more representative and direct form of governance, efforts which are supplemented by strategies causing economic and cultural dispossession. Achieving this objective necessitates depriving lower classes of the appropriate means to acquire the instruments to participate in politics such as arranging for severe limitations on the available amount

²⁴¹ Bourdieu, 168.

²⁴² Bourdieu, 168-69.

of leisure time and cultural capital.²⁴³ This is instantiated in McGahern's world, particularly the conditions under which characters live in *The Barracks*, *The Dark* and to a lesser extent, *The Leavetaking* demonstrate that eloquence constitutes a tool that is beyond the reach of those who are forced to devote most of their energies and efforts in pursuance of dignified living conditions and basic commodities such as food, clothing and household supplies. Whilst engaged in day to day activities to sustain themselves and their families, citizens are usually unable to devote any sustained attention to seeking to redress a deficit in their own representation. Nor are they in a position to seek to appropriate skills that would allow them to partake or even challenge the governing narrative which determines the philosophy that regulates the cultural environment in which they reside. However, there is always the possibility that once citizens acquire opportunities to partake in further education when cultural conditions permit, they may be able to partake in the formulation of future narratives that will come to be applied to the wider community in the future.

Class interests remain an ingrained feature of the cultural framework under which characters in McGahern's world must contend with on a daily basis. An ever present tension is visible in relation to characters whose conduct is subject to supervision and oversight by patriarchal authority such as the father figure in the home and the parish priest exercising his power in the school context. While personal respect and courtesy continues to be displayed toward these representations of authority, their hegemonic authority is gradually weakened with the maturation and changing circumstances of the characters in McGahern's later fiction in the form of *Amongst Women* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. Whereas in *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, there is palpable fear of the patriarch felt by the protagonist, there is a significant outgrowing and even inheritance of this authority in *Amongst Women*. Similarly, there is publicly expressed discord with the previously seen duty to observance of religious behaviour such as mass attendance in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. In the latter the change in behaviour is so pronounced that it is even possible for characters to openly admit their own hypocrisy in relation to the Catholic faith that finds expression

²⁴³ Bourdieu (2007), p. 172.

in light-hearted conversation about the matter which would previously have been both unthinkable and intolerable.

With the onset of these changed cultural conditions it becomes possible to also publicly acknowledge the abuse of power and the wrongdoings that resulted from such abuse, which was also previously unimaginable. It is the view of the present author that these conditions came into existence due to a paradigm shift which can be traced back to two key moments in modern Irish history; the *Investment in Education Report* in October 1965 and the reception given by the public in Ireland to the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*²⁴⁴ in 1968. Expansion in education obviously required greater expenditure and this was found in higher exchequer returns in the 1960s after the five-year *Program for Economic Expansion*, otherwise known as the Whitaker Report was implemented from 1958. With the reformulation of industrial policy on foot of this new policy instrument industrial expansion recorded average rates of 8.5% in 1961 and 1962, while in 1963 the Irish economy expanded at the lower, but still notable rate of 5 per cent.²⁴⁵

Greater levels of investment in education permitted the accommodation of a significant expansion in the levels of students being admitted to secondary and higher education. In the case of the former student numbers between 1966 and 1969 increased from 104,000 to 144,000 or, in other words, it increased as much as it had in the previous decade in just three years.²⁴⁶ With so many more students attending formal education institutions, it would be difficult to deny that the rate and scale of the production and dissemination of cultural capital also saw a corresponding expansion during that period and thereafter. In a cultural environment that saw the liberalisation of censorship legislation²⁴⁷, greater levels of economic investment and growth and an

²⁴⁴ For further information on this situation and the effect it had on the Irish Psyche see Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2012), p. 364.

²⁴⁵ Kenneth L. Campbell, *Ireland's History: Prehistory to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 290.

²⁴⁶ This statistic is cited in the historical context section of this thesis. Figures are taken from J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985, Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 362-3. Such information is presented again here for the sake of clarity in respect of the nature of the argument presented.

²⁴⁷ See Val Nolan (2011): 'If it was just th'oul book...': a history of the McGahern banning controversy,' *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 261-279, p. 274.

expanding chasm between the contours of the conscience of private citizens and the public morals espoused by the Catholic Church, the validity of more traditional constructs on the nature of Irish society began to deteriorate.

The present writer would argue that with the presence of much greater levels of cultural capital in the population where younger members of society took part in the process of acquiring and propagating cultural capital, the official narrative on accepted doctrine and the differences that existed between it and the views held by this younger generation acted as a catalyst to bring about a Kuhnian paradigm shift.²⁴⁸ Older narratives on the nature of the current (cultural) condition were thus regarded as being insufficient to account for the changes occurring and the theoretical plane on which the younger generation interpreted such events. Given the above-mentioned chasm, a polarisation of views appears to be predicated by what Kuhn described what a 'crisis' in the functionality of the existing system where the crisis '...simultaneously loosens the stereotypes and provides the incremental data necessary for a fundamental paradigm shift.'²⁴⁹ Within this system a 'paradigm' is understood as²⁵⁰ meaning 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of given community...'²⁵¹

The mere presence of a paradigm does not mean there is universal agreement as to its complete interpretation and rationalization of it, but it still remains useful for guiding further inquiry in a chosen field.²⁵² Furthermore, existing paradigms can have an inertial effect on the advancement of inquiry in a community and this can arguably perpetuate malaise to the detriment of cultural vivacity.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Thomas S. Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996/1962).

²⁴⁹ Kuhn, 89.

²⁵⁰ This definition was distilled after further reflection by Kuhn in later years and took the above cited form in 1974 with the publication of his "Second Thoughts on Paradigms." This text also asserted that another facet the term paradigm referred to 'one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science...' as per Kuhn (1996: 174-75).

²⁵¹ Kuhn, 174-75.

²⁵² Ibid: 44.

²⁵³ From a scientific perspective, the effects of which manifest themselves through economic practice and thus 'ripple' throughout the cultural system are noted by Kuhn in this respect as they '...restrict the phenomenological field accessible for scientific investigation at any given time' (Kuhn, 1996: 60-61). A similar argument is put forward by K. Brad Wray (2011) in his *Kuhn's Evolutionary Social Epistemology*

While the primary thrust of Kuhn's work relates to the work of scientists, its impact and value in the social and cultural spheres can neither be ignored nor denied. In this respect K. Brad Wray (2011) recognises that the theory change accounted for in Kuhn's work is a form of social change. For a community to come to a position whereby it is prepared to abandon one way of thinking and embrace another,²⁵⁴ the community itself must pass through a series of changes in social structure before this change can come about. In order for this to occur, a new tradition must be constructed and developed over time and this process requires a significant interval to materialise. Accounting for the nature of this process necessitates understanding how existing consensus is undermined and a new one established in its place.²⁵⁵

One could also argue that one of McGahern's most important contributions through his fiction was reflecting the discontent that began to arise between different generations in respect of their differential positions on what constituted appropriate moral boundaries and cultural standards. His early novels serve to expose the growing distance between personal ambitions and fossilised institutional values. A gradual change is discernible in McGahern's work, where the nature of cultural capital in *The Barracks* (1963), for example, stands in contrast with certain values exhibited by the protagonist in *The Pornographer* (1979).

In McGahern's work, one particular facet that assists the reader in detecting changing cultural values is the manner in which earlier experiences had by characters are sufficiently evident as to be noticeable in comparison to latter experiences in more recent novels. On occasions when a disparity arises between one character's perspective and the standards established by patriarchal authority, this can constitute a severe challenge to the existing system of values. The very awareness of such a contrast can provide the impetus for the seeds of change. Depending on the degree of difference between these systems, a crisis can arise in the degree of failure in respect of the operation of the existing paradigm. A new paradigm is then required to account for this new cultural context. This is what Kuhn remarks as being '...a necessary precondition

who notes on p. 52 that 'the discovery process is often drawn out because the paradigms and theories one accepts limits one's vision, and can even prevent one from noticing certain phenomena.'

²⁵⁴ One could argue that this is the essence of what becomes the governing paradigm.

²⁵⁵ Wray, 205.

for the emergence of novel theories...’ Although recognition is given to the fact that the existing paradigm is inadequate in its operation, the existence of what are referred to as ‘severe and prolonged anomalies’ means that a search begins for a new paradigm. The key moment in this process results from the comparison of both paradigms, i.e. the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ where they are compared with ‘nature and one another’ before final adoption of the new occurs.²⁵⁶

It is these incongruences between the existing paradigm and its future replacement that have given rise to what Kuhn referred to as the ‘incommensurability of standards.’ Old paradigms give way to new ones and provide much of the vocabulary and apparatus that was found in the old paradigm where older terms and concepts come to be brought into new relationships with one another.²⁵⁷ Taking the example of Einstein’s general theory of relativity which was subject to heavy criticism by those who held a Euclidean view of the theory. Einstein’s theory proved that space was “curved” and this stood in sharp contrast to a representation of space that was flat, homogeneous, isotropic. In order to make the transition to the norms of Einstein’s universe, new strands relating to space, time, matter and force had to be shifted and laid down once more on the whole. Only then could a broader understanding come to be. Similarly, Copernicus’ innovation did not solely concern moving the earth, but rather the establishment of a new way of regarding the challenges faced by the disciplines²⁵⁸ of physics and astronomy.²⁵⁹

Two different groups of scientists²⁶⁰ practice in different worlds, but they each see different things despite the fact that they focus their attention on the same target. Each looks at the world, which has not changed, but sees different things from the other and the relationships between them also appear differently to each observer. It is under similar circumstances that a law which cannot hope to be explained to one group of

²⁵⁶ Kuhn, 77.

²⁵⁷ This stands to reason if one accepts the logic of the notion of ‘how a scientific community functions as a producer and validator of sound knowledge’ a claim put forward by Kuhn in his *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago University Press, 1977), p. 298.

²⁵⁸ Or for that matter, any other field of inquiry that necessitates bold innovation to advance understanding in order to account for anomalous phenomena as viewed according to existing paradigms.

²⁵⁹ Kuhn, 148-9.

²⁶⁰ Or who may otherwise be a set of disciplined observers from another discipline or field of study.

scientists (or thinkers) may seem naturally intuitive to another group. By the same measure then, before one group can realistically expect to be able to communicate their knowledge with another group, they must first undergo the experience that leads them to a conversion in thinking that has been referred to as a paradigm shift.²⁶¹

Despite the availability of conceptual tools which facilitate bringing the gap between one paradigm and its successor, much resistance remains in systems where inertia forms a key part of the governing narrative. In many cases, it is only with the passage of time and increasing participation of younger generations that new paradigms come to be valued and applied as appropriate to evolved circumstances. Two great minds in the history of science attest to their awareness of this reality. Charles Darwin, in a passage at the end of his seminal *Origin of Species*, noted:

Although I am fully convinced of the truth of the views given in this volume..., I by no means expect to convince experienced naturalists whose minds are stocked with a multitude of facts viewed, during a long course of years, from a point of view directly opposite to mine...(B)ut I look with confidence to the future, - to young and rising naturalists, who will be able to view both sides of the question with impartiality.²⁶²

Emulating his sentiments in later years, Max Planck, in surveying his own career in his *Scientific Autobiography*, remarked that, “a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”²⁶³

As noted above, the passage of time provides the space and greater numbers of willing adherents of new paradigms, but this process cannot occur without the aid of some external catalyst or driving agent. It is arguable that in the case of the characters in McGahern’s world, the notable significant increase in the incidence and magnitude of the creation and propagation of cultural capital through a heavily expanded school-going population and the structured views that they leave the pedagogical system with

²⁶¹ Kuhn, 150.

²⁶² Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (authorized 6th English ed., New York, 1889), II, pp. 295-96.

²⁶³ Max Planck, *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers*, (trans. F. Gaynor) (New York, 1949), pp. 33-34.

provides new opportunities for the birth of new paradigms. The locus of the governing narrative thus begins to move away from traditional recognised sites of hegemonic discourse such as the clergy, the school teacher and the power structures they serve toward other sites of discourse that supply competing visions of the cultural context that gives rise to contours of their narrative. These younger generations come to form a recognisably different view of their circumstances and begin to assert the means to engage in the reformulation of the narrative discourses that serve to account for their own experiences and desires contrasted with older generations. Cultural capital thus changes character with the education and engagement of a younger generation. They in turn seek to formulate their own paradigms that can come to manifest themselves in the imagination of the writer in the behaviour and desires of fictional characters such as the protagonists in *The Dark*, *The Leavetaking* and *The Pornographer*. Bearing witness through this fiction thus provides a looking glass through which readers can become aware of possible alternative narratives that may reflect their own experiences and empower their imaginations to identify and challenge limiting contexts and mind-sets. It is these alternative ways of thinking, of exploring possibility that make it possible to construct alternative narratives of the human condition.

Part II. John McGahern – A Critical Reading

2.1 Arrested Expression: *The Barracks*

This chapter is concerned with examining John McGahern's first published novel, *The Barracks* (1963). As previously detailed in the introductory chapter 'McGahern's life, work and critical standing', this work was to be followed in the four decades thereafter by another five novels. *The Barracks* provides an unmistakable insight into the effects on the author's memory and imagination of the experience of growing up in Ireland in a conservative era, an experience that paralleled the lives of large swathes of the community from the immediate context to the national territory as a whole. It must be noted from the outset that this text shall have a much more in-depth analysis than the text that follow it as it is McGahern's first novel and serves to ground his entire style and artistic concern for quite some time.

The text takes as its setting a Garda²⁶⁴ Barracks where the authoritarian patriarch of the family that reside in it, Sergeant Reagan, lives with his three children and his second wife (having been widowed) and step-mother to the children, the terminally-ill Elizabeth. A great deal of the action in the novel takes place within this building and its immediate environs, particularly the day room of the barracks itself. Much of what is portrayed as occurring in the character's lives stands witness to the cultural forces that have shaped and governed Irish society and individuals and their families that comprise it. An analysis of *The Barracks* would not be complete without the presence of an examination of the narrative style adopted therein. In such terms, critics have noted the traditional narrative style of *The Barracks* where the anonymous narrator is presented in the third-person. As an omniscient narrator it is possible for it to move unencumbered through time and space. Early in the text this situation becomes apparent where the narrator shifts from Elizabeth's point of view to that of her stepchildren (*B*, 10-13) and then to Reagan (*B*, 18-19). It is this first chapter that provides the reader with a fleeting window into the minds of minor characters such as Garda Casey (*B*, 23) and Brennan (*B*, 30). At one point the narrator shines a light on the contours of the mind of a

²⁶⁴ The official police force of the Republic of Ireland, An Garda Síochána, in the Irish language (as *Gaeilge*), literally 'Guardians of the Peace'. Habitually referred to as simply 'the Guards' in quotidian discourse. See: Gregory Allen. *The Garda Síochána - Policing Independent Ireland, 1922-82* (Gill & MacMillan, Dublin, 1999)

character revealed only through a memory recollected by Elizabeth: that of her former lover Halliday. This is an exercise designed to illuminate information that would not be otherwise available (*B*, 93). As the text progresses into chapter 7 the narrator is seen to take leave of the Reegans entirely as it pursues Reegan's colleagues Garda Mullins and Garda Casey as they seek relief from the melancholy in the barracks in a quiet public house where the atmosphere is amenable to more fluid conversation on trivial matters.²⁶⁵

However, on the whole, it can be seen that the narrator is primarily occupied with adopting the perspective of mainly two characters in the text: that of Reegan and more deeply still, that of Elizabeth. It is the perspective of the latter that come to dominate the text overall. It is her fears, epiphanies, perceptions and intra-personal struggles that supply much of the material that comprises the narrative. For instance, a clear and early representation of the novel's narrative technique comes in the form of four paragraphs found in chapter one that begins with "Elizabeth drifted from between them" (*B*, 20-21). The narrator directs the reader's attention to Elizabeth as she tends to the fire while she puts a kettle to boil wherein she feels ill and her mind is penetrated by her husband's aggressive tone as he addresses the other guards in the building. She is also seen to acknowledge the state of the scullery table and the sound of the falling rain on the roof above her. At such junctures the narration mutates into free indirect speech to match the thought being represented: "sometimes it seemed as if it might never cease, the way it beat down in these western nights" (*B*, 20) which brings the reader into close proximity with Elizabeth's own consciousness. Thereafter, more perceptions follow in pursuit of a tranquil understanding of her circumstances and trace her concerns relating to the future, which take on the form of free indirect discourse: 'Were their day not sufficiently difficult to keep in order as they were without calling disaster? Quirke had the heavy hand of authority behind him and Reegan could only ruin himself. And if he got the sack? What then? What then?' (*B*, 20-21).

When Elizabeth is taken ill and later spends time in hospital recovering from an operation, another example of this narrative technique is deployed as readers observe

²⁶⁵ See David Malcolm, *Understanding John McGahern* (Columbia, South Carolina: University Carolina Preses, 2007), p. 12.

the mental process she works through as she attempts to regulate the discomfort her pain brings (*B*, 122).

Reegan's consciousness also features quite conspicuously throughout *The Barracks*. It is impossible for the reader to be unaware of and to escape Reegan's views on matters and how he responds to events in his world. Examples of his reactions include his response to sweepstakes advertisement that he hears on the radio (*B*, 32) and his reaction to the news given to him by Elizabeth concerning her illness (*B*, 47). As the novel progresses the reader is given further examples in the narrative of his plans for the future, the strong sentiment he feels in respect of his professional situation and his understanding of Elizabeth's melancholy and suffering (*B*, 67, 99, 109-11). Indeed, once Elizabeth reaches the end of her life-cycle her husband's reaction to her passing is presented in certain terms, leaving the reader in no doubt in relation to the depth of feelings he is dealing with: 'There's nothing to lose! Nothing to lose! You just go out like a light in the end. And what you've done or didn't do doesn't matter a curse then, worse itself into Reegan's bones in the next months (*B*, 226).'

As much as the importance of Elizabeth's experience and sense of awareness are fundamental to *The Barracks*, Reegan's convictions and feelings also carry heavy weight in the text. These two central figures are also the lens through which other more minor characters' views are revealed.²⁶⁶ Indeed, the narrator's type of language is consistent and distinctive since it involves high-frequency use of the passive voice throughout the text. One such example, late in the text after the news of Elizabeth's death has been reported demonstrates the unusually high occurrence of the passive voice:

After the first shock, the incredulity of the death, the women, as at a wedding, took over: the priest and the doctor were sent for, the news broken to Reegan on the bog, the room tidied of its sick litter, a brown habit and whiskey and stout and tobacco and foodstuffs got from the shops at the chapel, the body washed and laid out – the eyes closed with pennies and her brown beads twined through the fingers that were joined on the breast in prayer. Her relatives and the newspapers were notified, and the black mourning diamonds sewn on Reegan's and the children's coats (*B*, 221-22).

²⁶⁶ Malcolm (2007), p. 13.

One also finds that the vocabulary employed by the narrator to be frequently informal and consistent so that, for example, with characters like Elizabeth and Reegan, their utterances are found to be in direct speech. The overall effect is that there is a pervasive informality that contrasts with passages that are occasionally formal, even solemn. Examples of this include when the narrative states that Elizabeth's "tiredness was growing into a fearful apprehension" and that she "was existing far within the recesses of the dead walls (of her body)" (*B*, 57). This can be contrasted with the intermittent contracted forms (e.g. "didn't", "she'd", etc.) reflect the linguistic preferences adopted by the characters.²⁶⁷

A pertinent observation advanced by David Malcolm (2007) is that the heavy prevalence of the passive throughout the text has the effect of depersonalizing actions and the agents responsible for their occurrence by making them irrelevant through anonymity and in so doing shifts the reader's attention away from the individual persona to impersonal processes and forces such as the passing of time, communal activities and rituals.²⁶⁸ From this perspective it could be argued that McGahern's has created a text where extensive space is provided to sustain the contours of pensive activities, routine and ritual that are seen to comprise the principal cultural forces that govern characters temperaments and behaviour. An example of this is when the only departure from daily routines and the homestead and its immediate environs is when Elizabeth's worsening medical condition obliges her to spend time convalescing in a Dublin hospital. This is indicative of the highly stultifying environment and routine that characters are forced to live with which makes it exceedingly difficult for the birth and sustenance of individual desire and imagines in such conditions in rural Ireland. So, it may be said that repeated actions and routines offer a means of countermanding the march of time and thus a way to preserve known social structures that are themselves woven into the strands of cultural values that are birthed and perpetuated by habit-forming and habit-reproducing activities such as schooling, religious practice and the patterns of behaviour that they inspire. These patterns of behaviour comprise what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as the *habitus* that brings about 'transposable dispositions'

²⁶⁷ See Malcolm (2007), p. 15.

²⁶⁸ Malcolm (2007), pp. 15-16.

that result in the appropriation of what Bourdieu referred to as ‘shared systems of thought, appraisal and action.’²⁶⁹ Thus, in the fictive world created by McGahern in *The Barracks*, greater importance is placed on the character of the community and the values that sustain it, rather than the concerns of individuals. An obvious contradiction to this statement is the attention given to Elizabeth’s thoughts and feelings, but it can be seen that her thoughts are highlighted if only to show how they are ignored when shared thus negating any real influence of the individual, particularly women that the patriarchal state and the authoritative Catholic Church so deliberately marginalised.

As Dermot McCarthy (2010) aptly observes, a fundamental part of McGahern’s construction of Elizabeth Reegan’s character is the way she struggles to maintain her sense of dignity and remain as sovereign-pensive, autonomous woman who refuses to capitulate to feelings of despair and societal expectations of pious behaviour that women should display. Thus, from this perspective, *The Barracks* can be seen as ‘an important harbinger of the fragmentation of the Catholic habitus that characterises the last three decades of twentieth century Ireland.’²⁷⁰

A close reading of *The Barracks* reveals unmistakable features of what can be termed ‘McGahern’s world’ – defined by the present author as the socially inhibited, culturally restricted environment within which McGahern’s characters reside where the existence of liberal attitudes is initially impossible, but with the coming of a (Kuhnian) paradigm shift, (Bourdieuian) cultural capital changes in nature thus permitting the propagation of secular values that act as a catalyst for the reform of the Roman Catholic inspired-patriarchal Irish state. Irish society thus incorporates a large swathe of secular features that were previously unacceptable under a previous paradigm. In that world the single-greatest force of influence and power present in character’s lives is that of the Irish Catholic Church. There is much evidence to substantiate claims that the Catholic Church has acquired a considerable mass of cultural capital that, with the official collusion of agents of the Irish state, were successfully propagated throughout Irish society, such as the education in the form of schools and also that of the law

²⁶⁹ A more comprehensive treatment of the habitus and cultural capital is offered in an earlier chapter.

²⁷⁰ Dermot McCarthy, *John McGahern and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 61.

enforcement arm of the executive through its primary law enforcement agency, An Garda Síochana, the police force of the Irish state.

The book is set, for the greater part, in the residential quarters of a Garda Barracks, from which its title is taken, where the Reegan family live. The opening lines of the text provide early evidence of the extensive power and influence that Catholic doctrine has managed to assert in peoples' lives and how this has, for example, manifested itself in the permanent display of religious paraphernalia. These symbols remind those in their shadow of the power they represent and indicate the depth to which Catholic doctrine has permeated the wider community with the consent and cooperation of the Irish state:

...A boy of twelve and two dark-haired girls were close about her at the fire. They'd grown uneasy, in the way children can indoors in the failing light. The bright golds and scarlets of the religious pictures on the walls had faded, and as it deepened the dusk turned reddish from the Sacred Heart lamp that burned before the small wickerwork cub of Bethlehem on the mantelpiece... (B,7).

As previously noted above, the three children of the family reside with their authoritarian father, Garda Sergeant Reegan and their father's second wife Elizabeth, in rooms in the Garda Barracks reserved for the family of the commanding police officer (B, 11-12).

It is soon revealed to the reader that Elizabeth and Reegan met in the environs of the Barracks, itself located in relatively close proximity to the local church. Town planning of this kind was no coincidence and serves to strengthen the link between church and state. Much official business and socialising is conducted within the space subtended between these two key public buildings. Elizabeth is shown to reminisce about the circumstances under which she and her older husband met:

It was more than four years now since she'd first met him, when she was home on convalescence from the London Hospital, worn out after nursing through the Blitz. She had come to the barracks to get some of her papers put in order. He happened to be on his own in the dayroom

when she came. It was twelve, for the Angelus had rung as she left her bicycle against the barrack wall (B, 13-14).

Elizabeth, in common with all other residents of the community, finds her days punctuated by the unmistakable ringing of church bells as a form of call to attend mass. Repeated ringing of the church bell at key times during the day establish a particular routine for parishioners²⁷¹ as a way of regulating their behaviour and to replenish levels of cultural capital (heavily influenced by Catholic values). It is routines such as these that reinforce the structures and habits that form each person's habitus. A memory of her early days learning her way into the codes of the faith also attests to the long-lasting nature of habitus-induced conduct²⁷²: 'and the laurelled path between the brown flagstones looked so worn smooth that she felt she was walking on them again with her bare feet of school confession evenings through the summer holidays' (B, 14).

Such is the power of religiously determined cultural capital in affecting behaviour that acts of confession at determined seasons throughout the year are as much validating acts of faith as regular mass attendance. Childhood habits of religious observance are thus carried into adulthood and thus form part of the foundation of the hegemonic position of social and political authority then enjoyed by the (catholic) church. Everyday acts of speech, and indeed, where emphasis is required to indicate the weight of importance of a determined remark or exclamation, it is infused with religious references often with the overt intention of underlining the gravity with which the issue should be regarded. Evidence of this is found in a conversation the character Elizabeth has with her own mother after she makes it known that it is her intention to marry the widower, Sergeant Reegan:

²⁷¹ It can be argued that in the eyes of Catholic Church authorities, people are more properly regarded as of interest in their capacity as parishioners (indoctrinated, publicly acknowledged worshippers of the faith), rather than secular citizens, the former of which strive to live within the established value system of norms and behaviours promoted by governing authorities.

²⁷² Grennan (2005) is also alert to the importance of regular repetition of particular acts as '...recurrent, ubiquitous rituals – religious or everyday – that bind families and communities...'; see Eamon Grennan, 'Only What Happens': Mulling over McGahern, *Irish University Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Special Issue: John McGahern (Spring-Summer, 2005), pp. 13-27, p. 16.

...Marryin' isn't something, believe me, that can be jumped into today and outa tomorrow. It's wan bed you have to sleep on whether it's hard or soft wance you make it. An' remember, as he tauld you, it's no aisy house to be walkin' into, but, I'm sayin' nothin'. It's for your God above to direct you! (B, 15)

While trust in God and the authority of the church remains largely unchallenged, arguably there is some desire to encourage younger members of society to advance through education in the hope of achieving a higher standard of living than is enjoyed by members of the community at that time. However, these prospects are consequently kept in check by means of the official propagation of accepted values by the members of the clergy who occupy many important positions in the educational system including chairing school management boards, university presidencies, management of teacher training colleges and key teaching positions throughout the national higher education system. Placing appropriate 'sentinels of surveillance' in strategic positions in society allows governing authorities (e.g. the de facto hegemonic position of the Catholic Church) to retard and even completely arrest the accumulation and transmission of certain forms of cultural capital that are found to be in contravention of recognised principles.

Although remarks about education are made in jest in *The Barracks*, much truth emanates from the source of the motivation for such suggestions. One situation in which this dynamic becomes visible is when after finishing his day, Reegan retires to the family residence quarters of the barracks and enquires as to what his son has learnt in school during the day and when he does not receive what he would regard as a satisfactory answer, feels obliged to issue a mild rebuke: "You'll never get with, Willie! Were you never tauld that you go to school to learn to think for yourself and not give two tuppence curses for what anybody else is thinkin'?" (B, 17).

In making the criticism he does, Reegan also exposes the hypocrisy and subservient acts that had to be performed in order to progress within the educational system with official sanction from the Irish state, an experience which his wife also had and whose account does not differ in any substance from that of her husband who echoes such experiences in his assertions:

We might as well have been learnin' our facts and figures and come out in every other way just as God sent us in— as long as we learned how to bow the knee and kiss the ring. If we had to learn how to do that we were right bejasus! And we'd have all got on like a house on fire! Isn't that right, Elizabeth?" (*B*,18).

As the Reegan family reside within a Garda Barracks, there are occasions when official business intrudes on household life, for example, when subordinate officers need to defer to superior officer Sergeant Reegan. Similarly, everyday language is laden with religious imagery, its significance further elevated by the fact it is being employed by officers of the state in the course of their official duties as they engage in interpersonal communication. In the following case, Sergeant Ned Casey engages in conversation: "God bless all here," he greets, "And you too, Ned," his company replies (*B*, 19). This same character acknowledges the presence of the children in the room and engages in light pleasantries with them by mentioning their school work and in so doing, again highlighting the value that should be placed on education as he enquires as to whether they have completed the homework assigned to them by their teacher:

"Ye're finished the auld lessons?"

"All's finished," they told him quietly.

"And ye have them all off?"

"Aye."

"(...) Well, you'll get nothin' without the learnin' these days. Pass the exams. That's what gets people on..." (*B*, 21-22).

While assent is given to the reality that education is an important means of social mobility, the presence of religiously-tinged cultural capital comprising the habitus of individuals in McGahern's world is again manifested, but this in the form of a remark made in jest. Casey continues his dialogue. Casey then jokingly asks about the formation of winds off the south west of Ireland in the Atlantic Ocean and how this affects the weather adversely once it reaches land:

Very right, my boy! I see you are one boy who comes to school to learn something other than villainy and rascality. And then as I have repeated day-in, day-out, while the hairs of me head turned grey, it strikes against the mountains, rises to a great height, and pisses down on the poor unfortunates who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brows in this holy Catholic and apostolic country of Ireland!” (*B*, 23).

Elizabeth Reegan scolds Ned Casey generously who retorts by saying (again, bringing the Almighty into the narrative): “But it’s the God’s truth!”, “You know what Cromwell said: Get roasted alive in hell or drowned and perished in Connaught” (*B*, 22-23). Immediately after the jesting between Casey and his company subsides, Casey reminds his company that his childless wife craves companionship or the simple presence of another person while her husband fulfils his professional duties, he enquires whether one of the Reegan girls could be permitted to stay with his wife one evening:

The Missus was wonderin’ if it’d be all right for Una to come up with me when I’m going for the bit of supper, for to stop the night.” (...)

“Shure she can go. But that’s the woman’s territory. Whatever she says,” deferred Reegan. (...)

Elizabeth (Reegan’s wife) had no real say, though this social deference pleased her so, and she tried to catch Reegan’s eyes with a smile of gratefulness as she assented, “She can, of course. Her nightdress is ready there in the press” (...)

Una couldn’t conceal her delight, though she tried. Nor could Sheila conceal her terror of the loneliness in the cold room. Both tried to suppress any expression of their feelings. They knew their places. They were simply pawns. And this world of their father and Casey and Elizabeth was unknowable to them as the intolerable world of God is to the grown, if they have not dulled their sense of the mystery of life with the business or distractions of the day and the hour. All the two black-haired girls could do was sit there and wait, coming and going as they were willed. (*B*, 23-24).

In a household and in society at large where all the power was exercised by men, women were not permitted to share their true feelings and were expected to remain discrete in the presence of men. A world in which they were mere observers, not

participants, but rather instructed servants. Servants not of truth, but of the demands of men: men of cloth, of family, of marriage.

Genuine opportunities are available for men only, a situation in which the woman in the home is expected to dedicate herself to providing for the welfare of the family by meeting their nutritional, emotional and clothing needs. Quotidian affairs are more often than not, sufficiently demanding in their own right to occupy the time and concerns of these women. In McGahern's world their desires are indefinitely restricted to an imaginary realm.

As the women remain at home, the men in *The Barracks* present themselves for duty. Since there are often lull periods throughout their professional day, something must be found to alleviate the tedium. Release is found in social activities within the workplace, with card-playing a popular and uncomplicated choice acceptable to all parties. Even in such relatively simple activities, the influence of the church remains a presence in the form of religious images and statutes around the building. Sergeant Casey completes his professional duties for the evening and then joins the Reegan's in the family room of the barracks: "What about a game of cards? It's ages since we had a game" he said, now that he was no longer troubled. A pack of cards was found behind a statue of St. Therese on the sideboard, the folding card-table fixed in the centre of the hearth. The cards were dealt and played' (B, 24).

In the unlikely event that the company in the room does not proclaim the faith, this obvious symbol can be seen as a means to remind the people (in their capacity as parishioners) of their duty before God and church. Such symbols act as a catalyst to encourage reflection on the religious capital element of each individual's habitus and by provoking reflection it also motivates behaviours that perpetuate accepted practices of speech and behaviour. Religious values form a central part of family values in such a way that the perpetuation of values exercises a powerful influence on the prospects and kind of social mobility of future generations. Thus, sons may be expected to follow in the footsteps of their father in continuing a professional tradition or inheriting land in pursuance of prevailing cultural practices. An exemplification of this situation can be found in *The Barracks* where speculation surrounds the future of Sergeant Reegan's

only son, Willie. One of his fathers' colleagues, Garda Officer Brennan enquires as to what Willie would like to do in the future, which quickly becomes the focus of humorous repartee that serves as a critique of prevailing standards of entry to the force:

What does young Willie think of all this? Will he join the Force when he grows up?"

Not if he has any sense in his skull," Reegan intervened.

Sargent Casey then interjects to boggle:

"But do you think he will be the measurement?" His colleague Garda Mullins offered his own contribution on the matter:

"We'll have to put a stone on his head, that's what we'll have to do soon with the way he's grown up on us," "But I'm afraid he'll never be thick enough."

This reference then introduced an old characterisation all the Gardaí of a certain age had come to know from their time in training: "Thirty-six inches across the chest, Willie, and a yard thick with solid ignorance like the fella from Connemara; then five foot nine inches against the wall in your stockin' feet and you're right for the Force, Willie. All the requirements laid down by the regulations" (*B*, 28).

This relatively brief interaction is an indication of the somewhat disparaging attitude held by existing members of the official state police against governing regulations in the force, an attitude that leads to nostalgic recollections of the hopeful early days of the fledging Irish Free State: 'The pun was a favourite that never grew worn, always bringing back to them the six months they spent training in the Depot when they were nineteen or twenty, in the first days of the Irish Free State' (*B*, 28-29). In their jesting, a key observation comes to the fore: suitable political affiliations are capable of delivering immediate and dramatic upward social and professional mobility. Probabilities of achieving success from strong personal desires for a better life are thus

contingent on party politics, where personal loyalties and family dynasties disrupt the course of advancement for those without a political sponsor. Since a complex and deeply entwined relationship of comparably symbiotic proportions persists between church and state in McGahern's world, the means of advancement also requires concentrated levels of religiously-tinged cultural capital. Cultural capital of this nature also takes the form of approved behaviour and linguistic practices that serve to indicate that these parishioners possess the approved characteristics to live and act as reproductive units of the cultural lattice binding together what would otherwise be incongruent communities. Even in uniform, police officers attend Mass in full uniform while members of the public are witness to this spectacle. An example is thus set for the public in general.

For those who had remained in the force long after this initial flurry of excitement, malaise had become the accepted reality.²⁷³ Securing promotion remained largely the preserve of beneficiaries of nepotistic recruitment practices, activated more often than not through political patronage. However, this patronage could only be exercised in conjunction with sufficient levels of approved cultural capital on the part of those in search of upward professional mobility. In practice this meant exhibiting all the stereotypical signs of what was considered a good Catholic: regular mass attendance, appropriate public conduct, respect for tradition and authority.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ After a period of post-war recovery, the modest economic gains of recent years were quickly checked by a balance of payments crisis in the 1950s, a period described as 'a miserable decade for the Irish economy'. The largest deficit on record up to that point occurred in 1951 mainly due to complications arising from the effects on the international markets of the Korean War. A situation like this forced the government to raise taxes and to reduce subsidies on basic foodstuffs. Real income virtually stagnated between 1950 and 1958. Other measures including special levies on what were considered luxury goods meant the imposition of a 40 per cent levy on goods imported from the UK and a 60 per cent rate was applied to goods coming from other countries. Rates between 25 and 37.5 per cent were levied on a range of goods including zip fasteners, electric fires and typewriters supplied from outside Ireland. See Cormac Ó Grada, *A Rocky road: The Irish Economy since the 1920s* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997) pp. 26-27.

²⁷⁴ Tradition and authority in these circumstances refers to absolute deference parishioners are expected demonstrate in the face of the power exercised by the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy and the central place it occupies in Irish society. Acceptance to this extent implies that all public morals and political standards are set and policed by the church and its plenipotentiaries. Deviation from such standards invites sanctions. This becomes particularly clear in *The Leavetaking* when the protagonist is dismissed from his position and is forced to seek work abroad as he contravened church teachings on social policy by marrying a divorcee.

During the course of the same interaction referred to above, one colleague, Garda Brennan decided he wished to be part of the banter and states that he noticed how none of the men they trained with were exactly six foot tall, an assertion which elicited a response from Garda Mullins, which was heavily laden with pious overtones: “No man ever born was exactly six feet. It’s because Jesus Christ was exactly six foot and no man since could be the same height. That’s why it’s supposed to be!” (*B*, 30).

Reegan’s wife, Elizabeth agrees with these sentiments and is followed by Garda Brennan’s quote in respect of original sin: “It’s like the Blessed Virgin and Original Sin,” and he continues: “The Blessed Virgin Mary by a singular privilege of grace was preserved free from original sin and that privilege is called her Immaculate Conception” (*Ibid*). From this reference to heavenly authority, Reegan reminds his family of their duty to say their prayers:

“The news is long over,” “Are ye all ready for the prayers? We should have them said ages ago.” They blessed themselves together and he began: “Thou, O Lord, will open my lips,” “And my tongue shall announced Thy praise,” they responded. They droned into the Apostles’ Creed. Then Our Fathers and Hail Marys and Glory be to the Fathers were repeated over and over in their relentless monotony, without urge or passion, no call of love or answer, the voices simply murmuring away in a habit or death, their minds not on what they said, but blank or wandering or dreaming over their own lives (*B*, 33).

For all intents and purposes, at least from a public perspective, each parishioner and families remain dedicated servants of the church. While religious doctrine is infused into the habitus by daily routines such as prayer and devotions, mass attendance and other acts of faith, some subtle, residual resistance to what becomes an ideology can be detected in the manner in which the narrator describes the way the Reegan family engage in prayer: ‘...their relentless monotony, without urge or passion, no call of love or answer, the voices simply murmuring away in a habit or death, their minds not on what they said...’ (*B*, 33). Here, it is the patriarch, Sergeant Reegan who imposes the expected standard of faith and ensures his family engage in daily prayer sessions, a reflection of the authority exercised by men across Irish society at that time in direct

comparison with the national political authority of Eamon de Valera.²⁷⁵ Himself a declared public servant of the church, whose pious morals were embodied in legal form in *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, the Irish Constitution. This legally binding document ensured that all laws and thus social policy would strictly respect Catholic doctrine so that the entire country would be bound by a judicially enforceable moral code. The highly conservative social environment in which it was conceived and promulgated provides much of the social background which inspired McGahern's early fiction.

The ultra-conservative regime in which the characters in McGahern's world live closely mirror the environment into which the author was born and raised. De Valera's hegemonic confessional state enjoyed wide support throughout the country, but its philosophy and operation did not enjoy absolute approval on the part of the population.²⁷⁶ Thus, there is a discernible, if discrete, vein in McGahern's fiction that recognises the existence of a certain level of discontent toward expected standards of piety and a limited detachment in the relationship between the church and individual parishioners who display relatively more interest in themselves and their own family's affairs than that of religious duty. Limited pretences persist out of fear, reverence and respect for traditional religious ideology.

Religious ideology is reinforced in its specific provisions by very particular kinds of prayers that seek to assert hope for preferred family values, a cornerstone of Catholic Ireland. This is also found to be an integral component of the Reegan family prayers:

²⁷⁵ In a speech made in 1940, just three years after the promulgation of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, De Valera stated that 'the very notion of the state is futile if it not be conceded that there exists within the state one single and sovereign power having the supreme right effectively to co-ordinate all wills in pursuit of the common end.' See Moynihan, *Statements and Speeches of Eamon de Valera*, p. 423. De Valera's remarks on this occasion would seem to suggest that he saw the one sovereign figure as being himself and thus he acted as a father figure for and over the Irish nation.

²⁷⁶ In the General Election held on the same day as the referendum on *Bunreacht na hÉireann* in July 1937, De Valera's Fianna Fáil saw its popular vote fall from 689,000 in the previous election to 599,000 (49.7 to 45.3 per cent) – the first decline in five elections. A fall in the incidence of voter participation from 81.3 per cent to 76.2 per cent was also an indication of uneasiness on the part of the electorate. This was even more pronounced in rural areas such as the west of Ireland where participation fell from 79.8 to 70.9 per cent. Overall the constitution was approved by 685,000 to 527,000 votes against. See J.J. Lee, *Ireland: 1912-1985, Politics and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 210-11.

As the prayers began to reach their end for the evening, Reegan says “The Declaration of the Christian Family,” began the last prayers, the trimmings. Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Oliver Plunkett – whose scorched head they remembered reading on the leaflet, was on show in a church in Drogheda.

Prayers for all they were bound to pray for in duty, promise or charity.

Prayer for a happy death.

And the last prayer, the last terrible acknowledgement, the long iambic stresses relentlessly sledged:

O Jesus, I must die, I know not where nor when nor how, but if I die in mortal sin I go to hell for all eternity (*B*, 36-37).

Evening family prayers present an ideal setting for Catholic-inspired cultural capital to be imbued and perpetuated from an early age since the target of early indoctrination schemes are children living in a family setting whose habitus have yet to take on the permanent features they later gain in adulthood. Upon reaching adulthood, the habitus, carefully shaped by the rhythm of daily prayer, school instruction and parental influence comes to reflect established conservative values. Deviation from the established system of values is discouraged through psychological mechanisms such as manufacturing strategies, e.g. the specific wording of certain prayers, which encourage feelings of guilt or shame.

Symbols that attest to the presence of a religious commitment also provide a reminder of associated duties expected of those parishioners resident in a household in which there has been an accumulation of religiously-tinged cultural capital. Duties of this nature include the most obvious and visible affirmation of faith: mass attendance. Failure to attend to this obligation elicits criticism and censure from and in the community. Neighbours and peers retain an interest in whether other members of the community live up to this responsibility. However, Reegan’s wife Elizabeth was an avid church-goer and she confirms her regular attendance at mass in response to a question from Mrs. Teresa Casey, wife of Garda Casey: “Were you at first Mass last Sunday?”

She (Elizabeth) nodded. She was at first Mass every Sunday, there were meals to get ready when Second was on (B, 52). This confirmation reflects the duty to be carried out by all ‘good’ Catholic women with families in De Valera’s Ireland: pious and regular attendance at mass everyday and the responsibility to care for their family’s every need above their own.

Although she was their step-mother, Elizabeth Reegan regards her role as primary carer of the Reegan children as an integral part of her life and marriage to their father. This duty is acknowledged on a number of occasions in *The Barracks*:

(...) She had less than an hour to prepare the children’s lunch. They had but a half-hour from school and ten minutes of it went going and coming. Their meal would have to be on the table when they came to her, running.

She put down potatoes and hurried out to the garden for some curly cabbage (...) Across the avenue were the few shops of the village, hidden by sycamores: the church alone stood out visible, areas of stone and glass and slate showing between breaks in the old graveyard and evergreens...(B, 55).

A varied landscape is united in the mind’s eye and the physical vista by the striking reality of the dominant and imposing presence of the local church, which stands out over all other landmarks, natural or artificial. The prominence of place of the church is a deliberate organisation of space that can be found repeated right across the nation.²⁷⁷ Parishioners need not look very far to find a local landmark: the local church serves as the most obvious example of one and it also happens to be the place of worship where the rituals and rhythms of prayer as a testament to the faith can be publicly blended and manifested in the act of mass-attendance. Roman Catholic duty stands above all other priorities and prayer forms a central part of personal conduct, irrespective of any tasks at hand: “...The Angelus rang when she was inside. She did not stop her work to pray...” (B, 56).

²⁷⁷ While this occurred in other nations, the level of complicity and cooperation that persisted in the Church-State axis of power went well beyond other comparable polities around Europe.

As evening time arrives, so too does the end of Reegan's working day. He makes his way into the family quarters of the barracks and after enquiring about how Elizabeth felt he confirmed that he had made a medical appointment so as to determine the nature of her recent discomfort. Reegan does not let his piety take second place and insists on having the family pray together again, as on every other day, albeit slightly earlier on that occasion:

We better call the children and have the rosary over for once. It gets harder to kneel down the later it gets. It was a long day," he said quietly.

He went and she heard him call on the street, "The rosary! The rosary! The rosary! The rosary!" and their shouts from the river path, "Coming, Daddy! Right! Coming, Daddy!" The night was with them at last, the flames of the fire glittered on glass and delf, the cub on the mantelpiece bathed in the ghastly blood-red of the Sacred Heart lamp (*B*, 72).

Here, McGahern again provides more examples of the repetitive nature of prayer in the Reegan household. The Sacred Heart lamp provides a relatively dramatic backdrop to a faith-filled Reegan household, blood-red light serves as a further reminder of the crucifixion and the presence of God in the context of the message of sacrifice projected by the Catholic hierarchy with the hope of reaching every family home.

The home serves as the principal setting for Elizabeth Reegan's life and for most of her interactions with other people (in the main, her family). As feelings of anxiety in respect of fearing that her suspicions of having cancer begin to intensify, Elizabeth places her fate in the hands of God, just as the church has strongly encouraged the pious population to do: She did not know what way to turn, nothing seemed to depend on herself any more: "She thought blindly since she could turn no way, the teeth of terror at her heart: "I will pray. I will pray that things will be well. I will pray that things will be well" (*B*, 72-73). In this sense, prayer is offered as a means to secure greater proximity to one's spiritual faith, to secure acceptance of one's condition in life, and in so doing, trusting the self to the will of God. Moreover, abrogation of individual autonomy or a deliberate strategy of failing to assert one's character that this behaviour can lead to become a way in which parishioners can honour this supreme authority, a daily example

of which can thus be found in regular prayer. Cyclical patterns of behaviour thus form around this philosophy and McGahern again supplies the reader with more examples of this practice: 'Reegan got his beads from the little cloth pursue he always carried in his watch pocket. He put a newspaper down on the cement and knelt with his elbows on the table, facing the dark mirror.' They blessed themselves together and he began:

"Thou, O Lord, will open my lips"

"And my tongue shall announced Thy praise," they responded.

(...) O Jesus, I must die! I know not where or how. My happiness is as passing as my evenings and nights and days. I must travel the road of penance and prayer towards my Resurrection in Jesus Christ. It is my one joy and sweetness and hope, and if I will not believe in this Eternal Resurrection. I must necessarily live within the gates of my own hell for ever (...)

Reegan sang out the prayers as he sang them every evening of their lives and they were answered in chorus back, murmurs and patterns and repetitions that had never assumed light of meaning, as dark as the earth they walked as habitual as their day (*B*, 73).

This paragraph is highly indicative and singularly illustrative of the extent to which the Catholic faith and its philosophy and principles permeates the lives of ordinary people even in the private spheres of their homes thus suggesting a deep penetration of their minds which consequently shape their social conduct. Since habit is often unreflective behaviour, prayer and other expressions of faith are indicative of the lack of space or will on the part of adherents to critically reflect on their condition, a situation that is highly conducive to perpetuating the existing power structures that promote and defend the faith through the political system. Fear and ignorance become aids to ensuring the survival of the hegemonic position of the church in governing social and political standards in the Irish state portrayed in McGahern's world.

Elizabeth attends her medical appointment booked by her husband. As she sits in the waiting room for her turn to come, a growing sense of helplessness and guilt driven by the stress of the situation began to envelop her:

She might have been kneeling in the queue in front of the confessional and her turn to enter into the darkness behind the purple curtain coming closer and closer. You were sure you were ready and prepared and then you weren't any more when you got close, less and less sure the closer you got. Doubts came, the hunger for more tie, the fear of anything final-you could never bring all your sins into one moment of confession and pardon, you had lost them, they had escaped, they were being replaced by the new. The nerves began to gnaw at the stomach, whispering that you were inadequate, simply always inadequate (...) (*B*, 79).

Severe moments of stress and powerlessness of conscience are equated with that of the confessional experience in which the parishioner is expected to share their sins with the priest. Moments such as these reveal the power dynamic in operation between parishioner and priest, the latter retains enormous authority in and over the community in which they work. In turn they have the ability to judge the actions of parishioners, who in turn find themselves temporarily reduced to a most vulnerable position. Elizabeth's thoughts reveal the disdainful attitude of the clergy toward their parishioners that can be found in the manner that they address people. "Well, can I help you?" a question which compares to a possible dialogue with a priest as person would sit to be heard in confession, a model based on her own experience: "Now tell me your sins, child" – indicating her own apprehension and how deeply the position and power of the church and its local agent, the Parish Priest penetrates the mind and soul of ordinary citizens (*B*, 81).

Further existential pondering on the nature of life, her own life, Elizabeth comes to the conclusion that it is in death that true equality is granted to all regardless of economic means or dogma:

She smiled and nodded flattering approval. She had seen doctors and nurses ill and getting well again and dying as she had seen people from every other way of making a living getting well and dying too; and it made small difference. No one was very privileged in that position. Money and a blind faith in God were the most use but there came a point when pain obliterated the comfort of private rooms and special care as it did faith and hope. The young and old, the ugly and the beautiful, the failures and the successes took on such a resemblance to each other in physical suffering that it seemed to light a kind of truth (*B*, 84).

Acknowledgement is given to the fact that faith, in this case, faith in the Catholic Church, offers some solace to parishioners in dealing with suffering in their lives. An over-arching sense of universality of the character of the human condition is hereby revealed. Suffering is held forth as a means of finding a path to God. Christ's suffering for humankind thus resonates with those who subscribe to such a system of values, a 'choice' which parishioners in McGahern's world are denied ab initio. Elizabeth questions whether her life lived to date has been futile:

(...) What was her life? Was she ready to cry halt and leave? Had it achieved anything or been given any meaning? She was no more ready to die now than she had been twenty years ago. There was the after-life, hell and heaven and purgatory between Jesus Christ on the right hand of God, but her childhood and adolescence over they had never lived as flesh in her mind, except when she dreamed. (...) (B, 85).

This profound reflection on Elizabeth's part has been described by John D. Sheridan as being a central element of an activity that 'is occupied always with the riddle of existence, the purposes and meaning of life.'²⁷⁸ Indeed, this is the point at which Elizabeth acknowledges her mortal predicament to herself. This act of introspection has been provoked by the memory of her time with her doctor-lover Halliday, when she worked as a nurse in London prior to her marriage to Reegan. Her willingness to allow her past memories to function as a source of knowledge is, in Denis Sampson's view, an important feature of her character that gives readers their most important hint as to the contours of her metafictional role of 'surrogate artist' in the novel.²⁷⁹ From the point of view of McGahern the artist, this role is placed in a place of light, rather than darkness.²⁸⁰

Ultimately, it is faith and the presence of almighty God which dominates her review of the life she has lived and from which she cannot escape is the extent of the critical mass of religious-tinged cultural capital through her family home and the local

²⁷⁸ John D. Sheridan, 'Classic Tragedy in the Barracks' (ver. of *The Barracks*), *Irish Independent*, 16 March 1963, p. 10.

²⁷⁹ Denis Sampson, *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), p. 17.

²⁸⁰ A position asserted by Dermot McCarthy, *John McGahern and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 55.

community in which she lives. Elizabeth interrogates herself on the greater meaning of her life in a wider context and by doing this, she approaches a more enlightened state as a means of transcending quotidian routines so as to assert her individuality.

While progressive ideals guided and provided much of the momentum for Irish nationalist designs to deliver the Irish state from British rule, it also represented a barrier to progression and expression for those who did not subscribe to the value system that was established once Irish independence was achieved. Elizabeth Reegan experiences difficulties in remaining steadfast in her Catholic faith. Her faith wanes further as her illness advances, which in turn leaves her in a situation that takes her further away from her ideal goal: greater self-awareness and clarity of understanding. It could also be argued that Elizabeth's suffering is also analogous to that of the state of the Irish nation experiencing near-total economic and cultural asphyxiation mainly due to a large surplus in the levels of religiously-tinged cultural capital (and a corresponding deficit in other areas such as intellectual capital) reflected in McGahern's world. As illness gradually envelops Elizabeth's boy and consciousness, the greater the deficit in her ability to assert her wishes just as the Ireland portrayed in McGahern's world comes to resemble what might be termed a detached dystopian fantasyland as the Catholic hierarchy and the sentinels of society (i.e. parish priests) assert more control over the supply of cultural goods and means of expression throughout the community at large.

Elizabeth begins to make preparations to go into hospital for tests to finally determine what kind of illness she has been afflicted with (*B*, 102-105). Sargent Mullins, her husband's colleague encounters her in the corridor and after hearing of her health challenges offers his support draped in religious overtones: "With the help of God it'll be nothing and if there's anything I can do..." (*B*, 105) a comment that is well-received. Not long after Mullins has absented himself, Reegan returns to his wife's company and declares his intention to begin another session of prayer, a reminder of the fact that piety remains a pervading influence in their daily lives: "We better get the prayers over because, unless I'm mistaken, this house'll be full of women soon" (*B*, 106), as he let the beads run into his palm. Thus, the ritual of prayer remains a staple of

daily routines and its necessity is only reinforced by the serious crisis of the deterioration of his wife's state of health.

It can be said that the poverty afflicting Elizabeth's health is also a condition that resonates with the poverty of spirit that has in turn led to material deprivation and cultural malaise in McGahern's world. Survival rather than distinction is the driving motivation behind work for the characters in *The Barracks*, a consequence of the malaise that has turned the De Valera utopian dream into an intoxicating dystopia where an uncompromising moral code exenterates any reasonable prospect of cultural vibrancy and economic development. Thus characters are seen to be struggling to attain sufficient means to supply basic goods of sustenance. Reagan cannot afford to take a hiatus from his household chores even when Elizabeth is being transported to hospital:

The ambulance took her (Elizabeth) away at four the next day and Spring came about the barracks that week as it always did in a single Saturday: bundles of Early York, hundred-weights of seed potatoes and the colourful packets of flower and vegetable seed the children collected coming from the Saturday market (...) In the night Reagan sat with a bag of the seed potatoes by his side, turning each potato slowly in the lamplight so as to see the eyes with the white sprouts coming and there was the sound of the knife slicing and plopping of the splits into the bucket between his legs. (...) Mullins and Brennan were splitting the seed in their kitchens exactly as he was there, and Monday they'd be planting in the conacre they rented each year from the farmers in the village (...) They couldn't afford to buy vegetables and potatoes for their large families: their existence was so bare as it was that Mullins was never more than a few days on the spree when they were getting credit in the shops or borrowing or going hungry (*B*, 107).

De Valera's utopian objective of an Ireland free of the yoke of British rule was achieved and is evident in McGahern's world. However, while a large degree of self-determination is achieved, material realisation of a better life remains a distant reality. The limited financial resources available are thus required for the purchase of foodstuffs and other essential consumer goods and little or no money remains to acquire cultural goods. It is this situation that marks the post-colonial Irish state in McGahern's world. Survival is marginally less challenging for those who have the opportunity to work land that is either in their ownership or which has been leased. Reagan recalls his own childhood that was intimately connected to the land, those who had access or

constructive possession of land were often able to build a life for themselves. Those who did not enjoy such facilities were left with no alternative but to seek their fortunes in foreign lands: ‘...All his people had farmed small holdings or gone to America and if he had followed in their feet he’d have spent his life with spade and shovel on the farm he had grown up on or he’d left it to his brother and gone out to an uncle in Boston...’ (B, 109).

Reegan’s personal upbringing was heavily influenced by utopian desires, yearnings for new beginnings and he was also a direct participant in militant efforts to set his nation on the path to liberation:

But he’d been born into a generation wild with ideals: they’d free Ireland, they’d be a nation once again: he was fighting with a flying column in the hills when he was little more than a boy, he donned the uniform of the Garda Síochána and swore to preserve the peace of the Irish Free State when it was declared in 1920, getting petty promotion immediately because he’d won officer’s rank in the fighting, but there he stayed – to watch the Civil War and the years that followed in silent disgust remaining on because he saw nothing else worth doing (B, 109).

The great irony that stands out at this juncture is that even though Reegan became part of the apparatus of state with the inception of the Irish state, he has not been ‘delivered’ from the material deprivation and squalor that was hoped would disappear under the new Irish state. Instead of fulfilment he finds himself enslaved within the confines of his professional position and dependent on the profits yielded from additional physical labour on the land in the form of cutting turf on the bog with his children. This draining, exhausting work they are left with little choice but to engage in stands as a clear rebuttal of the high ideals linked with the founding discourses of the Irish Free State and its successor, the Republic of Ireland.

Doubt could not be cast on the fact that Irish independence was achieved, but much evidence surfaces to attest to a situation whereby great promise has turned to bitter disappointment.²⁸¹ Malaise has set in and Reegan, in common with many others,

²⁸¹ This is a situation that is also recognised by Brian Liddy (1999) who notes that in the case *The Barracks* that: ‘The fact that nothing has change, however, brings about its own changes in the minds of the people. When oppressed by the English, the Irish had something to fight for; they had a dream of ousting the oppressor from the land, and this dream was strength enough to carry with it a central purpose

has watched his dream turn into something very different once revolutionary activity dissipated. Thus a cultural despondency becomes the prevailing condition and breeds the ideal conditions that permit the development of tendencies and habits that are proper to a dystopian narrative. A gradual bleeding of the land steadily diminishes the human resources available to the community as large numbers of families suffer enforced separation from loved ones through this phenomenon. Those who manage to escape the need to emigrate remain in a country where a comatose economic system affords few opportunities for advancement forcing more still to leave their land of birth. Reagan is soon called upon to take Elizabeth to her medical appointment. Since he cannot afford to own a motor vehicle, they take the train and are witness to the exodus of labour from the country: 'There's not many travelling', to which her husband promptly responds: 'No. Never in the morning. We're lucky not to be on the three twenty-five. It's like a cattle train these days and them all for the night boat.' Elizabeth's reply was a typical reflection of the community: "There'll be soon nobody left in the country (*B*, 112). This comment is an apt appraisal of the alarming rate of emigration from Ireland enveloped by stifling conservatism which in turn asphyxiates developmental policies.

Eventually, Elizabeth is taken into hospital as planned and undergoes an operation to remove a breast due to a malignant growth. In the depths of her despair inspired by strong pain it is once again the Almighty that she cries out to for help as she comes to the realisation of the futility and insignificance of human suffering:

...But Jesus Christ, she couldn't just lie there suffering and doing nothing, she'd have to try and do something, this wouldn't go on forever, she knew from her nursing days that'd be a lot less in twenty-four hours, and in forty-eight it'd be almost gone, twenty-four hours wasn't long, it was only a day, and a day was very little in a lifetime...(B, 121).

Desperately seeking release from her pain, Elizabeth falls back on her faith and piety:

She'd been brought up in the fear of God but what remained most powerful in the memory was the church services, always beautiful, especially in Holy Week; witnessed so often in the same unchanging pattern that they didn't come in broken recollections but flowed before the mind

for existence. Now that Ireland stands free, there is no dream, and the reality remains very much as it had done prior to the bloodshed.' Brian Liddy, 'State and Church: Darkness in the Fiction of John McGahern', *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 3, No.2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 106-121, p. 120.

with the calm and grace and reassurance of all ritual, nameless priest in black and white moving between the Stations of the Cross...That was her religion. Certain phrases: thirty pieces of silver, the lakeshore of Galilee evoked events in the life of Christ. The soul went before the Judgement Seat as dramatically after death as it did in the awful scarlet and gold and black of the pictures on the walls in every house, as concretely as the remains when across the bridge to the graveyard in a motor hearse...Everything was laid out and certain, no one needed to ask questions, and there was nothing to offer anyone who stumbled outside its magic circle (*B*, 122-23).

In her recollection, she reveals the power of ritual and routine of religious doctrine on long-term behaviour and memory (a manifestation of the success in influencing the habitus from childhood). As her religious conviction begins to wane, Elizabeth finds solace in the beauty of religious rites and procedures that mark the contours of her faith. Long-standing fears surface to indicate strong residual ties to the values she was taught in childhood and into her early adult life. The ‘magic’ alluded to in the final line of the passage is that of the hegemonic position enjoyed by the Irish Catholic Church that was so strong as to be able to successfully stifle any serious critical reflection into its practices and power structures. Those who could not or did not belong to this community of the faithful found themselves afforded little comfort in their choice and were treated as inferior citizens.²⁸²

Even though piety was a powerful tool of the church in regulating the conduct of parishioners, its power could be negated (sometimes permanently) by strong forces within an individual such as serious illness or a fundamental discord in the values professed by the individual and the standards of conduct expected by governing authorities. Imaginings outside the accepted view of the world are unwelcome and such is the success and depth of the indoctrination of citizens that few members of the

²⁸² This is an argument that is carefully pursued by Tom Inglis who states that people tend to wish to avail of the benefits of social prestige enjoyed by respected organisations in an society, such as the Catholic Church in Ireland (up until recent times). For that to happen citizens had to emulate the expected standards common to these organisations and where thus treated with appropriate respect, failing to do so resulted in inferior treatment. See Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987) pp. 64-70. Similarly, church teachings held great sway for decades in Ireland and to contravene them was certain to invite social sanction even when the motivation for contravention was a bona fide cause. See Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2012), pp. 455-457.

community possess any real desire to question existing structures of power and perception.

Elizabeth's condition worsens and her ability to sustain her spirits through leaning on her faith begins to break down entirely and in this state of near-despair she reveals the true nature of the strategy she has adopted for her day-to-day living:

It was little use to Elizabeth as she lay racked with pain. She couldn't pray. I believe, O God. Help my unbelief, rose to her lips and sounded as dishonest as something intended to be overhead, she'd never made it part of her life, it was not in her own voice she spoke. The childhood terror of hell came back and she was afraid but she could not adapt herself to living now in its presence. She'd have to try to go on as she had come to live, without fear or hope or despair, there was a passing moment in life (*B*, 123).

She seeks escape from her suffering, but finds it impossible to engage in genuine prayer. Personal choice motivates such thoughts, which are not without resistance from deep within her as the influence on her habitus in childhood that still exhibits a notable presence in her adult life. Guilt rather than faith endows a final membrane of pretence to which she can cling, itself a source of a pragmatic pathway through a rather bleak life. Each moment of her life thus stands as vessel for the emptiness that living has become for her.

Sergeant Reegan continues his quest to seek a way out of the Garda Síochána and commandeers the assistance of his reluctant children as his wife lay convalescing in her Dublin hospital bed. His only means of securing additional capital is through physical labour in the context of extracting turf from a local bog with which he satisfied the winter fuel needs of key customers (including the local convent) in the nearest town, the proceeds of which he plans to use to be able to retire from the Gardaí, a job which he detests. The physical strain involved in collecting the supplies of turf causes his children to wither due to heavy fatigue:

They had to go to the bog every evening after school. The work was monotonous and tiresome, continual stooping to lift the sods off the ground into windrows and clamps, but not heavy, a child could do as much as a man. It was novelty first, Reegan incited them with sweets and odd

bottles of lemonade or an orange, but it was soon too much... ...They were left with no energy to face into their lessons and got into trouble in school the next day. Their faces began to shut, a mask on the weariness and bitterness, they laughed little, and started to grow twisted as the roots of a tree between rocks (*B*, 126-27).

Reegan imposes his will upon his household and leaves his children with no choice but to accede to his authority. His personal dream takes priority over all else and he is incapable of feeling sympathy for the difficult position he has put his children into. In treating his children in the manner that he does, Reegan behaves in a most arrogant and dictatorial way that mirrors the Ireland over which Éamon de Valera presides in an uncompromising partnership with the Catholic Church where both yield hegemonic power in Irish society. Ordinary citizens, young and old, are ideologically enslaved to an idea not of their making and which gradually diverges from tolerable limits that comes to have a detrimental effect on their welfare and development of the community at large. The land, so hard fought so from the British as means of liberation, paradoxically becomes a source of enslavement in an environment where protest is not entertained:

Reegan saw nothing. All he saw was turf saved and the money that'd give him the freedom he craved. He drove them with the same passion that he drove himself, without thinking that it might not be to them the road to the vision of sky and sun that he saw. Their faces shut. When they laughed it was with the bright metal of observant people, not with their hearts, and mostly they watched, nothing but watch...(Ibid).

Sergeant Reegan adopts a single-minded attitude toward his goal and even the terminal condition of his wife fails to feature as a major issue on his conscience. His children attempt to react in as regular a manner as they can when in the company of other members of the community, while suffering from a serious deficit of conviction within themselves. Reegan also works to secure his family's food supply by growing crops in the rear garden of the barracks in which he and his family reside. His salary is insufficient to ensure a rich diet for his family and so he is forced to be resourceful in

encountering the means to ameliorate the situation. It is necessary to safeguard the fruits of his efforts and he does so by spraying his crops to protect them from disease:

He felt the pressure on the pump as he drove it down to his hip. The two jets hissed out on the leaves. The strong, matted stalks broke apart as he backed up the furrow, the leaves showing a dull silver where they were upturned. Pools of blue gathered in the hollows of the leaves, they glistened green with wet, and then started to drip heavily in the silence, the way trees drip after rain. He had sown these potatoes, covered them with mould again when the first leaves ventured into the spring frosts, kept the weeds from choking them till they grew tall and blossomed, now he was spraying them against the blight this calm evening and he was happy (*B*, 129).

Reegan's need to grow crops of his own is a reflection of the relative poverty in which even officers of the state live in due to stifling social and economic conditions²⁸³ that would be expected to be a fundamental component of the malaise that characterise De Valera's Ireland as portrayed in McGahern's world. Once more, religious references are found in the quotidian conversation of ordinary parishioners where a passing neighbour comments on Reegan's strenuous efforts: "God bless the work" and Reegan answered: "And yours too, when you're at it" (*B*, 130). Just as Reegan reciprocates the good wishes from his neighbour, his commanding officer, Chief-Superintendent Quirke arrives at the barracks. Reegan detests his presence and the authority he represents and struggles to contain his rage against him. Quirke addresses Reegan directly:

"I noticed, Sergeant, that you're still supposed to be out on patrol?"

"It was three before I got back and I was in a rush to get this barrel out, it slipped my mind in the rush," he explained, fit to take Quirke by the throat as he listened to himself in the servile giving of explanation.

²⁸³ As previously mentioned in the historical context chapter of this thesis, Such was their predicament that in the late 1930s and early 1940s severe shortage in basic materials ensured that sporting events and race meetings were seldom held and there was no sugar available for home-jam making, newsprint was very scarce as were fertilizers and copper sulphate provisions. Only doctors and the clergy escaped the ban on the use of private cars. Beyond this, severe limitations on the supply of coal also caused a notable reduction in the output in electricity generation. Ó Grada, *A Rocky Road* (1997), pp. 9-11. See also footnote six above.

“It’s all right this time, but don’t let it happen again. In your position it gives bad example. If you and I don’t do our work properly, how can we look to them to do theirs?”

“That’s right, I suppose,” Reegan agreed with a slow, cynical smile woke on his face. Quirke had expected a clash, it wouldn’t have been the first, and what seemed this sudden agreeableness satisfied and flattered him, he looked on himself as a patient and reasonable man. Perhaps, at last, Reegan was taming down, he was getting some glimmer of sense (*B*, 131).

Quirke gains a false sense of security to the effect that some respect for him has grown within Reegan, but such an assumption is gravely mistaken as the latter retains heavily hostile toward him. This is evidenced where Reegan continues to adopt a contemptuous attitude toward his commander officer as he answers questions from the same as they stand in the garden to the rear of the barracks:

And what cases have you for next Thursday?” he changed affably, he wants to show Reegan that they weren’t enemies but in a team together, with a common cause and interest; and when Reegan outlined the few cases for him he began to discuss and explain Act this and Code that with a passion oblivious to everything but its petty object, while Reegan stood between the drills, the can on his back, the leakage seeping into his clothes. The listening smile faded to show frightening hatred as he listened, but he contrived to convert it into sufficient malicious cunning for Quirke not to notice (*B*, 131).

It is highly ironic that this ‘malicious cunning’ should persist between Reegan and Quirke since it so closely emulates the historical relation between the subaltern and coloniser. Declan Kiberd instantiates Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in analysing the dynamics of such a relationship. In that respect *Waiting for Godot* represents on stage the amnesia which afflicts an uprooted people (i.e. the Irish). Thus, the character Gogo is forced to treat every situation he is faced with as it were an entirely new phenomenon. Fulfilling his role as an ignorant tramp with no clear sense of their own future which in turn reveals that they find themselves waiting without hope ‘for a deliverance from a being in whom they do not really believe.’ In this way they share the fate of the *aisling* poets; they are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past since they have been denied the facility of fully knowing it. Left with no real alternative, these tramps muster what

little capacity they have to restore and re-establish a link with memories that have been stolen from them. But this is an impossible task as there are just too many gaps to bridge owing to interferences experienced and caused by a life marked by poverty, migration and continual disruption. This causes the tramps to suffer from a poorly developed sense of self and to remedy this condition they adopt short-term identities (e.g. Let's play Luck and Pozzo) or the feigning of emotion (e.g. Let's abuse each other). A parallel can be found with the Irish in England, or the black man in New York, these are people who feel they are constantly performing. Then they become consumed by the performative element found in every abusive relationship. What is striking in this situation is that the Irishmen portrayed here are not resident abroad but live within the Irish state and this reality demonstrates the irony of social and cultural dynamics of post-independent Ireland. It is in fact a powerful denunciation of this corrosive environment.²⁸⁴ Reagan thus enacts such a interpersonal dynamic, but this apparently goes unnoticed by Quirke. Even with the banishment of the imperial bogeyman, the old issues of subjugation and suspicion within a relationship of power persists within the new political paradigm of independent Ireland. It was hoped that the relationship between people could be more communal but since these issues re-appear in the new Irish state it stands as another cause for disappointment on Reagan's part.

As the superior officer continues to speak he recounts his acute disappointment at the response he received from another member of the force when he questioned him about legislation pertaining to illegal drugs. His incredulity at the answer proffered does commove Reagan:

Mrs. Cullen's Powders. He said Mrs Cullen's Powders was a dangerous drug. Can you credit that, Sergeant! What kind of respect can a man like that have for himself or his work? And that man would be the first to have his hand out for an increase of salary! And, I say, unless we raise the efficiency and morale of the Force, how can we expect to raise its status? (*B*, 132).

The moral sermon has no meaningful effect on the intended target and instead simply breeds deeper distrust and perpetuates insolence:

²⁸⁴ For a wider contextual argument of these points see, Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 538-41.

Reegan listened to the moral righteousness without feeling anything but his hatred. This bastard has associated himself with the Police Force, he thought shrewdly; his notion of himself is inseparable from it. Why should he go against him when the wind wasn't blowing his way, he'd wait his chance, and then let him watch out; but why should he do the strongman when the wind wasn't blowing right, now he'd throw the bait of flattery, and watch the egotism swallow and grow hungry for more (*B*, 132).

Reegan bides his time and allows himself to acquiesce in the tense peace that has persisted in the interaction as he does not yet possess the means to leave his employment that he now regards as a burden and a betrayal. In so doing he is being consistent with an attitude he has held for a considerable period of time, which he expresses at the beginning of *The Barracks* when he arrives home with gusto to inform his wife of whom he had seen while out on patrol:

The bastard Quirke!

"The Superintendent", she exclaims and asks as to what he was doing at that time of evening:
"What had him out, do you think?"

He was lukin' for a chance he didn't get, you can be sure!

He began to recount the clash, speaking with a slow, gloating passion and constant mimicry.

He stopped in front of me and pulled down the window and asked, 'Is that you, Reegan?

Reegan confirms his identity and wades into further conversation with his exasperated supervising officer under inclement atmospheric conditions:

"And what has you on a night like this?"

"I'm out on patrol, sir," says I.

"But are you mad, Reegan? Are you stone made? No man in his senses would be out cycling on a night like this without grave reason. Good God, Reegan, don't you realize that all rules and

regulations yield at a certain point to human discretion? Do you want to get your death, man, cycling about on a night like this?"

"‘Aye, aye, sir,’ says I. ‘But, I’ll not get the sack, sir.’"

No word was lost on the children was pretended to be busy with their exercises.

It was an old feud between their father and the Superintendent Quirke. They loved this save mimicry and it frightened them. They heard him laugh fiendishly, "That's shuk him! That's what tuk the wind outa his sails! That's what shut him up, believe me!"

With an audience witnessing his entire recount of having encountered Quirke on his rounds, Reegan gains greater enthusiasm in sharing his experience. His rebellion is not only against his supervising officer, but against the system that sustains him and that which he represents. An insensitive authoritarian regime that has come to embody the dystopian nature of what were once lofty-dreams.

Soon the topic of conversation veers toward his ill wife and on asking Reegan states that she is to return home the following week. She is taken home by ambulance after her surgery to continue recovering toward full-strength at home. Preoccupied by her gradually worsening state of health, she engages in reflection on the relatively low probability she has of overcoming her disease:

...The chances must be all against her, she'd think; she'd go home out of this and be able to walk and work about for a little while and then one day the pains would get too much and she'd have to go to bed to wait to die. That was the way, that was mostly the way, most of them went that way, and she'd have to lie down that way too. She was no different, that was the terrible thing, she was no more than a fragment of the same squalid generality (*B*, 137).

Elizabeth quickly comes to the conclusion that she is no different in suffering from anybody else, perhaps only in the way that she is so vividly aware of her own reality. She realises that she has joined the ranks of so many that had suffering under similar conditions before her and that she is just one person in a much larger universe of people. Her overwhelming circumstances and terminal state of health are directly

analogous in respect of the health of the public psyche and the stifling social and economic conditions in which people in McGahern's world live. The hegemonic position and the near-totalitarian features exhibited by the symbiotic relationship subsisting within the Church-State axis of power exercised throughout the community and the political culture severely retarded the development of freedom of conscience and its public manifestation particularly where the primary unit in the community of McGahern's world is the family, itself a symptom of a patriarchal power system. Such a toxic conglomeration of power acted as cancer at the heart of society and spread malaise throughout the community permitting only some very minor instances of deviations from established principles of conduct. Relief is sometimes sought through sporadic instances of jesting, for example when Garda Mullins directs his wit in the form of a Limerick to critique the conduct of the clergy:

Said the Bishop of old Killaloe,
'I am bored, I have nothing to do'
So he climbed on his steeple
An' pissed on his people,
Singing tooralaye – ooralaye-oo" (*B*, 150).

A little humour of this kind brought relief to Elizabeth in her loneliness within the metaphysical confines of her mind and the physical ones of the barracks itself. Soon after this event she feels a strong urge to reveal to her husband that she had been hoarding a sum of money that she had earned in her nursing days in London prior to their marriage. After some obfuscation, Reagan agrees to his wife's request that he accept the money as a kind of gift from her. Their conversation moves onto other matters before household chores claim their attention as evening time advances and this onset of evening returns the day to the night whence the Rosary must be said again: "Afterwards the long, dark evening was let rest in the kitchen. The rosary was said" (*B*, 159).

Much effort is exerted by the Church to not only strictly regulate social conduct and reinforce expected values, it also relied upon voluntary organisations to assist in

this mission so it could enlist the help of, for example, women who had time to partake in activities while their husbands were working and children at school. Elizabeth recalls how the local priest had canvassed her as part of his enterprise to have her join one such organisation, the Legion of Mary, something that she rebuffs. The narrator outlines the purpose of such organisations:

Soon after she had married he²⁸⁵ approached her to join the local branch of the Legion of Mary, a kind of legalized gossiping school to the women and a convenient pool of labour that the priests could draw on for catering committees. There was no real work for it to do, all the Catholics of the parish attended to their duties except a few dangerous eccentrics would not be coerced (*B*, 163).

Local priests sought to enlist the voluntary social services of women in the locality, those who refused were treated in an unpleasant manner and often shunned due to receiving mean-spirited criticism for refusing to become part of what was regarded as an organisation that provided a means for parishioners to fulfil both their civil and religious duties in the wider community. In this way it was possible to generate and propagate more religiously-tinged cultural capital. Refusal to form part of the organisation invites chastisement, an experience that Elizabeth recalls when she does not accept an invitation extended to her for this purpose:

“But come now, Mrs. Reagan. You must have a reason – why?”

“Because I dislike organisations.”

The priest attacks her principled stance and attempts to assert his superior social authority over her: “So, my dear woman, you dislike the Catholic Church: it happens to be an organisation, you know, that’s founded on Divine Truth” (*B*, 163). There is no rebuttal of the last remark, but Reagan finds the general tone of the folly-laden conversation tiresome. On having their own company restored with the departure of

²⁸⁵ The local parish priest.

Mullins, Casey and Brennan, Reegan laments the inertia that characterises the nature of his malaise-laden situation.²⁸⁶ “Nothin’ short of a miracle would change that crew, and there’s no mistake” (*B*, 174). This remark also captures Elizabeth Reegan’s sentiments on the matter, although her mortal condition presents an additional dimension to the implications of the statement as only divine intervention would suffice to stay her descent to the grave. Indeed, her terminal decline mirrors the general decay and malaise in Irish society. Elizabeth has begun her terminal journey, the end of her life forces her family to re-examine their own lives and they then must adopt the necessary measures to continue without her, just as Ireland began to witness the end of an old way of life and the birth of a new one. Desires for a better alternative permitted Irish society to adopt a more progressive attitude toward culture, community and the acquisition of education and wealth. Thus, while in the depths of a depressing environment for freedom of expression in the arts and a live censorship regime, hope was not extinguished, but neither was it entirely visible to those who sought it: ‘She was quiet. Nothing-short of a miracle would change any of their lives, their lives and his life and her life without purposes, and it seemed as if it might never come now, she change his words in her own mind., but she did not speak’ (*B*, 174).

²⁸⁶ One could argue here that it is this continued and enforced malaise that gives the impression of a dystopian narrative being the most suitable to encapsulate the dynamics at play in the situation. Many scholars report their understanding of a dystopian setting as one which portrays the future as a living hell, for example in Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 803. Other scholars refer to the oppressive societies whose depiction is expected to act as a catalyst for change, see Tom Moylan, ‘To Stand with Dreamers: On the Use Value of Utopia’, *The Irish Review*, No. 34 (Spring, 2006) pp.1-19, p. 13. Others still have noted how dystopias highlight how an imagined utopia will turn out badly in the future and it essentially pessimistic in its portrayal of anticipated consequences under a particular system, see Fátima Vieira, ‘The concept of utopia’, pp. 3-27 in Gregory Claeys, (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 17. Tom Moylan identifies an important feature of the typical narrative structure of the dystopia: an alienated character’s refusal of the dominant society (see Thomas Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Westview Press, 2000), p. 147. While Reegan may be difficult to characterise as rebelling against the system as a whole, he can be seen as raging against a key representation of it through his superior officer that represents the authority of state. The mere fact that lamentation of the situation actually happens suggests awareness of an unsatisfactory situation which requires remedy, a notion that dovetails with the sentiments expressed by Bill Ashcroft (2007) who notes that despite the fact: ‘Utopia is by definition impossible, an unachievable ideal...The concept of the utopian remains a conceptual anchor to any theory of a better world, any hope for social change and amenity...’ cited in Bill Ashcroft, ‘Critical utopias’, *Textual Practice*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (2007), pp. 411-431; p. 411.

Time advances and Christmas arrives and it provides another occasion for the manifestation of faith in the household particularly over dinner. Reegan leads the prayer: “(...) Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts which of thy bounty we are about to receive through Christ, our Lord. Amen.” Once the meal had been consumed another refrain was mobilised:

“We give thee thanks O Almighty God, for all they benefits, who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.” “...the meal began and ended in the highest form of all human celebration, prayer. It was a mere meal no longer with table and table-cloth and delf and food, it was that perfectly, but it was above and beyond and besides the wondrous act of their reality...” (*B*, 183).

So fundamental and second-nature has the act of prayer become (and thus forming a part of the *habitus*) that individuals need not dedicate excessive levels of attention to ensure its completion. Life is linked directly to God and it is believed the best way to celebrate it and give thanks is to engage in prayer to transmit such gratitude, another way in which the clergy succeed in making religion a part of everyday life and thus influence it. Once the meal concludes, the reader is again reminded of the fact that religious paraphernalia adorn the house such as where leisure activities such as card playing are unable to avoid images of the faith since the material used for the games are stored near a holy statute, itself receiving light from artificial illumination of a religious kind.

The day draws to a close and its end is finally allowed to be acknowledged by means of the saying of evening prayer. Acts of faith such as this are not necessarily a genuine testament to sincerely held religious conviction, but its outward appearance remains a social obligation: “Eventually it was time to pray and go to bed, the same prayers murmured while their minds wandered and dreamed as on every other evening of their lives, the beads in their fingers” (*B*, 185).

While Reegan gives the outward appearance of carrying on a normal life, Elizabeth’s condition continues to deteriorate and she weakens physically and this further descent prompts her to engage in the reflection of memories of her time prior to marriage when she worked as a nurse in London where she met Halliday, a doctor who

taught her how to think of greater questions about life. While at first Elizabeth's emotions may seem to suggest that she has grave doubts about her faith, the dignity with which she accepts her terminal decline as her thoughts progress suggests that her condition immerses her even more deeply into her faith. On this point Jean-Michel Ganteau asserts that: "Despite a certain number of lapses, she is subsequently drawn towards the acceptance of faith. She grows resigned to the impalpable substance of religious belief and ponders on the close relationship between faith and doubt".²⁸⁷ While it can be acknowledged that Elizabeth is impelled toward reflexivity by the discursive probing that Halliday engaged in during their time together, recognition must also be given to her own capacity to appropriate this capacity for deep-thinking. It may well be argued that in presenting Elizabeth in this way, McGahern highlights the increasing role of women outside the home in Irish society as this character shows considerable mental strength that would permit much greater critical reflection on the condition of women in the community. In *The Barracks* then, while Elizabeth is dying, her strong mental capacities attest to the promising and greater role women like her will come to play in the years to come in Ireland and thus challenge existing highly patriarchal structures. Her choice to embrace her faith also reveals the possibility that she has the opportunity wherein she could turn away from religiosity and seek meaning in the secular sphere which although unlikely, remains a possibility for other women and men as challenging circumstances force them to find answers beyond the power structures and the faith that had traditionally underpinned that power. It could also be argued that McGahern is acknowledging through the character of Elizabeth that women must be recognised in their own right as intelligent and valuable members of society outside the home and until their right to a fulfilling professional life is respected the community at large will continue to experience difficulties in modernising itself. Indeed, as Denis Sampson asserts, this would mean attitudes changing so as to admit, as in the case of Elizabeth, the right 'to an authentic sense of herself as a unique

²⁸⁷ Jean-Michel Ganteau, "John McGahern's *The Barracks*: An Interpenetrative Catholic Novel", *Études Britanniques Contemporaines* (Université de Paul Valéry, 1995), Janvier, pp. 25-40. p. 37

individual’²⁸⁸ beyond merely as wives and mothers, as issue which McGahern deals with obliquely in *Amongst Women*. However, it may also be the case that a catalyst is required before serious self-reflection can come about and Elizabeth credits Halliday for this initiative through what he had shared with her: “the first real books she’d ever been given which in turn had “changed her whole life, it was as if she’d put windows there, so that she could see out on her own world” (B, 87).

What can be seen as ironic about this awakening within Elizabeth is that it is prompted by a man to whom she was emotionally attached, although now in her past and deceased, he contrasts sharply with her husband, Reegan who cannot engage in such deep soul searching. The fact that she is effectively given the means to free her soul by one man and ends up having this facility rescinded by another man demonstrates that the power still rests in the hands of men who, at least for now, control the fate of all others. Moreover, since Halliday was an educated man and working in England stands as an indictment against the men in McGahern’s world (in Ireland) up to that point who do not defend women’s autonomy. McGahern’s highlighting of this situation permits the reader to see that changing male attitudes toward the role of women in Ireland had become strong enough to commit to paper and to be well received in novel form.

Elizabeth’s remembering of this time prompts her to draft a letter to an old colleague in London, but her motivation to do so quickly dissolves in despair as she denies her right to have dreamed of aspiring to anything other than a manual worker in the malaise of the community in which she lives. It is essentially an acknowledgement of her (and women in general) subordinated position in Irish society: as a woman and living in the role of mother to Reegan’s children she did not have any opportunities to pursue her own career or interests. In this respect, she believes the best course of action is to simply jettison any dreams of escaping the drudgery of her life. Thus her wish to acquire much greater personal autonomy and assert her individuality proves impossible:

²⁸⁸ Denis Sampson, *Outstaring Nature’s Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), p. 47.

(...) She'd no business playing games of fancy such as the letter, she talked with herself. She wasn't a leisured person, all her life she had to work with her hands, the most of her energy had been absorbed by that, little more than a performing animal; her praying and her thinking and reading just pale little sideshows....but the work had to go on, grinding, incessant, remorseless; breaking her down to its own dead impersonality, but never quite, and how often she had half-wished to be broken into the deadness of habit like most of the rest, it was perhaps the only escape. (...) (B, 188).

An unfulfilling life creates justifiable dissatisfaction, but since no real opportunities are available to remedy the situation the lack of alternative corrupts the conscience into finding solace in the very routines it has recoiled from. A situation of this kind is particularly restrictive for women and Elizabeth in particular, while Reegan redoubles his labours to collect turf so as to secure sufficient financial resources to gain freedom from the job for which he reserves such great distaste:

This year he had secured the contract to supply all the fuel to the laundry the Sisters of Mercy ran in the town, the biggest contract he'd ever got, and if it went lucky he'd have enough money to buy a good farm, he'd be his own master, and with his pension he'd not have to slave too hard...(B, 189).

Reegan seeks his freedom through voluntary extra labour to supply fuel to the Sisters of Mercy Convent in the town. He receives monetary payment for the delivery of the agreed material and thus slowly reaches his goal of freedom. Paradoxically, it is an institution of the Catholic Church that pays Reegan for his work and it is this money that he wishes to use to secure liberty from the great distaste he has acquired from his job as policeman in an ideological paradigm promoted and maintained by that same church. Throughout Ireland nuns such as those found in religious orders like the Sisters of Mercy maintained state-sanctioned and state-funded Magdalene Laundries where 'fallen' women'²⁸⁹ were taken or sent by their families, the clergy or other

²⁸⁹ 'Fallen women' were those women or girls who had become pregnant outside of wedlock and were then placed in the full-time care and residence of the religious orders where the child was given up for adoption and the mother often never left the institution for the rest of their natural lives. See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004) pp. 253-56.

representatives of official authority. They were not permitted to leave the grounds and were forced to work cleaning clothes for no pay and poor boarding. It was in such conditions that these women were abused in many ways, psychologically, physically and sexually. As the Catholic Church and its ideological partner, the Irish state, enjoyed an invincibly hegemonic position in Irish society for many decades, these abusive practices could not be challenged and would not be stopped if reported.²⁹⁰

Life goes on at the barracks and Reegan finds the time to inform Elizabeth of his plans to retire by the end of the summer, if circumstances permitted it to happen. While these plans occupy his mind, Reegan again overlooks his wife's accelerating decline that was about to reach critical proportions. The latter wishes to continue to struggle onwards until she can no longer stand and leaves her fate to God: "With an effort she rose out of the chair, swayed for a moment as if she half expected to be struck, and smiled as she managed to move towards the spool of thread on the sewing-machine. Her collapse would come at its own choosing" (*B*, 192-93).

Despairing at the vacuum of meaning, Elizabeth recoils from her innermost desire to cry out and seek greater meaning of the scheme of things out of fear of being regarded as eccentric and suffering derision from others:

She'd took silly or gone crazy, she'd have broken the rules. She could only cause painful concern to those involved with her and wring ridicule and laughter from those who were not, the thing that runs counter to the fabricated structure of safe passions must be slaughtered out of its existence (*B*, 193).

Critical reflection on quality of life issues was discouraged and the indoctrination process supported this agenda and thus aided the retention of established values. Deviation from preferred principles invites sanction and is thus avoided by all but the most resolute citizens. In her weakened state, Elizabeth abandons her failing desire to find greater meaning and reverts to a more pious strategy that she has been taught of finding parallels of her suffering to that of Christ:

²⁹⁰ See Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2012), pp. 323-332.

...Christ on the road to Calvary, she on the same road; both in sorrow and in ecstasy; He to save her in Him, she to save herself in Him-both to be joined for ever in Oneness. She'd gone to these devotions all her life, she'd only once fallen away, some months of bitterness in London. She saw her life declared in them and made known, the unendurable pettiness and degradation of her own failings raise to dignity and meaning in Christ's passion (*B*, 194).

In puritan-like, De Valera's Ireland as portrayed in McGahern's world, strong encouragement is given to the acceptance of the principle that the only true validation of the value of the human condition is to be found in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Any other extra-quotidian pondering is met with strong suspicion and where necessary, reprimand and sanctions. Once her illness reaches another critical juncture, Elizabeth becomes immobilised and bed-ridden. The doctor is called and he visits his patient at home. During the course of his attendance the doctor remarks on the changing nature of Irish society and answers Elizabeth's question in respect of where he and his family were to spend their summer holidays: "To the South of France and if we can manage the money," "probably across and down to Rome. We've had too much of the rain to ever want to see Ireland first, we should get out to the sun when we get the chance. Now it's in a lot of people's reach, and we're losing our inferiority complex about travel and culture and that, the pig-in-the-kitchen days are gone" (*B*, 208). As a member of the professional class in Ireland, the doctor is beginning to reap the benefits of the change in economic policy that has the effect of making Irish society more affluent. It is noted that the community is gradually gaining more confidence and shedding many of its inhibitions that had previously limited its potential:

Do you know, when you think, great changes have come over this country in the last years. Now we're reaping the fruits those men that won us our freedom sowed...There's a new class growing up in this country that won't be ashamed out of doing things because they haven't come out of big houses. I could walk this day into the Shelbourne Hotel as if I owned it, and I was born with no silver spoon (*B*, 208-9).

Éamon de Valera had left executive governance in Ireland in 1959 after his election as President of Ireland in that same year – he was replaced by a more economically friendly and global thinker Taoiseach Séan Lemass, who held office until 1966. Economic and educational reforms made it possible for the population to become more educated and thus acquire greater cultural and social capital, which in turn permitted a gradual dismantling of censorship provisions and the dissolution of the hegemonic position of the Catholic Church in Irish Society over in the times to come. It is notable that the censorship of McGahern's work occurred while De Valera still occupied the position of Taoiseach and that the reform of the censorship regime only came to be implemented after his retirement from executive politics. It is arguable that O' Malley educational reforms in the 1960s²⁹¹ played a central part in providing much greater educational opportunities for the people and in turn in augmenting the critical mass of cultural capital available and its propagation throughout the country. For many, however, these changes came at time when they had already reached a position in life that they could not reap the benefits of educational opportunities since they had entered the workplace and would not be able to re-enter full-time education or to take up part-time study.

Although her terminal condition precludes her from any further meaningful interactions with the world, Elizabeth is like many women and is not afforded the freedom to pursue activities beyond the care and welfare of their families. Thus, the wondrous world of which her doctor speaks is not a viable option for Elizabeth. Now beyond medical salvation she can still benefit from spiritual counselling and receives visits from her local parish priest who predictably insists that she rely on pious means for comfort: "You must pray to Mary, she has the ear of God, she speaks to God for us, we're one of the few nations in the world who understand Her importance. Don't you think we should have great devotion to Mary?"

Elizabeth is unequivocal in her response: "Yes, of course." The priest's response is demonstrative of the relative contempt the clergy generally hold people in: "There's no course about it, we should, and that's all" (*B*, 218).

²⁹¹ See historical context chapter of this thesis for more information on same.

While she is not in a position to challenge the uncharitable attitude adopted by the priest but was disgusted by it, Elizabeth does privately despair of her condition and laments the lack of choice she must live with. She also finds it difficult to accept the general malaise present in society and she believes it persists in people's acquiescence in the staleness that life has become in the country:

It was hard enough to accept the reality of her situation; but it was surely the last and hardest thing to accept its interpretations from knaves and active fools and being compelled to live in them as in strait-jackets. To be able to say yes to that intolerant lunacy so as to be able to go your own way without noise or interruption was to accept everything and was hardest of all to do (*B*, 219).

There is much credit a position that defends that this attitude represents an acknowledgment of the oppressive nature of Irish society that forms the central context of McGahern's world. She cannot expel the priest from her company, but she does allow her mind to wander to more agreeable circumstances where she recalls parts of the verse of the Rosary that her husband so faithfully says everyday:

Mystical Rose
Pray for us
Tower of David
Pray for us
Tower of Ivory,
Pray us
House of Gold
Pray for us
Ark of the Covenant,
Pray for us
Gate of Heaven,
Pray for us.
Gate of Heaven,
Pray for us.
Morning Star (*B*, 219).

Much irony can be found in this position and it also reveals the depth to which religious indoctrination has colonised Elizabeth's mind in how she attempts to lose herself in prayer as a mental escape from the company of the priest who preaches the same faith from which such prayers are taken. This is evidence and by producing it, McGahern denounces the widening chasm between genuine private faith and the institutional processing of Christianity by the church that in turn results in an irreversible loss of credibility for the Church in the eyes of the public.²⁹²

Further segments of Elizabeth's thoughts reveal her acknowledgment of this very process of indoctrination and the point at which she began aware of the process:

The rosary had grown into her life: she'd come to love its words, its rhythm, its repetitions, its confident chanting, its eternal mysteries: what it meant didn't matter, whether it meant anything at all or not it gave the last need of her heart release, the need to praise and celebrate, in which everything rejoiced (*B*, 220).

The Catholic faith, through the long-term and careful moulding of the habitus²⁹³, is seen to become an integral part of the personal philosophy and psychological nature of individuals who come to instinctively fall back on their faith to judge all other values, objects and experiences encountered as part of the human condition. Whereas Elizabeth admits some shortcomings in the intensity of her own faith, this weakness has largely gone unnoticed and is largely neutralised after so many years of having her habitus harmonised by the religious routines so faithfully observed and protected by her husband within the Reegan household. The final hours of Elizabeth's life again demonstrate the unmistakable and irrefutable presence of religious tropes in her life and the world she inhabits. It is the ringing of church bells at strategic times during the day

²⁹² See the discussion on the impact of the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on Irish society in Ferriter (2012), p. 364; also dealt with in the historical context chapter of this thesis.

²⁹³ As Eamon Maher also notes in this respect, it is an environment 'dominated by rigidity, hierarchy and a lack of freedom. The Catholic Church is a controlling influence, dictating how one should behave in church, at school, or in the bedroom....British hegemony has been replaced by a different type of tyranny, one in which Church and State collude in order keep people in subjection.' E. Maher and P. Butler, 'John McGahern: his Time and his Places', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (2016), pp. 27-54, p. 30

that manifests this reality. She wakes from a drowsy, medication-induced slumber and engages in conversation with her step-daughter Una:

“That was the bell, Willie, wasn’t it?”

“Twas, Elizabeth,” Una answered amid noise of cooking activities from the ground floor.

“I wasn’t sure, all day I seem to hear strange bells ringing in my mind, church bells. It was the bell, wasn’t it?”

“ ‘Twas,” she answered with unease.

“Did they come from the bog yet?”

“No, not till evenin’, Daddy has a day’s monthly leave, they brought bread and bottles of tea in the socks.”

“But they were to be back to go to devotions, it grows cold on the bog in the evenings. But that was the first bell, wasn’t it?”

“No, ‘twas the Angelus, Elizabeth,” the child remarked in tense surprise.

“It’s the bell for the Angelus,” Elizabeth repeated as means of reaching some kind of understanding of the fact.

Elizabeth has now begun her final descent on her mortal coil and the reader is witness to the collapse of her body and power of perception:

“But why did you draw the blinds?”

“What blinds?” the frightened child retorted.

“The blinds of the window.”

“No, there’s no blinds down, but it’ll not be long till it’s brighter. The sun’ll be round to this side of the house in an hour.”

“There’s no clouds?”

As these words were uttered Elizabeth took her leave of the mortal world. A bustle of activity ensues in pursuit of organising the funeral. Relatives and friends are notified and provisions are acquired to be given to visitors to the house. A brown habit is bought to dress the corpse and the latter is laid out for the wake. People visit to pay their respects. Company for the deceased arranged and the midnight rosary said on time. The funeral takes place after a day had elapsed. As mourners begin to make their way out of Elizabeth’s service in the church it is noted how certain families are buried in particular positions in the cemetery and how this evolved since the foundation of the Irish state:

Before the church door was the King-Harman plot the landowners of the district before the New Ireland had edged them out, the deer parks of their estate split into farms, the great beech, walks gradually cut down, their Nash mansion that once dramatically overlooked the parks and woods on one side and the lake with its islands on the other burned to the ground (*B*, 223).

Mourners are witness to a statement of a key period in Irish history, which has now become part of the colonial narrative as the Irish state navigates its way through the maturation of its own existence. Where one generation lived through the experience of seeing unwanted non-Irish citizens departed national shores, Elizabeth’s passing marks a milestone in being one of the first of her age group in the community to pass away, thus providing an opportunity for the next generation to assert its own identity, an act she was unable to complete due to her illness and her position in society. Her husband survives her and is in a position to take the necessary steps to rebel against the authority which he associates with corrupting the utopian designs he held in youth to yield to a situation that shares many of the characteristics found in a dystopian narrative. In the months after his bereavement, Reagan’s determination to rebel against his supervising officer and gain his autonomy on leaving the police force intensifies: ‘It grew and grew as he watched Quirke more. He’d smash him if it was the last thing he did, and he seemed to dog the barracks these days, the other policemen as much as Reagan, with

surprise early morning inspections and oral examinations of their knowledge of police duties...' (B, 226).

Reegan allows himself to show much greater disrespect toward Quirke in the hope of provoking conflict and thereby create an opportunity to openly defy his authority. Reegan corrects his superior officer on the name of a piece of legislation and awaits the inevitable result. Once Reegan is asked to confirm whether in fact he has been supplying turf to local institutions, the scene is set for a final confrontation:

"I've been informed that you've supplied the Convent Laundry and half the town with fuel, Sergeant," Quirke advanced.

"And what if I did?" Reegan stiffened.

"We'll pass that point for the moment. May I ask you this one question, Sergeant? Do you intend to stay long more in the police? Why, Sergeant, are you a policeman anyhow?"

Reegan mustered the best sarcasm he can for that moment and replies: "Is it the regulation answer you want?"

"Any answer!" Quirke offers, now in a state of undisguised fury.

"To keep from starvin' I suppose,"

"And you don't believe you have a responsibility in the matter? You don't believe you should do a fair job of work for a fair remuneration," he scowled.

"I don't believe anything nor care,"

"Well, I'll see that you'll act something at least, I'll see that much, Sergeant."

"You can see to what you like!" Reegan declares (B, 227-28).

After further heated discussion, and inferences of flexibility that Quirke claims he had extended to Reegan following the death of his wife, exception is taken to this

remark by the latter and an apology is issued. However, relations between the two have irretrievably broken down and before the Superintendent leaves he issues a stern warning: "Things have passed out of bounds. This station might as well not exist, except as an example in everything that no police station should be" and finally adds: "There'll have to be changes," whereupon he closes the exterior door and vacates the premises (*B*, 228). Since administrative standards in the barracks continue to remain unsatisfactory, Sergeant Quirke is forced to return and confront Reagan once more. A serious confrontation ensues whence Reagan engages in a verbal assault on his former superior officer since he has just now informed him of his resignation:

"No, you can't. I wore the Sam Browne too, the one time it was dangerous to wear it in this balls of a country. And I wore to command-men, soldiers, and not to motor around to see if a few harmless poor bastards of policemen would lick me fat arse, while I shit about law and order. And the sight of a belt on somebody else never struck me blind!" (*B*, 231).

Quirke leaves astounded and a sense of suspended animation takes hold within the barracks. As the other officers in the barracks recover their sense of perspective they begin to receive telephone enquiries from other police stations seeking further information as to the events that took place on that occasion (*B*, 232). Events start to enter memory and night approaches and as it does so the reader is provided with a final reminder of the religious atmosphere continually persisting in the barracks and the family home that it contains: 'The night had come, the scarlets of the religious pictures faded, their glass glittered in the flashes of firelight and there seemed a red scattering of dust from the Sacred Heart lamp before the crib on the mantelpiece' (*B*, 232).

Reagan's final act is one of defiance and it is his only option since he can no longer live within the constraints of a regime he believes has betrayed idealistic values. For him, the Ireland in which he lives resembles restrictive cultural environment where social mobility is more often dream than reality. However, given that he has sufficient freedom to be able to rebel, there is hope that with the passage of time changes will come about that will alter the dynamics of his world and the lives of others.

As the household begins to quieten down before retiring for the night, the children step into their daily chore of closing the blinds on the winds and execute the task with gusto, each shouting: “My blind was down the first!” exactly as they had announced at the end of another day revealed to the reader on page eight of *The Barracks*. Thus, it is possible to look upon this text as a play in which characters are forced to act out their lives very much restricted by the restraints of a stage and also by the ideological and confessional constraints placed upon them by the system of values that govern the community in which they live. Indeed, readers are left in ignorance as to the fate of the Reegan family now that Elizabeth has passed away leaving the children with only one parent, and he has now become unemployed through his own resignation. There seems relatively little hope other than emigration for these children as they mirror the fate of so many others than have experienced a flight of conscience followed by actual emigration. The future remains uncertain, but this does not mean a remedy cannot be found since this is the era in Irish history when policy makers began to take deep-rooted economic problems seriously and when international investment began to make its effects felt in Irish society. While there may be a fog over the future, the winds of change make it possible for the clear blue sky to become visible once more and path forward can be found. While Reegan has been widowed for a second time, he has survived his loss and has succeeded, albeit in brutal fashion, in leaving the employment of An Garda Síochána. In so doing he has freed himself of an oppressive element in his life, but he does so at a cost: both a financial and that of prestige. He no longer has a steady income to support his household and the authority he held as part of the state police force will evaporate over time. Thus, while he achieves his ambition to achieve full autonomy, he does so at a relatively high cost. It perhaps a lesson that risk-taking is necessary to bring about change and that change must begin with oneself before it can brought about elsewhere.

2.2 Weakening the shadows: *The Dark*

McGahern's second novel, *The Dark*, was published in 1965. A controversial text from the outset, it was banned immediately from the moment it was published.²⁹⁴ The title of the text is highly revealing of the material within the book itself and its origin can be traced directly to the well-known W.B. Yeats poem "The Choice" which establishes a relationship between choice and darkness:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.²⁹⁵

The young protagonist of *The Dark* must navigate the difficult circumstances that this symbolism of darkness that pervades as the title of the novel indicates.²⁹⁶ While the young man declines to unambiguously adopt the life of an artist consumed by seeking perfection of the work, he does clearly turn away from the pursuit of a "heavenly mansion" as a *raison d'être*, itself a complex question as whether this would refer to material success or expecting the reward of eternal life.

The principal themes of *The Dark* are three-pronged pertaining to adolescent sexuality, the uncertainty of vocation, the abuse of parental authority and the effects it has on its victim – the protagonist is portrayed as he experiences self-awakening and comes to assert himself. However, the ending is not definitive and readers are left with the impression that certain matters remain unresolved with the conclusion of the text. Although these are distinct fictions, with autonomous plots and characters, *The Dark* can be seen as containing many features that would make a discrete sequel to *The Barracks*. Where readers are witness to the dying mother in the first novel, they also accompany the journey of the son in *The Dark* who is forced to continue without her. A complex narrative technique is employed in the former that includes all three kinds of

²⁹⁴ The circumstances of the banning are clearly outlined in the historical context section of this thesis. For further reference see Val Nolan (2011), 'If it was just th'oul book...': a history of the McGahern banning controversy', *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 261-279.

²⁹⁵ W. B. Yeats, "The Choice", in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 278.

²⁹⁶ Sampson (1993), p. 64.

person-perspectives and this sometimes challenges the reader to identify why the author does this as well as trying to understand the apparent difficulty in reconciling the plot with its conclusion.²⁹⁷

The narrative structure commences with the vicious symbolic rape in Chapter One followed in Chapter Three by a disturbing parody of seductive behaviour in a focalized third-person voice which gradually shifts to a more personal stance. As the reader advances through the text first and second-person narrators materialise (e.g. ‘...With one savage bound and swing he sent you hurtling against the table, you felt the wood go hard into the side, but no pain, it was almost a kind of joy. You came back from the table and able to shout...’ (D, 36), ‘Dazed you got up, and pulled aside the curtain. The world was unreal. All your life had been gathered into the Concession...’ (D, 42), ‘You started with fright when your arm was touched, it was your father...’ (D, 43), ‘As the struggle outside eased it grew worse within the skull. You could get no control. You’d go weeks without committing any sin...’ (D, 53), ‘...A secret world was around her. Her thighs moved on the saddle, you got conscious of the friction of your own thighs, got rouses, desperate in case she’d notice...If you had twenty miles to travel it wouldn’t be enough...’ D, 57), and this marks the point when the unnamed protagonist assumes the role of narrator-protagonist. What features as a minor theme in *The Barracks* becomes a major theme in *The Dark*; that of the vulnerability of children in the face of the abuse of parental power. In *The Dark*, the parental figure, Mahoney exercises tyrannical authority over his children and derives the primary source of his authority from his physical power and from threatening and actual physical violence, coercion, starvation and abuse: ‘They all got beatings, often for no reason...’ (D, 11).²⁹⁸ For James Whyte, Mahoney is equally as much a victim as his son is since he ‘is clearly a victim of his environment’,²⁹⁹ but this stance is contradicted by Dermot McCarthy who defends Mahoney should be seen as a brutal victimizer whose vile animus is ‘the dark’ which emanates from the core of his character. In this way then, McGahern’s

²⁹⁷ Dermot McCarthy, *John McGahern and the Art of Memory* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 83.

²⁹⁸ McCarthy (2010), p. 86.

²⁹⁹ James Whyte, *History, Myth and Ritual in the Fiction of John McGahern: Strategies of Transcendence* (Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 38.

work highlights the source of this core as being ‘a society in flux’, which in itself maligns the fundamental nature of McGahern’s work.³⁰⁰ In his Memoir, the author identifies the source of darkness that envelops the text as being directly associated with his late father’s secretive ways. The result is a symbolic duality of father-darkness and mother-light (*M*, 203). This is consistent with a memory McGahern recounts of when as a baby he attempted to walk into the sun, an which appears to be linked to a connection established by his older self between the sunlit recovery his ‘lost beloved’ (i.e. his mother) in the conclusion of his memoir (*M*, 11-12, 270-272). On the other hand, his father inspired a feeling that ‘there was...something dark or forbidding in his personality’ (*M*, 226). And this allied with his father’s ‘practically pathological’ sense of secretiveness (*M*, 35, 57) led him to believe that ‘A life from which the past was so rigorously shut out had to be a life of darkness’ (*M*, 271).

In Chapter 5 young Mahoney’s search for a way out of the darkness leads him to initially consider entering the priesthood in pursuance of honouring a promise he made to his late mother, but which he now feels unable to honour (*D*, 33). That promise also surfaces in *The Leavetaking*, McGahern’s next novel. Deep guilt within the boy’s conscience triggered by his developing sexuality is the root cause of his anguish over his promise. He recalls making that promise, ‘one day I’d say Mass for her’ (*D*, 33), but this recollection is tainted as it is conceived after the boy is masturbating. The narrator-protagonist (i.e. the young Mahoney) goes downstairs to engage in some study and as he examines a book for that purpose a memorial card for his mother falls out instantly drawing out the memory of the promise to his beloved (*D*, 33).

Chapter five also stands as the point at which the important theme of Confession is introduced. Its insertion comes about in a rather comical manner as the boy pictures himself in his mind’s eye confessing to ‘one hundred and forty impure actions with himself’ in the four weeks prior to his last Confession (*D*, 31). But this humour is soon displaced by a more serious attitude toward the sacrament where the narrator refers to it as ‘a judicial process in which the penitent is at once the accuser, the person accused, and the witness, while the priest pronounces judgement and sentence.’ *The Dark* is thus

³⁰⁰ McCarthy (2010), p. 86.

a 'self-examination' and the second-person voice is appropriate to facilitate that kind of process of story-telling (e.g. 'You couldn't have Mary Moran if you went to be a priest and you couldn't be a priest as you were. The only way you could have her anyhow was as an old whore of your mind, and everything was growing fouled' (*D*, 57-58), 'You had come. You were in the priest's house, you could draw back the linen sheet and get into bed. A picture of your father's house in your mind, all the others sleeping there miles away, and you here...' (*D*, 68). Readers are given a description of the church where the atmosphere in the building leads to penitents' queueing 'to judge themselves' (*D*, 39) and it is the application of the second-person voice that supplies a particular depth to the scene as well as high-velocity effect of present-pastness and past-presence in the verb forms chosen (*D*, 40).³⁰¹

It is nearly always the perspective of young Mahoney that is promoted by the narrator throughout *The Dark*, in what could otherwise be a standard realist text were it not for the complex and unusual narrative organization that it exhibits. Relative little that is not perceived by the young Mahoney features as part of the narrative. As the narrative changes from the third-person to the second the first-person narrator momentarily materialises. Chapters one to four are characterised by a third-person narrator, while chapters five to seven are served by a second-person narrator. The next fourteen chapters alternate between third person; chapters eight, nine, eleven and twenty-four to twenty-seven, chapters ten, twenty-eight, twenty-nine and thirty marked by the use of the second-person. Chapters twenty-two and twenty-three are notable for their use of the first-person. Alternate uses of the different kinds of narrator are to be found in the remaining chapters. Chapter thirty-one and the final one in *The Dark* is noteworthy as the narrative strategy applied is not settled. Mahoney the patriarch (as opposed to and father of young Mahoney, the protagonist-narrator) has his acts reported in the third person but is not referred to by personal pronouns.

Young Mahoney's lack of certainty in his own character manifests itself in his personality and this in turn presents itself in the shifting nature of the narrative that comprises *The Dark*. As a result, he is unable to settle upon a single, coherent

³⁰¹ An argument utilised by McCarthy (2010), pp. 91-92.

construction of himself and as such it is neither “I”, “you”, nor “he.” In the final chapter of the book the protagonist no longer exists as an “I” other than in direct speech, which is highly indicative of McGahern’s subtle strategy to exhibit how the environment portrayed in *The Dark* depicts individuality which is subsumed entirely by a stifling environment. In this regard, David Malcolm suggests that *The Dark* is distinctly dissimilar from McGahern’s other novels in that there is no heavy reliance on circularity as found in the works of Joyce such as *Finnegans Wake* and Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* and McGahern’s other works.³⁰² However, after the text journeys through first, second and third-person perspectives, young Mahoney’s narrative voice finally attains the position of a dispassionate, God-like Flaubertian stance that grants a degree of stability unseen up to that point of the text. In this *The Dark* shares traits with *The Pornographer* and *The Leavetaking* in emulating the same familiar Proustian approach. These three texts stand as autobiographies of their respective protagonists but eventually give way to a point that the protagonist-narrator is granted the liberty to become narrators of their own lives. A certain significance has been observed in this approach by Roger Shattuck whose exposition of the value of the structure found in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* illuminates the contours of the narrative appropriated by McGahern:

Proust’s ending leads us firmly out of the Search as Marcel’s story of growing up and across into a symmetrical mirror-novel, consisting of all the same words and incidents, this time recording the Narrator’s story of recording Marcel’s story. A new circumambulation begins, this time not of living the events, but of writing them. As Proust’s I contains two persons, his novel contains two stories.³⁰³

With its two stories, *The Dark* is sustained by its protagonist the young Mahoney who lives the trauma of having lost his mother in early childhood. In common with *The Barracks*, he lives with his two sisters in northwest rural Ireland under the care of his dictatorial father who often exhibits tyrannical tendencies. The social and cultural environment in which these characters reside is a highly puritan environment that is

³⁰² Malcolm (2007), p. 32.

³⁰³ Roger Shattuck, *Proust’s Way: a field guide to In Search of Lost Time* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), pp. 168-69.

governed by the mores of Roman Catholic doctrine, a philosophy that is cynically appropriated by the family patriarch, who himself harbours resentment of the clergy, to justify his mean-spirited and abusive behaviour that he uses to impose his will on his children. There is also a dysfunctional and ignorant stance toward sexual matters in the household, a situation aggravated by serious abuse affected by the father whose primary victim is his son. De Valera's Ireland encouraged ambiguous and restrictive attitudes in respect of all matters pertaining to sex and sexual morality, a stance which served only to strengthen ignorance to a point where insalubrious attitudes came to the fore due to fervent curiosity about such sensitive matters, a situation which belied official Irish state portrayals of the country as a wholesome and saintly community.³⁰⁴

Opening with an accusative tone, *The Dark* begins tracing the tumultuous relationship between father and son, with the latter charged with employing an expletive that causes grave offense to the conservative morals of the Mahoney household. Tensions escalate quickly between father and son:

"Say what you said because I know."

"I didn't say anything."

"Out with it I tell you."

"I don't know I said anything."

"F-U-C-K is what you said, isn't it? That profane and ugly word. Now do you think you can bluff your way out of it?"

"I didn't mean, it just came out."

³⁰⁴ Literature has often reflected the challenges posed to sexual behaviour by oppressive environments. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) also deals with puritan attitudes toward sexual matters. In that situation citizens are expected to engage in sexual relations for the sole purpose of procreation and pleasure from such activity is regarded as contrary to official doctrine. A number of other texts supply equally valid examples of the same including: Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* (1985); Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976); Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), amongst others. For a more extensive discussion on how the power relations created and perpetuated by specific constructs of gender politics and control see: Lyman Tower Sargent, Lucy Sargisson, "Sex in Utopia: Eutopian and Dystopian Sexual Relations", *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (2014), pp. 299-320.

“The filth that’s in your head came out, you mean. And I’m going to teach you a lesson for once. You’d think there’d be some respect for your dead mother left in the house. And trying to sing dumb-as if butter wouldn’t melt. But I’ll teach you” (*D*, 7).

Mahoney Senior’s sinister commentary prepares the reader for the next step he takes against young Mahoney: corporal punishment. The boy is then ordered to make his way to one of the upstairs bedrooms despite his continuing protests:

“I didn’t mean it, Daddy. I didn’t mean it, it just slipped out.”

“Up the stairs. March. I’m telling you. Up the stairs.”

As young Mahoney is forced to climb the stairs against his will, his father menacingly narrates his ascension through the house: “March, march, march” (*D*, 8). In a calculated manoeuvre, Mahoney Senior directs young Mahoney not go into his own room but to enter his sisters’ bedroom. His intent is to maximise the humiliation suffered.

Mahoney’s Catholic habitus is reinforced by the religious imagery around the family home and this imagery comes into view as the young Mahoney enters the room in which he is to receive his punishment: The two large beds where all the girls slept faced the door, the little table between them, and above it on the wall the picture of the Ascension (...) (*D*, 8). Young Mahoney takes his place in the room only under duress and his presence there is a coerced as the faith that is force-fed to him and his siblings by his father. His disgust for his father begins to spill over into the faith the father represents to him as the father begins to resemble an ornament of sociocultural tradition that is now being questioned.

In a manner that reveals a discernible degree of sadism, Mahoney gradually demands that his son remove more and more items of clothing until he is left standing completely naked: “I’m going to teach this gent a lesson. Your sister can be witness of this. Now off with your clothes. I’m going to teach you a lesson. Quick. Strip. Off with your clothes.” (*Ibid*). This chilling order is quickly followed by further demands:

“Off with your jersey. Quick. We can’t stand here all day,” a white froth showed on his lips. The eyes stared out beyond the walls of the room. The belt twitched against his trousers, an animal’s tail. A plywood wardrobe and a black leather armchair stood beside the empty fireplace. Mona rose out of the bedclothes in fright at their coming (*Ibid*).

Mahoney’s publicly pious behaviour compliments his private persona in the family home as he can draw legitimacy from the former to impose a form of tough-love through exacting brutal physical punishment on his son in order to coerce an Irish brand of puritan philosophy of wholesome thoughts and exemplary behaviour. This strategy achieves little other than generating a loathing in the son for his father and highlights a means by which he can distinguish himself in his own thoughts as being separate from his father’s idealised designs for the development of his character. This enforcement strategy was also frequently employed in residential institutions that fell under the management of Catholic religious orders. Despite the outward appearance of calm and order the clergy presented, these actions serve to demonstrate a very different persona beyond the public eye. Such behaviour was carried with the collusion and consent of the Irish state, under whose responsibility all civil conduct fell.³⁰⁵

What may have otherwise appeared to be a tranquil and collected persona, is revealed to be animalesque and vicious in nature. Thus, the implement utilised by Mahoney to enforce his will on his powerless son embodies the relatively untamed forces of the raw energy of the human spirit, of Mahoney’s own habitus that in turn leads him to seek to reproduce the standards of conduct to which he himself had been indoctrinated into. Young Mahoney now stands naked before his father and sister.

³⁰⁵ Physical and sexual abuse occurred in residential institutions managed under the auspices of the Irish Catholic Church, but with the approval and funding of the Irish state. Several reports into these situations have been compiled in recent years. For further detail see: Andrew Auge, Louise Fuller, John Littleton and Eamon Maher, ‘After the Ryan and Murphy Reports: A Roundtable on the Irish Catholic Church’, *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring, 2010), pp. 59-77; Peter Guy, ‘Reading McGahern in light of the Murphy Report’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 99, No. 393, Power and Accountability in Ireland (Spring 2010), pp. 91-101; Anthony Keating, ‘Marlborough House: A Case Study of State Neglect’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 93, No. 371 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 323-335; Claire McLoone-Richards, ‘Say Nothing! How Pathology within Catholicism Created and Sustained the Institutional Abuse of Children in 20th Century Ireland,’ *Child Abuse Review*, Vol. 21, (2012), pp. 394-404 and Harry Ferguson, ‘Abused and Looked After Children as ‘Moral Dirt’: Child Abuse and Institutional Care in Historical Perspective’, *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (January 2007), pp. 123-139.

Stripped of his dignity, he sits completely dominated by his father. No defences remain, he is at the mercy of the family tyrant.

Mahoney takes pleasure in dictating how his son should behave: “He just moved closer. He didn’t lift a hand, as if the stripping compelled by his will alone gave him pleasure” (*D*, 8). While maintaining this attitude, Mahoney issues a final instruction before he raises his hand against his son: “Into that chair with you. On your mouth and nose. I’ll give your arse something it won’t forget in a hurry” (*D*, 9). A final protest from young Mahoney is ignored entirely as his fear overcomes his ability to control his bowel movements. The belt strikes the arm of the leather three times, each blow sending a psychological shockwave through young Mahoney who crouches in utter fright as his father demands continued submission: “Don’t move and shut that shouting,” and when he was reasonably still except for the shivering and weeping, the leather came for the third time exactly as before. He didn’t know anything or what he was doing or where the room was when the leather exploded on the black armrest beside where his ear was’ (*D*, 9-10). Young Mahoney is rendered temporarily unaware of his surroundings indicating the depth of his fear and disorientation due to the grave psychological abuse perpetrated upon him by his sadistic father. This incident is a precursor to the nightly horrors of sexual abuse that young Mahoney was to experience at the hands of his father later in the book. Denis Sampson (1993) suggests that such physical and psychological violence that the father employs under the ruse of ‘moral custodian’ so as to “teach a lesson” has the effect of causing a change in both parties where it “...quickly reduces both father and son to involuntary states of being below the level of conscious thought.” In this context, he defends that the “...father’s power is associated with “measured passion”, “blood,” and animal instincts reflecting frustrated sexuality...”³⁰⁶ Repression and stigmatisation of sexual desire where it fell outside a procreation agenda formed a vital part of the conservative social mores adopted by the patriarchal Church-State axis of power in the Irish state. It thus has much significance in appearing in McGahern’s fiction.

³⁰⁶ Sampson (1993), p. 65.

Where no actual physical violence is used, a psychological violence is exerted instead that actively prejudices the healthy functioning of composure and thought. This is manifested in young Mahoney's slow and agonising effort to replace his garments after his humiliating experience:

It was a real struggle to get each piece of clothing on after he'd gone, the hands clumsy and shaking. The worst was the vapoury rush of thoughts, he couldn't get any grip on what had happened to him, he'd never know such a pit of horror as he'd touched, nothing seemed to matter any more. His mother had gone away years before and left him to this (*D*, 10).

Young Mahoney lives in a miserable situation and remembers things as being better before his mother died, a bereavement that overshadows all their lives in the family household. His trauma at receiving gratuitous corporal punishment leaves him unable to form a clear line of thought in respect of his future ambitions, affects which linger to appear again later in the novel.

In his almost continuously vain attempts to assert his own personal freedom and establish bodily integrity, young Mahoney seeks to return to some kind of calm from this brutal treatment. To do so he retreats to the only lavatory that serves the house, an outside facility where he makes his way to: '...the old bolted refuge of the lavatory, with the breeze blowing in its one airhole. There they all rushed hours as these to sit in the comforting darkness and reek of Jeyes Fluid to weep and grope their way in hatred and self-pity back to some sort of calm' (*D*, 10). From darkness they come to seek calm in further darkness, from chaos to calm in the absence of light. This is, however, a paradoxical moment since the dark suggests inability to see the light, obscurity of things that the patriarch of the house wishes to keep hidden. Thus, seeking refuge from 'dark' practices in yet another environment that enjoys a deficit of light suggests that the character has become so accustomed to abuse that the lack of freedom in his life acts as a force of incarceration over his consciousness, if only temporarily, but that forces him to love such limitations.

The oppressive and abusive environment of the Mahoney household has conditioned the children of the family into suppressing their affection for their callous

father and this approach is adopted as a means of demonstrating their disapproval of his doggedly deleterious behaviour. Indeed, this violent conduct firmly alienated father from offspring since they were victims of his corporal punishment on the slightest whim and none at all: 'They all got beatings, often for no reason, because they laughed when he was in foul humour, but they learned to make him suffer-to close their life against him and to leave him to himself...He'd put himself outside and outside they'd make him stay ...' (*D*, 11).

At times, however, the human need for relief overcomes their resolute resistance, a weakness which their father takes full advantage of in an effort to further his desire for sheer self-gratification. This weakness is brought forth by Mahoney Senior's gestures of generosity in the form of offering his children sweets, trips away from home and other outdoor adventures: "(...) Neither brutality nor complaining could force a way in but it was not so easy to keep him out when he changed and offered them an outing, to Duffy's circus, or a day on the river (...)" (*D*, 11). Grave apprehension tinges the children's reaction to their father's offer: "They'd make no answer, they'd watch him and each other, they didn't trust." The children waited calmly for further conversation, which came relatively quickly: "Why can't you speak out? We could go after first Mass and bring sandwiches and make a day of it" a remarked which elicited a tentative note of approval: "It'd be nice," they weren't sure, they didn't trust enough to want to go. A final enticement with more concrete detail succeeds in securing their consent: "We'd be able to get bottles of lemonade to drink with the sandwiches and Knockvicar. We might get a few pike too" (*D*, 12). The children's need to be happy and to be treated favourably by their father takes precedence over cynicism and proceed to agree to the suggestion: "And suddenly they trusted again because they wanted, he was their father, this time might be different and happy. They laughed. Tomorrow they'd go together in the tarred boat to Knockvicar" (*Ibid*).

Morning arrives and Mahoney and his children take their places in the tarred boat. They row out onto the lake and begin fishing. Much praise emanates from Mahoney for his children. As they begin a renewed effort to catch a second fish, his generous humour reaching an apogee: "It's only eleven yet and we have a right pike"

and his speech was interrupted by the sound of people conversing and the passage of vehicles across the lake as they made their way to mass amidst the ringing of the church bells. Mahoney notes the importance of attending religious services, and praises doing so as early as possible: “They’re starting into Mass now. If you’re not early afoot and at first Mass there’s no length left in the day. It’s gone and wasted” (*D*, 13). Religious piety and observance of religious ritual such as mass attendance and daily family prayers in the home form a fundamental part of the lives of devout Catholics, where deviance from such standards was met with much disdain and, where necessary, practical sanctions to discourage further breaches.³⁰⁷

Mahoney and his offspring continue their efforts to land more fish, but Mahoney’s patience quickly dissipates. He soon takes out his frustrations on his children and charges: “Now do you see,” as he rested the oars against the sides of the boat. “Too curse lazy to watch the lines while I break my back against this wind.” The veneer finally comes off Mahoney’s mood and he attacks again: “...God, O God, such a misfortunate crowd of ignoramuses to be saddled with” (*D*, 14). The Mahoney siblings cower away from their father’s temper and the company completes the journey home in relative silence.

As the Mahoneys make their way back to shore as Mahoney Senior rows the boat he could be heard constantly complaining and invoking the name of the Lord: “God, O God, O God, such a curse” as he flexed his arms to keep the oars in motion (*D*, 15). Physical and psychological abuse are twin-tools of choice appropriated by Mahoney Senior to intimidate his children and exercise hegemonic control over affairs in the family home. In the patriarchal Irish state, members of the Irish government, particularly Éamon de Valera appropriated the power possessed by the Catholic Church

³⁰⁷ As the Irish state began its long journey toward maturity, the great dreams of the 1916 Easter Rising suffered from a suffocating insularism that denied a far more promising future. Irish literature subsequently manifested the bleak environment in which the community was left to live in. Liddy (1999) discusses this issue and reasons that: ‘There is a reason why Irish literature is dark and bleak, and it is essentially the same reason today as it was for O’ Faolain some seventy years earlier. The centralized government of the new Irish state refused to accept the moral and artistic validity of Irish parish life; it infringed upon, and continually eroded, this validity in the name of centralization, in the name of modern development...’ For the complete exposure of this extensive issue see Brian Liddy ‘State and Church: Darkness in the Fiction of John McGahern’, *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1999), pp. 106-121, p. 107.

to implement a conservative political agenda. At a time in which it was not possible to publicly question much less criticise, actions carried out by or with the approval of Church authorities, policy that carried this authority was beyond challenge.

On reaching their home, the Mahoney siblings clean the fish they caught but refuse to engage in a game of cards with their weary father who has again broken their trust. Their only weapon against him is withdrawal: “Let him play alone” (*D*, 16). While the Mahoney children are compelled to share their father’s society, they resist his efforts to develop a more intimate rapport and in so doing deprive him of the ability to cultivate social capital within his family circle. His inappropriate physical proximity with his son worsens the underlying dysfunctional dynamic between them. Such is the extent of the dysfunction in the relationship that Mahoney engages in sexual abuse of his son. On occasion Mahoney Senior makes entry to his son’s bedroom late at night and arrives uninvited into his son’s bed, causing the latter great distress:

The worst was to have to sleep with him the nights he wanted love, strain of waiting for him to come to bed, no hope of sleep in the waiting—counting and losing count of the thirty-two boards across the ceiling, trying to pick out the darker circles of the knots beneath the varnish. Watch the moon on the broken brass bells at the foot of the bed. Turn and listen and turn. Go over the day that was gone, what was done or left undone, or dream of the dead days with her in June. (...) He was coming and there was nothing to do but wait and grow hard as stone and lie (*D*, 17).

The anticipation of his father’s arrival causes young Mahoney to pretend to be asleep in the vain hope that it would dissuade his father’s presence. He has no option but to tolerate the situation and is forced to acknowledge his father’s presence by persistent questioning and enquiries in respect of whether or not he is conscious as a lighted match was pushed very near his face in the darkness. “Hatred took the place of fear, and it brought the mastery of not caring much more. No one had right to bring a match burning close to his face in the night to see if he was sleeping or not” (*D*, 18). Young Mahoney’s torment does not end at this point and he is soon joined in bed by his father: “I was sleeping and you frightened me with the match. Did you want me for anything that you cracked the match?”

“No. I just wanted to see if you were asleep and alright. I didn’t mean to frighten you” he remarks as he: pulled back the clothes, and awkwardly got into bed. The feet were cold as clay as they touched on the way down” (*D*, 18).

Employing his old tactic of offering something such as a trip or a gift to try to mollify his suffering son, Mahoney suggests that they could have tea in the well-regarded Royal Hotel in the town. Mahoney Senior then engages in conversation in an effort to justify his abusive behaviour before engaging in abuse proper: “In every house there are differences. Things don’t all the time run smooth. Though that’s not what counts, sure it’s not.” Once Mahoney secures his son’s consent to the logic he adopts, he continues to justify: “Even Up Above there was trouble. There’s differences everywhere. But that’s not what matters. Everyone loses their temper and says things and does things but as long as you know there’s love there it doesn’t matter. Don’t you know I love you no matter what happens?” (*D*, 19).

In calling upon divine example, Mahoney attempts to use the prestige associated with religious faith into arrogating more control over his son’s reactions in a form of emotional blackmail. Behaviour of this kind inflicted a lasting feeling of disgust and mistrust in the boy whose thoughts reveal the transitory nature of his belief in his father’s promises:

...All this talk and struggle to get to terms or understanding that’d last for no longer than the sleep of this night. It was always changed by the morning: shame and embarrassment and loathing, the dirty rages of intimacy. The struggle was not his struggle nor the words, and there were worse things in these nights than words (*D*, 19).

He is a typical authoritarian figure who entertains no dissent to his authority, but acts on his own since he is a widower. His attempts at rationalising his abnormal behaviour rely heavily on faith and fear that leave little room for escape, a phenomenon that took much of its inspiration from an attitude of alienation and loathing for the sexual aspect of human nature encouraged by clerical authorities. Worse than words’ came to pass on that night and many others for young Mahoney whose father uses him as an object to enable him to satisfy his sexual urges:

You don't have to worry about anything. There's no need to be afraid or cry. Your father loves you, and hands drew him closer. They began to move in caress on the back, shoving up the nightshirt, downwards lightly to the thighs and heavily up again, the voice echoing rhythmically the movement of the hands.

The words drummed softly as the stroking hands moved on his belly, down and up, touched with the fingers the thighs again, and came again on the back (*D*, 20).

Mahoney makes offers of gifts to excuse his behaviour as the abuse continues, but tensions remain high and his son finds no relief within that immediate context:

The hands moved more tensely. The breathing quickened.

"You like that. It's good for you," the voice breathed jerkily now to the stroking hands.

"I like that."

There was nothing else to say, it was better not to think or care, and the hands-the rhythmic words-were a kind of pleasure if thought and loathing could be shut out (...) it was better to lie in the arms and not listen except to think lulling of the rhythm of the voice as the hands stroke and not listen and not care. It was easy that way except for the waves of loathing that would not stay back (*D*, 20-21).

He suppresses potent sensations of hatred and indignation against his father as he still depends upon him for sustenance, a reality known to and taken advantage of by Mahoney Senior, secure in his selfishness and arrogant yielding of hegemonic authority in the family home. Peter Guy (2010) discusses the importance and the reception of the Irish government-sponsored official reports into abuse of persons who resided in state-sponsored but Church-managed institutional homes. He warns against retrospective analysis of past actions through the filter of more modern values where definitions can be so elastic as include an enormous swathe of possible perpetrators on the basis of singular acts of unkindness toward children in their company. However, he welcomes the end of a culture of deference that has been held as being a central part of how abusive behaviour by the clergy went largely unchallenged.³⁰⁸ Guy's text is highly

³⁰⁸ Peter Guy, 'Reading John McGahern in light of the Murphy Report,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 99, No. 393, *Power and Accountability in Ireland*, pp. 91-101.

informative on the role of the clergy but one must also acknowledge that family members also engage in abuse of minors within the home and his text demonstrates that authority can be very difficult to overcome if a vulnerable person wishes to complain of ill-treatment. The above cited passage of McGahern's text attests that the character of Mahoney is a representation of both the potential and verified perverse effects of a cult of patriarchal authority that was a key dimension of De Valera's Ireland.³⁰⁹

Young Mahoney screams in silence against the unbearable authority of his father and the abuse of the power that he yields, much as many numbers of other citizens in De Valera's Ireland conduct their lives in a particular manner under duress since they cannot (yet) rebel against the institutions that represent such authority and encourage value systems that sustain these systems of control. Social conditions under such a regime attest to many characteristics of a dictatorial system of government: minimal consent sought from the governed, low tolerance of opposition, the control of information and concentration of political power in the hands of an elite. The latter is also seen to govern the community according to a strictly interpreted ideology. Citizens in De Valera's Ireland and more particularly, parishioners in McGahern's world, are captives in system of values that stifles dissent and deny opportunities for development.

With no alternative, young Mahoney must turn to his father for assistance in daily life. He does so in the middle of night of the same evening on which the incident of abuse took place. As he attempts to sleep, he finds something irritating his skin that also bothers his father, an irritant that they defend themselves against in a joint-effort: "I think the fleas are at it," one of them says. With this an effort to kill the insects begins in earnest: (...) The thumb-nails were easily brought to bear, there was no danger of the lightning hop free, they were too drugged, and one movement crushed them into another red speck in their sleep (*D*, 22). The mere presence and quantity in the Mahoney

³⁰⁹ Providing suitable acknowledgement and a frank discussion of the very powerful of the Catholic Church occupied in Irish society until approximately the turn of the century, Auge et al., (2010: 59) note the approach adopted by the Church in this matter as being (until relatively recently): '...powerful, authoritarian, and highly prescriptive in its approach to the laity. In its everyday teaching, a strong emphasis was placed on sin; there was little consideration of what might be term the gray areas. The result was a legalistic attitude toward transgression.' See Louise Fuller, John Littleton and Eamon Maher, (2010) 'After the Ryan and Murphy Reports: A Roundtable on the Irish Catholic Church', *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (2010) pp. 59-77.

household is indicative of the material poverty that persists despite the purity of spirit promoted by conservative social attitudes. It stands as an indictment on the lack of basic hygiene even in respect of simple conditions for people to sleep in.

Forced to accept the reality of his circumstances, young Mahoney recognised, if only temporarily, that the bond between father and son can sometimes contain positive attributes:

“Your blood and mine,” remarks Mahoney Senior, “Those bastards feeding all the night on our blood. The quicker we get the DDT the better. Just think of it-those bastards feeding all the night on your blood and mine” (*D*, 23). Once father and son had dealt with all of the flies and return to bed exhausted, too fatigued to concern themselves with any of matter until morning: ‘He blew out the flame and got into bed. The heavy blankets were marvellous and warm after. There was no repulsion as their flesh touched deep down in the clothes. There was no care of anything any more’ (*D*, 23). As he has nowhere else to turn but to the perpetrator of his torments – his own father – young Mahoney has his nature corrupted as he attempts to survive his circumstances. His nature is corrupted in that he is compelled to abide by a set of standards that contravene his current desires and thus cause him serious internal conflict.³¹⁰ Presented with no alternative to his predicament and believing emigration to be unviable for him, young Mahoney reacts in an insular manner by choosing to remain in his father’s company and that of the state, the latter of which is responsible for failing to alleviate the malaise that has afflicted the community and this is reflected in widespread unemployment and poverty.

Young Mahoney’s internal conflict is magnified by the presence of a Priest in the family, who comes to visit the family home. Great reverence is held for the clergy in the Mahoney household, a conviction common to most household throughout De Valera’s Ireland. Of particular note is the strength of this reverence that ensures that the most common reaction to members of the clergy is meek obedience, often accompanied

³¹⁰ Denis Sampson interprets this episode as pertaining to a situation whereby this ‘...intimacy results from the surrender of all sense of consciousness of self, of “right” not to be intruded on, and seems to gain for the boy a temporary freedom from hatred and self-loathing. Self-esteem and individual autonomy are sacrificed in this scene because of the bond of “blood” and in recognition of a necessary compromise with the facts of the boy’s circumstances...’ See Sampson (1993), p. 67.

by a warm welcome and the absence of any criticism in their company: 'Father Gerald came every year, He was a cousin and his coming was a kind of watch. Mahoney hated it, but because of his fear of a priest's power he made sure to give the appearance of a welcome' (*D*, 24). Members of the clergy or those acting on their behalf enjoy considerable authority and exercise the power to obtain information on request that ordinary parishioners could not expect to yield themselves. Since the clergy reside in a strata of society that enjoys a concentration of both cultural and religiously-tinged cultural capital, many resources are available to them that are simply unimaginable to non-members of the cloth. From this vantage point, members of the clergy act as gatekeepers to the educational system and thereafter filters to the labour market.

The Mahoney household is cleaned thoroughly, the best linen found for the table cloth, the best china taken out and a hen killed for the main meal in anticipation of Fr. Gerald's visit. As the conversation between Mahoney, son and cleric progresses, the priest enquires as to what young Mahoney's plans for the future were. The boy's answer indicates the acute predicament faced by many parishioners in McGahern's world: "I don't know, father. Whatever I'm let be I suppose" (*D*, 24). As the priest has a good knowledge of the students of the local school, since the clergy chair the management body of the every local school, he asserts that young Mahoney's prospects are promising and notes that Irish society is undergoing significant change, which younger people are best-placed to take advantage of for a better future if they can maximise their scholarly abilities and successfully make their way through the education system.

However, under the confessional Irish state, the highest calling was to become a servant of God and work for the church. Accepting the supreme calling of spreading the word of God by becoming man of the cloth guaranteed a form of nobility for oneself. Entering the priesthood was seen as a virtuous life that would guarantee respect in life and ascension to paradise in death. Young Mahoney ponders on this very point: '...He'd not be like his father if he could. He'd be a priest if he got the chance, and there were dreams of wooden pulpits and silence of churches, watching between yew and laurel paths in prayer...He'd go free in God's name' (*D*, 25).

Slight improvements in possibilities were beginning to materialise in Irish society due to minor improvements in economic circumstances and consequently greater educational opportunities. Fr. Gerald notes that the boy may be able to escape 'slaving on the land' that his father has had to resort to in order to support his family: "He may not have to slave on any farm. He's been always head of his class" and also remarks that: "Times have changed. There are openings and opportunities today that never were before" (*D*, 25). While the educational system provides a means of upward social and professional mobility, reticent attitudes continue to retard greater progress for members of the community. Mahoney Senior remains exceedingly sceptical about the value of education since he himself was unable to advance very far in his own studies. Fr. Gerald offers a final piece of advice before taking his leave of the Mahoney's: "Don't worry. Work at your books at school and we'll see what happens," and then closed the gate behind him (*Ibid*). Young Mahoney continues his arduous academic work and is rewarded when he is granted a scholarship that ensures he is able to attend the (Christian) Brothers' College. However, he is unable to take much pride in his achievement as his father retains much inertia toward the whole concept of more advanced study and often verbalises his strong opposition to his son taking the opportunity offered. Despite his awareness of his father's apprehension to this course of action, young Mahoney resolves to grasp his opportunity and once he informs his father of this decision no time is spared before he is informed of the latter's opinion: "Take it so and may it choke you but I'll not have you saying in after years that I kept you from it" (*D*, 26).

As the month of September approaches and young Mahoney prepares to enter the next phase of his studies, tension builds in the family home. Young Mahoney finally begins the next stage of his scholarly career all the while facing strong resistance from his father who erects barriers to continued progression. Mahoney Senior relies on the small land holding the family owns in and around their dwelling, and expects help working the land and to harvest crops he has cultivated such as potatoes. He demands that his children collect the picked potatoes every day before nightfall (*D*, 26-27), thus forcing them to invest their principal energies and time in the land leaving little time to

pursue other more productive (intellectual) pursuits. In this way, he is representative of a significant portion of a generation of people who wish to frustrate the creation and propagation of cultural and intellectual capital for the youth that comes after them.

Mahoney does not relent in his complaining and his piety ensures that he invokes the name of the almighty as he verbalises his frustrations at the seemingly eternal torrential rainfall that severely impedes his ability to harvest his potatoes from his field: “Give me the bucket in the name of Jesus. Those bloody spuds’ll not pick themselves.” This comment is later followed by “Wilful waste is woeful want. God, O God, O God” (*D*, 27-28).

Young Mahoney gradually matures and as he does he seeks to satisfy his own desires for personal autonomy and sexual gratification. To this end he engages in masturbation in the privacy of his own bed³¹¹ driven by fantasies inspired by the image of a girl in a newspaper cutting and mental images of other women. As he finishes the act and starts to re-focus on his surroundings, it becomes apparent that religious imagery adorns the house and the boy’s bedroom is no exception to this phenomenon: (...) The day of the room returns, red shelves with the books and the black wooden crucifix, the torn piece of newspaper on the pillow...(*D*, 31). Here the omnipresence of Catholic iconography reminds the reader and the characters present in this episode of the source of the philosophy of the governing ideology of the community in which the text is set. Consistent with that philosophy it is expected that actions or behaviour that have been taught as to be regarded as sinful or inappropriate are expected to be disclosed during confession to a priest. Indeed, this does come to pass when young Mahoney presents himself before a cleric announcing the interval that has passed since he last confession and the nature of the sins committed. Such is the guilt he feels for the actions due to the indoctrination that has characterised his habitus, he shivers at the prospect of the kind of response the priest will give (*D*, 31).

³¹¹ This scene is fact what provoked the Irish Censorship Board to ban *The Dark* (1965) in its entirety, an event that led to McGahern’s temporary relocation to London. Such was the scandal surround the banning of the book, McGahern was quite embarrassed and depressed and was unable to write for a number of years afterwards. The events that comprise the incident form a central part of the plot McGahern’s next book, *The Leavetaking* (1974).

Mahoney Senior retains a generally disapproving attitude toward his children's conduct at home and complains about it loudly. Young Mahoney seeks solace and simultaneously projects an attitude of defiance by re-doubling his efforts to keep reading academic materials. As he opens a book for this purpose a Memoriam card for his late mother falls out of the volume. It serves as a reminder of the person she was and the life he had while she was in his life. He mourns the life she lived and mourns what never came to be (*D*, 33). The environment in which he lives inspires further feelings of despair in the sense of living in the absence of compassion from a matriarch. Women play a relatively insignificant role in young Mahoney's life, either to do the bidding of their husbands or fathers or toil in service of Catholic doctrine. In De Valera's Ireland, the Ireland he defines and protects in his *Bunreacht na hÉireann*³¹² the Christian character of the Irish state and by extension, society at large. In this context, women are not afforded any meaningful role in the directing of public affairs and these are dominated by men in the form of their husbands and the clergy. Such realities are a notable component of the social dynamics within McGahern's work. The absence of a major matriarchal figure is a recurrent theme in McGahern's novels and illustrates the excessively authoritarian nature of the power structures that persist in the world portrayed in the author's narrative fiction that is exacerbated by this deficit in power distribution. Indeed, the situation in the Mahoney household mirrors the hegemonic position of power occupied by De Valera in the Irish state.

In remembering the passing of his mother, young Mahoney recalls that he had promised her that he would someday become a priest and say mass for her and thus he would be able to keep his word and serve in the most noble of roles in Irish society: the priesthood. However, a persistent sense of doubt and oppression within his own life

³¹² *Bunreacht na hÉireann* or the Irish Constitution, almost exclusively formulated by Éamon De Valera, remains the fundamental law of the Irish state since its promulgation in July 1937. It had originally specifically provided that women were to be recognised as having a specific role in the family home to care for the family. Ordinary legislation also provided that they were obliged to resign from their jobs on marriage, so that women were, for the greater part, largely excluded from decision making roles in Irish society. While great changes have changed the character of the document, the specific provision on women has not yet been removed. A forensic examination of *Bunreacht*, is provided in Seamus Ó Tuama, 'Revisiting the Irish Constitution and De Valera's Grand Vision,' *Irish Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (2011), pp. 54-87. See also: Brian Farrell, *De Valera's Constitution and Ours* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1987) particularly Chapter 8 authored by University College Cork academic Dr. Dermot Keogh titled 'Church, State and Society.'

leave him unable to decisively choose the path he should take and he admits defeat before taking any concrete steps to realise his dreams. Despotism from his father narrows his belief in himself and results in him unwittingly self-excluding himself from possible escapes from his suppressive constraints: 'I'd never be a priest. I was as well to be honest. I'd never be anything. It was certain (*D*, 33). Young Mahoney and a wide section of the community has been taught to expect relatively little in terms of professional attainment or career advancement, both of which would have to rely on political patronage, which in very many instances were directly moderated by clerical influence. In the absence of strong support in the school system and positive home influence, all but a determined few manage to avail of social and professional mobility through the acquisition of cultural and intellectual capital in the education system. Individuals who may have the capacity for advanced higher studies may otherwise be discouraged from taking steps to realize such possibilities, such is the agenda encouraged by the doctrine put into operation by governing authorities. Certain dogmatic community leaders manipulate a sense of inferiority to ensure reserves of confidence in ambitious parishioners are kept in check. Attitudes of this kind are emulated in family homes throughout the country which provide for high retention of traditional values across the population.

Cantankerous conduct continues to emanate from Mahoney Senior who seizes upon a flippant comment by one of his children during a conversation between them and he promptly eviscerates the authors of the remark: "Did I hear you mention ALWAYS? Did you know that there's only one thing you should use ALWAYS about and that's God. He always was and always will be, for ever and ever, Amen (*D*, 35). In this instance Mahoney cynically invokes religion to buttress his authority and his abusive parenting. Since he is the sole parent in the household, his influence is a major one and difficult to ignore or overcome. Frequently on the offensive in respect of traditional Catholic values, he represents a much darker, less compassionate face of Catholic Ireland, where the detection and eradication of sin is a central priority to maintain the integrity of the faith in the community. One central mechanism that functions to deal with the presence of sin and the alleviation of conscience in

McGahern's world is the act of confession. The importance of this ritual means that the parishioners hold the belief that they must atone for their sins if they do not confess them on a regular basis before God's servant of the word, the local members of the clergy. An acute sense of mortality is heightened around this ritual of faith that forms part of deep seated convictions that stem from Roman Catholic doctrine: '...In fear and shame you are moving to the death of having to describe the real face of your life to your God in his priest, and to beg forgiveness, and promise, for there is still time...' (*D*, 39). Parishioners share their sins with their priest and exit into a renewed conscience, a freedom from guilt that is relished by those who live the experience. As young Mahoney and his father leave the church after both completed their confession the atmosphere lightens noticeably. The narrator reveals the state of mind of young Mahoney at this point: '...There was such joy. You were forgiven, the world given back to you, washed clean as snow. You'd never sin again.'³¹³ You willed yourself to say the rosary, wanting new words that never were before...' (*D*, 43). The intensity of feelings of relief after absolution during confession affords observers an illuminating example of the depth of guilt felt by people and the degree to which the Catholic Church had penetrated the conscience and behavioural habits of most members of the community. Mahoney Senior anxiously shares his relief: "It's a great feeling after Confession. You feel everything's put right. You have no cares any more." These remarks prompt young Mahoney to join in agreement with his father: "No. You have no cares."

While the power of the relief of confession on the Mahoneys cannot be underestimated, nor can its power to enrich the spirit, it does not seem possible for this experience to transcend the spiritual sphere and also transform the conditions of material poverty under which the family live. Sometime after the occasion of attending Confession, Mahoney decries the climate that has brought an excessive amount of rainfall and the detrimental effects it is having on his land and cattle: "It'll be the poor house. I'm saddled with such lazy misfortunate bastards, we'll have the poor-house anyhow, something to look forward to at the end of your days when we expect some ease and respect. God, O God, O God!" (*D*, 47-48). Moments of great stress or

³¹³ This is a key indicator of the saturation level of religiously-tinged cultural capital present in the community under such a conservative regime.

emphasised meaning are often interlaced with references to God in such a way as to attach more prestige and significance to the utterance made that in turn makes the assertion proffered more difficult to challenge in its own right.

Young Mahoney remains in conflict with his own conscience as he labours towards making a clear decision in respect of whether he can commit himself to making a life in the priesthood. This task is further complicated by the fact he is wracked with doubt in relation to the strength of his own discipline, but he does not abandon all hope immediately as he is attracted to this noble calling and believes it offers him path to freedom. Of greatest concern is remaining celibate since his sexual fantasies are so strong that he fears he will be unable to respect the vows of the cloth: ‘...A priest all your days...and never in all those days to have touched and entered the roused flesh of a woman in her heat, never for your nakedness to be hid in her nakedness...’ a conviction that he slowly dissuades himself from holding by asserting that attaining the priesthood would offer a viable solution to his conflicted thoughts (*D*, 56). This reluctance has partially come about by young Mahoney’s interest in a local girl Mary Moran, whom he fantasies about and experience great difficulty in choosing between romance in life or a constrained existence as part of the clergy (*D*, 57).

With the end of the school term, young Mahoney’s thoughts turn to summer holidays, a time which he expects to spend some time with his father’s cousin, Fr. Gerald in the parochial house so as to engage in more sustained reflection about his future intentions. It is hoped that the more solemn environment will assist him in coming to a definitive conclusion about the true nature of his plans. However, he is still riddled with doubt, which manifests itself in his view of what sees as he takes part in a Corpus Christi procession: ‘...was it all mere pomp and ceremony to cover up the unendurable mystery...It was impossible to know, and in that uncertainty you went to confession, you had to find some limbo of control before facing the priest...’ (*D*, 58-59). Despite needing clarity on his position, young Mahoney wallows in his uncertainty and remains acutely aware of the fact that his actions chequer his conscience, which in turn he knows will be held to account by the clergy through the act of confession. And it is the latter that forms another element of the mechanism of control used by the Roman

Catholic hierarchy to regulate the thoughts and behaviour of ordinary parishioners so as to ensure that they behave in a manner that is consistent with established religious and social priorities synonymous with De Valera's Ireland.

He finally arrives at the parochial house (*D*, 62). After visiting his sister with the priest in her place of employment, which the latter had arranged they return home. Dinner time arrives after which both relax for the evening. Young Mahoney eventually retires to bed, but is soon surprised by the presence of the Fr. Gerald in his room. Shortly thereafter Fr. Gerald takes it upon himself to enter his guest's bed uninvited in a semi-clad state who claims he wishes to calm the young man's restlessness and to discuss his position in respect of the priesthood (*D*, 70). His presence quickly becomes as unwelcome as the stress it provokes:

You find it hard to sleep? I often do. It's the worst of all, I often think, to be sleepless at night," he said, and you stiffened when his arm went about your shoulder, was this to be another of the midnight horrors with your father. His hand closed of your arm. You wanted to curse or wrench yourself free but you had to lie stiff as a board, stare straight ahead at the wall, afraid before anything of meeting the eyes you knew were search your face (*D*, 70-71).

As both parties lie in bed together, young Mahoney is finally interrogated as to what he feels his shortcomings are in respect of becoming a priest. However, Fr. Gerald takes a more cynical and inappropriately intimate approach and refers directly to carnal pleasures in his questioning of the petrified young Mahoney in the bed next to him:

"Have you ever wanted or desired to kiss?"

"Yes, father" he answered while weeping.

"Did you take pleasure in it?"

"Yes, father."

" (...) This is the most reason why you're not sure, why you think you're not good enough is it?"

"Yes, father. Do you think I might be good enough?"

“I don’t see any reason why not if you fight that sin” (*D*, 72-73).

The puritan attitude reflected by the Catholic Church is revealed here in how they regard any sexual longing as inappropriate and sinful, thus causing much guilt to significant numbers of parishioners over feelings that may be expected to occur naturally. Reflecting the power and depth of the indoctrination carried out by the church, young Mahoney makes strident efforts to overcome what he has been taught to be shortcomings so as to serve God and Church, portrayed as the most noble of vocations in McGahern’s world.

In an example of the dysfunctional nature of the exercise of near-hegemonic power, Fr. Gerald relies on religious language and the imagery contained within it to distract and shield himself from reproach: “God guard you and bless you. Sleep if you can” (*D*, 74). Much as he tried, Mahoney could not liberate himself from feelings of shame, again indicating how disturbing inappropriate sexual and physical of the clergy can be for those receiving it: ‘Anguish stayed after the priest had gone—rage, you’d been stripped down to the last squalor, and no one had right to do that to anybody...’ (*D*, 75). His final conversation with Fr. Gerald in the parochial house in respect of his clerical ambitions garners him some insightful advice, an element of which shows how powerless men and women are in De Valera’s idyllic confessional Irish state: ‘...Remember your life is a great mystery in Christ and that nothing but your state of mind can change...’ (*D*, 101). In light of the attitudes exposed by this conversation, it seems apparent that there is no meaningful possibility of any meaningful change in the short-term. However, this does not preclude young Mahoney from contemplating what form that change could take when the time comes, which he believes will arrive, for circumstances to respond to the needs of younger people and the desire for a more open community that his generation wishes to see. Thus it is this seed of desire that will grow in time to motivate further attempts at more significant designs at manifesting the realisation of his and his contemporaries’ vision of the world. While at this juncture of the narrative of McGahern’s world there is a discernible taste for change present, which indicates that the absolute and hegemonic power exercised by the Church-State axis of

power has been called into question. This shift in thinking later manifests itself in diverging views held by the protagonist in McGahern's following novel, *The Leavetaking* (1974).

Despite intensive mental efforts aimed at arriving at a discernible position on whether or not to join the priesthood, young Mahoney feels suffocated by the oppressive environment in which he lives. However, having earlier learned of his sister's unhappy situation in the employment of a grocer in the town arranged by Fr. Gerald, young Mahoney resolves to extricate his sibling from the premises. Thus, his willingness to intervene in a situation that he finds unsatisfactory demonstrates that change can be brought about by determined individuals when they are sufficiently motivated to do so, although it may only happen when their own or their family's welfare is directly threatened. As the siblings, Joan and her brother discuss what alternatives they now have in terms of seeking alternative professional situations, young Mahoney identifies the one obvious option that could be taken if circumstances become sufficiently dire to merit the need to make hard decisions: "Go to England, I suppose then", which he quickly follows with "We may all be in England soon" (*D*, 104).³¹⁴

Persistent cultural and economic malaise in the De Valeran era meant that those individual who did not benefit from political patronage and who refused to accept poor pay and conditions (where they could find any employment at all) were left with one immediate alternative – emigration. Under these circumstances the obvious choice of destination was England, a country that shared a linguistic identity, contained many cultural similarities and geographical proximity. While it is an accessible alternative, high-minded Irish parents and leaders alike frown upon that destination as being morally contaminated.

When the Mahoney siblings return to their father at home they are given a deeply inimical reception that displays the difficult economic situation the family finds itself in: "So you're home, are you? Where's the food going to come outa to fill extra bellies. God, O God, O God, what did I do to deserve this cross? The poor-house, it's

³¹⁴ In 1958 the Department of Finance reported that after thirty-five years of native government had been economically unsuccessful and had created a situation which left emigration as the only viable option for those people old enough to seek their fortune outside a stagnant Irish state. See Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2002), pp. 201-202.

the poor-house ye'll all wind up in, and ye needn't say I didn't warn ye" (*D*, 105). In referring to the poor house, Mahoney senior shares his concerns about his family becoming destitute due to financial difficulty and the lack of economic opportunities available that could allay such dangers. A final resting place for many destitute individuals and families in colonial Ireland were poor houses managed by local poor law commissioners that provided relief in the form of outdoor relief or workhouse activity to ensure that people could survive. Mahoney voices his concern at his family's state, but probably exaggerates the depth of the problem and does so as part of his share of the national cultural memory of the poverty, the poorhouse and the exacerbation of deprivation that was so heavily intensified by the experience of the Great Famine. Trauma of this kind often motivated continued cautious behaviour on the part the head of families and the children they raised to protect their basic welfare and seek little greater advancement beyond subsistence living. In this mind-set ambition itself is regarded with suspicion and so Mahoney reacts angrily when his son informs him his sister could train to be a nurse in England. His view is heavily tinged by Catholic piety that held England was a heathen dystopia: "But England's rotten, full of filth and dirt. No girl could be safe there" to which young Mahoney retorts: "She wasn't very safe where she's after coming from and it's no England" (*D*, 108).

Young Mahoney retains his faith, but it is a faith in the ability of the education system to liberate him from his existing circumstances.³¹⁵ Therefore, he dedicates his efforts to complete his cycle of studies to ensure his prospects remain intact, much to his father's distaste. Having convinced himself of the idea that good exam results meant a genuine opportunity to escape his home life and enjoy new prospects outside his immediate family situation. Until he completes his final written examinations, young Mahoney engages in intensive study at home in an upstairs bedroom heated by traditional turf from the countryside near his home acquired by his father, an expense that strains the family finances. Following complaints from his father in respect of the limited stores of fuel at home, he offers to work in England to repay the expense

³¹⁵ The implication is that it is to be accomplished by acquiring the appropriate kinds and levels of cultural capital.

incurred. A suggestion that is immediately rejected on the basis of the sullied nature of anything of English origin³¹⁶ which must be rejected *ab initio*:

Anyone can go to England. You don't have to waste years at school to go to England. If you've a fiver in your pocket and the boat fare you can go to England, that's all that's wanting. And I don't want any dirty money from England. What do I want your money for? I got on before I ever saw sight or light of you, and I'll get on after. Who wants your cursed money? (*D*, 115).

As the date of the exams comes upon him, young Mahoney receives derogatory commentary from his father to the effect that he was one of many and without political patronage he would be unable to secure a place in higher education or alternatively, in professional employment. His response contradicts his father's attitude as he is able to inform him that merit would be the decisive factor in allocating places to chosen individuals (*D*, 125). In stating that patronage (both clerical and political) was no longer the single most important factor in the provision of a better future, young Mahoney illustrates the changes that are slowly seeping into Irish society that make a major contribution to the dilution of the hegemonic position of the Irish Catholic Church. Although a weakening in the Church's authority was becoming more apparent, it still retains very considerable power and influence which it utilises as much as possible to further its own agenda, both through the pulpit and pupils in its schools. In the case of the latter, prospective members of the clergy are canvassed for interest during school hours in Catholic schools (which comprised the vast majority of schools in McGahern's world and De Valera's Ireland).³¹⁷ Members of the clergy would enter classrooms and make a direct invention to boys to join the priesthood, as is the case in young Mahoney's experience:

My dear boys, you are on the threshold of life, a life that'll end in death. Then the Judgment. All the joys and pleasures of life you yearn for now will have been just a passing bauble then. If you clutch at these now will they avail you anything in the only important moment in life, moment of death? On the other hand, if you give your life to God, and surely the priesthood is the gift

³¹⁶ Presumably in contrast to the supposedly 'pure' values in pious Catholic Ireland.

³¹⁷ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987) pp. 55-58.

outright, you can say you kept nothing back. As your whole life was in God, so will your life be in death, and in the hereafter (*D*, 126-27).³¹⁸

A central element of the argument used by the priest in attempting to persuade boys to consider a life in the priesthood is concern about achieving a noble life in order to secure entry to heaven. Indeed, by using the social ‘pedestal of prestige’ afforded to members of the clergy in De Valera’s Ireland, it is possible to exert to strong pressure of parishioners to engage in behaviour that they would not otherwise choose to participate in. Mortality becomes the punctuating point of the lived experience and as such, it is claimed that without the prerequisite conviction of faith in God, parishioners cannot expect to rest peacefully ever after once they pass away. Pressure from families in search of a source of comfort and prestige also results in young men being sent forth to the seminary, sometimes under duress. Young Mahoney, however, resists pressure and concentrates instead on his studies for a greater return.

Although young Mahoney has turned away from the priesthood, religion continues to circumscribe his life even in the face of the impending exams, the faith form part of this journey as prayers are offered in the clerically managed school so that the school would come out well in the results. Students in the boy’s school are encouraged to trust in God’s will, as one of the teachers, Brother Benedict advises the cohort to: “Pray for success. Ask God’s blessing. Have the peace of the state of Grace in your soul. Put yourself as an instrument in God’s hand. You’ll not fare any worse by it” (*D*, 136). This comment is indicative of how the clergy look upon ordinary parishioners as objects of divine control rather than autonomous citizens in their own right. Parishioners are thus expected to comply with what are effectively edicts from the Catholic hierarchy in deciding how to conduct themselves in their daily lives. Lack of opportunities or effective exile leaves the unfortunate ones (either through lack of

³¹⁸ McGahern wrote in a manner that reflected not only a discernible talent, but also a genuine desire to accurately depict what he believed required representation. Indeed, for John Brannigan, a notable strength in this manner of approach is that the artist: ‘...represents with unswerving accuracy a world with which we are all familiar, but rather that the makes his fictional settings and characters uncannily concrete and truthful...’ A complete account of this view can be found in John Brannigan, ‘Introduction: The ‘Whole World’ of John Brannigan,’ *Irish University Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (2005), Special Issue: John McGahern, pp. vii-x, p. viii.

qualifications or otherwise) with little else to do but to: “You can go to England if all fails. You’ll work in Dagenham and they’ll call you Pat” (*D*, 137).

Young Mahoney secures entry to University College Galway and begins preparations to make his way there. On arrival he is over-awed at having come to such a point and notes that nobody from his family had ever reached university before (*D*, 167). The environment is new and unfamiliar to him and he finds comfort in relying upon familiar acts while away from home: ‘...the unfamiliar surrounds led him to fall back on a more familiar act: prayer....you knelt mechanically going through the night prayers...’ (*D*, 171). At home and in new surroundings, it is quite difficult to escape from the routine of prayers, which demonstrates the depth to which such a habit has penetrated the conscious of each individual, where the default act to bring the evening to an end is an act of prayer.

With the start of new day, young Mahoney presents himself in a University lecture hall again to acquire a sense of organisation for things to come. He listened to the University Presidents’ address and notes that he is a Monsignor of advanced years who speaks in Gaelic meaning a sizeable proportion of the those assembled cannot understand what he says: ‘...and no one able to follow’ (*D*, 173). In acknowledging the identity and position of the president of the institution, young Mahoney becomes aware that the clergy control even institutions of higher education and thus retain considerable control over the training of undergraduates and graduates. In turn, this means the clergy hold the power to yield significant influence over individuals who finish their studies through the kind of intellectual and cultural capital they are permitted to acquire in organised education. In this way, it is possible to regulate the character and parameters of discussion within the community to reflect a conservative agenda and to minimise, where possible, critical reflection on oppressive practices and the exercise of hegemonic power by protected agencies of governing institutions. The monsignor makes a derogatory reference to literary activities in a deliberate attempt to discourage sustained reflection on the course of events in the society in which parishioners live their lives: “...If there are any among you who have literary ambitions the evidence would seem to point to a dosshouse or a jail as a more likely place of genesis than a University” (*Ibid*).

In the days after he first became acquainted with the university and its environs, young Mahoney wrote to his father informing him In the days after he first became acquainted with the university and its environs, young Mahoney wrote to his father informed how things were progressing. He soon receives a reply in a letter delivered to his lodgings which also included another letter from the E.S.B.³¹⁹ instructing him to present himself in Dublin the following Monday for a medical. The letter also stated that he could expect to be employed immediately in the event that he would pass the medical examination (*D*, 178). This new development leads to a severe crisis in young Mahoney's mind and he feels compelled to seek the counsel of his father and the Dean of Studies at the University, the latter of which forces him to confront his situation and make a clear choice between one and the other:

"You're afraid of failing?"

I am, father."

"You'd not have to worry about that in the E.S.B.,"

"No, I'd not have to worry."

"Well, I definitely think you should take the E.S.B. so," (*D*, 187).

Young Mahoney resents the manner in which the Dean has forced him to take charge of his own situation and he detected some contempt in his voice. At this moment he also acknowledges the clear difference in social standing that exists between both he and his father in comparison to the Dean. In this he accepts the deficit in standing between them as he attempts to arrest feelings of inferiority: '...you and Mahoney would never give commands but he always menials to the race he'd come from and still belonged to, you'd make a schoolteacher at best. You might have your uses but you were both his stableboys, and would never eat at his table' (*D*, 189).

³¹⁹ Founded in 1924, the Electricity Supply Board is the statutory agency responsible for the provision and maintenance of infrastructure for the purposes of the supply of electricity for residential and commercial purposes in the Irish state. See Cormac Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road: The Irish Economy Since the 1920s*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 184.

Evening arrives and it gradually becomes clear that young Mahoney could not refuse the offer of a position with the E.S.B. Once he retires for the evening, he is forced to share a bed with his father in the lodgings he has taken. On witnessing his father removing his garments and lying in the bed beside him, the son is struck by a flashback of the memories of the deeply unpleasant moments he had experienced with his father's inappropriate behaviour toward him in the dead of night. He notes how the passage of time has changed his view of these events in a manner that reflects his growing maturation and the gradually materialising reality of his self-sufficiency (Ibid).

On his last night accompanying his son in Galway, Mahoney senior repeats an earlier declaration and elaborates a little further in respect of the parting of ways that will now take place between them: "We won't be together any more. There was good times and bad between us, as near everywhere, but it's not what counts much," a statement to which his son readily acquiesces. As they both lie in before going to sleep, language imbued with religious references is again employed: "Good night so, Daddy." "Good night, my son. God bless you" (*D*, 191).

The Dark ends in a situation where young Mahoney has turned away from joining the priesthood, thus avoiding coming any closer to a religious life. He opts instead for a more secular life as a technician with the national electricity utility, an option that provides him with an income of his own with which he do as he pleases. Such an opportunity makes it possible for him to leave the family home and escape from his father's dysfunctional behaviour. Despite its minor nature, there is a noticeable evolution and improvement in circumstances for the protagonist, a member of generation that finally lives in conditions that are amenable to genuine advancement. As Irish society began to mature, a gradual breakdown of the patriarchal nature of Irish society began to occur and consequently there was less dependence on father (i.e. De Valera and his successor, Lemass) figures found in the political sphere of the national polity. However, while there is evidence of discernible fissures appearing within the pillars of traditional power structures, these changes are insufficient at this juncture to ensure the successful upward movement of young Mahoney within the social structure. He is offered a secure job within the state apparatus (the E. S. B. is a state-owned

company) and believes that this is best for him given the modest circumstances that he and his family hail from. In a Bourdieuan sense then, young Mahoney is fearful of aspiring to any position greater or higher than his own or the level usually attained by members in his social strata. He thus acts out the habitus that is consistent with the nature of the cultural capital that he has acquired and falsely assumes that his current position in society is the correct one and accordingly filters his options so that his opportunities are considered in accordance with that belief system. His father's reticence in encouraging or witnessing his son reach higher education is relatively unsurprising within such a value system and young Mahoney behaves in a manner that would be expected of a typical member of his family and class structure. However, Mahoney is largely unaware that he is being dispossessed of better options and seeks what appears to him to be a safe and viable option.³²⁰

As young Mahoney acquires more personal and bodily integrity (i.e. freedom from direct interference to his person) and financial autonomy, he, in common with the generation he belongs to, becomes less amenable (but not entirely immune) to intrusion in relation to his personal convictions and intellectual progression. While he does not succeed in acquiring complete freedom, he does attain a sufficient amount to allow him the space to wish for better. This dream is achieved by the protagonist in McGahern's next novel *The Leavetaking* (1974), only for conservative forces to intervene and frustrate his prospects.

³²⁰ See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. (Trans. Richard Nice) (London: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 206-210.

2.3 *The Leavetaking*: Old sentiments, new departures.

The Leavetaking, McGahern's third major novel, was published for the first time in 1974. Following a hiatus in creative activity of just over six years, McGahern returned to his art in the early nineteen-seventies, after having spent a number of years living and working in England. The circumstances of his departure from his country of birth were directly related to the publication and subsequent banning of his second novel,³²¹ *The Dark* in 1965. These events in the writer's life provided direct inspiration for the plot of *The Leavetaking*, in which the protagonist Moran examines his life through a series of recollections of key episodes in his memory.

In some respects the narration in *The Leavetaking* is deceptively simple. The narrator-protagonist guides the reader through a history of his emotional and sexual maturation process. There are, however, multiple occasions where complexities populate the text. In the first part of the book, it is Moran who assumes the role of narrator, but in part 2 it is his lover (later wife) who is given substantial space to narrate elements of what happens herself. Her accounts are sometimes inserted into the text through Moran's own direct speech and she operates as a narrator within his narrative. In one extensive segment of text Moran describes his relationship with Isobel and their life in London; this happens over sixty pages (108 to 173), one quart of which are dedicated to Isobel's speech. On occasion though, Moran moves in and out of the consciousness of other characters. For example, he accounts for his mother's feelings and imagined how his parents behaved in their own consciousness, and in the passage dealing with his mother's tranquillity in respect of her religious conviction as well as feelings toward a past suitor (*L*, 42). Moran also affords equal treatment to his father's thoughts as the latter is imaged cycling his way to meet his future wife (*L*, 57).

The language employed in the narrative voice of the text as a whole varies considerably. Present and past are effectively contrasted against one another with a simple, yet effectual movement within the text in relation to Moran's last day as a teacher and his memories of the first day he began work in that school. The language

³²¹ Discussed in detail in an earlier chapter.

used is peppered by poetic features that involve uncommon word arrangements such as where the narrator notes on page 16: “Tea and biscuits and fruit cake she brought in on a tray,” as well as page 69, “Crazy word came Sunday from my father”, the latter lacking an obvious preposition in the sentence. Moran’s language is shown to be comprised of fragments that frequently rely on non-finite clauses and these recur through the text in Part I. Another example of this non-standard language is utilised where on page 30 the following sentence appears: “Cheap plywood wardrobe of that room. Sprayed gold handle, Sacred heart lamp burning before the Sacred Heart, window on the empty meadow, more present than this schoolroom where I stand and watch.” A further instance of this includes the following: “Bare boards of the corridor, loose brass knobs of the doors; shoes on the stairs, hand on its wooden railing, relief I had cows to tie out in the darkening evening.”

It is probable that McGahern’s use of these non-standard fragments, non-finite clauses and supplemental noun phrases may be to furnish the reader with a feeling of the true nature of the author’s immediate impressions of his thoughts on the environment that gave rise to his artistic imagination. The second part of the novel displays remarkably contrastive features as regards its style with respect to part I. While it too contains examples of non-finite clauses (*L*, 97, 114, 119), the language appropriated in this section exhibits a high degree of syntactic complexity which serves McGahern’s desire to gradually transport the reader from an Irish context to a foreign one. Toward the end of *The Leavetaking*, McGahern’s prose is stretched to something very close to that of poetic writing. It would appear that he does this so as to supply the reader with an accurate portrait of the narrator’s feelings and to highlight the self-reflexive qualities of what otherwise can be described as realist text. Moran’s convoluted journey does eventually end with closure and it results in his departure into the unknown and a new way of life.

In the opening lines of the first chapter, the reader is presented with a scene set in a school playground and it becomes apparent that Moran’s profession is that of a teacher. As Moran stands in the school playground supervising the student’s playtime he is approached by a young male student who asks: “Bhuil cead agan dul go dtí an

leithreas, a mhaistir? (L, 9). This boy employs the Irish language or Gaelic version of what would be: ‘May I go to the toilet, master?’ In addressing a teacher as ‘master’, there is clear evidence of how teachers are treated with deference by pupils. With the founding of the Irish state and the utopian ideals that it was conceived to embody, the Irish language came to the fore as a defining emblem of the character of the Irish nation. Every school child is taught the Irish language from primary school onwards,³²² despite using English as their quotidian language. Intervention begins at a young age so as to affect the development of the habitus and also to occasion the involuntary acquisition of a particular kind of linguistic capital, however limited it may be.³²³

As Moran converses with a colleague as they stand supervising pupils in the school playground, the headmaster of the school, representing the highest form of authority of the state in the building, accosts a young student for failing to stop playing after the school bell had been silenced, shouts an instruction to him: “You”, he exclaims while pointing the hand of the bell in his hand at the boy, “Go dtí an oifig. No one moves after the bell stops” (L, 11). The student is instructed to go to the school office, as is the norm when messages of any substantial import are to be delivered with greater conviction or authority. The bell is rung again and the students are allowed to resume their play for a few more minutes. Thanking Moran in the official idiom once more, the headmaster says “Gura mile maith agat, a mhaistir” (meaning: ‘Thank you very much, master’) to which a similar reply is given: “Gura maith agat, a mhaistir” (Thank you, master). Although both men are sufficiently knowledgeable in the language to exchange essential information and give instructions, it is not a medium that they would use in the privacy of their own homes. A thought attributed to Moran reveals his true feelings on the use of the language where he proffers his gratitude as: ‘...to thank him in the patriotic and official idiom since in it I am unable to betray shades of feeling’ (L, 12). This attitude is indicative of the remove between official doctrine and personal opinion that constitutes a notable element of alienation between citizen and state. Most citizens have an impersonal or distant relationship with the Irish language and are thus

³²² This policy rests on the fact that both Irish/Gaeilge and English remain the two official languages of the Irish state and is specifically provided for in this context under Article 8 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

³²³ See Pierre Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007/1991), pp. 50-61.

dependant on elite scholars to set the meaning of the idiom for them and must appropriate the same for their own purposes. Such is the rarity of fluency of Irish language speakers that only a small minority are capable of using it as a discursive platform and as such, this relegates less proficient users to the status of mere servants of pre-established meanings.

While walking the school grounds, Moran also notes the contours of the school complex:

I look on the shape of the buildings that on three sides enclose the concrete I walk on. The lavatories and schoolrooms are flat-roofed and concrete, the single arm of the assembly hall alone v-roofed. Ragged rose bushes hang limp under its windows, a strip of black earth in concrete, the concrete beginning to crack after ten years, half-arsed modern as the rest of the country...(L, 10).

In a sweeping gaze across the school, Moran notes (presumably after many years of experience in this same place) the dull design and decaying state of the school facilities. His remarks attest to the fact that despite the high ideals sought by the fledging Irish state, its antipathy in respect of embracing developmental strategies that would reflect modern thinking in economic planning and spatial organisation remains problematic more than four decades after independence.³²⁴

How he came to be in the school becomes the subject of a moment of reflection on Moran's part as he remembers the conversation he had had with the headmaster when he was asked why he had wished to move from the job he held at the time to take up appointment in the new school: "I'm the oldest. If I could move to the city, it'd be to help more with the younger children's education" (L, 14). It was with these remarks in the headmaster's home that Moran began building a rapport with his manager. In hoping to move away from the countryside into more urban setting (most probably Dublin city), he follows in the footsteps of many residents from rural areas who wish to avail themselves of the much greater opportunities available in urban areas as the

³²⁴ A timeline can be published where the Irish (Free) state was founded in 1922 and comparing this year with the date of the publication of the book in 1974, but set in 1965.

country begins to experience the effects of a growing economy.³²⁵ The headmaster's wife noticed Moran's situation and shares her opinion with her husband who in turn mentions the matter during the interview: "Actually, my wife remarked on that in your application. It's an old country tradition. The first out of the nest helps the others out. City people are all right in their way but they don't have those good solid traditions behind them that we who come from the country have" (L, 14). In the latter comment, there is a strong indication of the revered values from the heartland of De Valera's utopia: idyllic rural Ireland. Members of the rural community are seen as encompassing more wholesome morals that tend to be overwhelmed over time in urban settings.

During the interview, the conversation between the two men is interrupted by rascality on the part of the headmaster's children, a situation that is soon resolved amicably when the headmaster brings the young child back to bed upstairs in his arms (L, 14). Before he has the opportunity to resume the interview his wife arrives: "Thank God, it's Mrs. Maloney back from the Sodality," and he also states that she was once in the same profession as they are: "She was a teacher too before we married..." (L, 15). What has now become the norm after many years of practice, women like the headmaster's wife were required to resign from whatever professional position they may have occupied up to the point of their marriage and thereafter would be obliged to vacate their position and support their family in the home.³²⁶ Indeed, as women remain unable to take part in communicating and administering the Holy Sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic hierarchy make other opportunities for involvement available to women such as activities like sodality organised, religious-inspired societies involved in charitable enterprises often engaged in efforts to assist less fortunate members of the community.

³²⁵ After the failed 'Economic War' with the UK after Independence and into the early 1950s, the Irish state reformulated its approach and embraced reformed industrial and cultural policies. For detailed information on same see Kevin O' Rourke, 'Burn Everything British but Their Coal: The Anglo-Irish Economic War of the 1930s', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Jun. ,1991), pp. 357-366; J. Peter Neary, Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Protection, economic war and structural change: the 1930s in Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol., 27, Issue 107 (May, 1991), pp. 250-266.

³²⁶ This was known as 'the marriage bar' pursuant to *Bunreacht na hÉireann* and was only revoked by the state under duress in the 1970s. However, Article 41.2.1. of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* still contains provisions that highlight the role of the woman in the home, which states: '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'.

As his interview draws to a close and while he is unsure whether he would secure appointment, Moran discreetly enquires in respect of the probability of the same: “I can’t appoint you. Father Curry is the Manager. He does the appointing, but in all the years he’s never once gone against my recommendation, though of course the final say is his” (*L*, 16). Such an answer is a direct reflection of the fact that, even though the state pays all salaries and expenses related to the operation of all schools, it is the Catholic clergy that retain absolute authority for the management of human resources. This authority held a power of veto over candidates (and indeed existing appointees) who wish to take up appointment as teachers in schools and also permits the clerical chairman of the board of management to refuse or rescind appointments where it is his opinion that the candidate does not or no longer possesses the appropriate ‘Catholic ethos’ that is expected to inform all aspects of teaching duties and attitudes toward the school environment.

It is in the school environment that many of the routines that come to characterise the habitus are formally established and encouraged with sufficient frequency as to aid in the indoctrination process that parishioners are subjected to. Reinforcement routines contributed to the maintenance of a hegemonic narrative; “No talking after the bell” followed by directions: “Lamha suas” (‘Hands up’), “Lamha síos”, after which students allow their hands to fall to their sides, followed by a repeated sequence of the same before resuming afternoon classes (*L*, 19).³²⁷ Individual class groups are summoned and directed “Rang a tri! Cle, deas, cle, deas,” (Third class, left, right, left). Students being instructed to act in this manner appear to be subjected to a specific routine designed to condition their behaviour as part of a scheme to achieve a particular kind of social order.

The headmaster remains present to ensure teachers are aware that they are being monitored. He interjects on their work by saying: “Nice bit of sun for a change, a mhaistir.” Another teacher, Mr. Moloney replies “Go haluinn, buiochas le dia, a mhaistir” (‘Beautiful, thanks be to God, master’) (*L*, 21). Moran himself sees a colleague come into view and deploys the standard greeting: “Dia dhuit, a mhaistir,” (‘God be

³²⁷ It is notable that this routine continues in many parts of Ireland today and was the norm in primary school in Ireland while the present author attended in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

with you, master'), he says formally as he were one general saluting another. The reply is similar to the original greeting: "Dia is muire dhuit, a mhaistir" ('God and Mary be with you, master') (*Ibid*). It is arguable that this kind of social deference manifested in language assists in perpetuating social hierarchies as between teachers and their authority over students so as to reflect the doctrinal priorities of the Catholic faith so fervently espoused by governing authorities in McGahern's world.

Prayer forms another strand of a reinforcement routine that is found in the life of the school and indeed the family home³²⁸ where it represents an act of reinforcement of the faith. In the context of the school, it was expected that students would be taught how to say their prayers and that they would practice them at key moments throughout the day, such as in the morning, before mealtimes and prior to departing for home as per requirements set down by the Catholic hierarchy: "We chant the prayer before work. They take out their books" (*L*, 25). Practicing prayer offers an opportunity to create and affirm pious practices that are hoped will make a significant imprint on the habitus of each child, who in turn carry such habits into adulthood and repeat the same practices with their own children thus completing a generational cycle of religious faith and observation. Moran recalls his own experience in childhood of his late mother that is tinged with heavily pious behaviour where he cowers into his mother's bed in terror at the arrival of thunder and lightning: "We'll live happily forever and forever if we pray." The young Moran informs his mother of his anxiety who promptly replies: "You can come to me if it does" (*L*, 26). A clap of thunder is then heard which in turn provokes more angst on the part of young Moran who declares: "Hide me, O hide me, I don't want to go to hell" (*L*, 26).

The fear of the time after death remains a constant preoccupation and affects people's behaviour during their life time. As the thunder and lightning storm passes, young Moran and his mother Kate fall back on their piety in search of security and solace, where the former anxiously enquires:

"We won't die so and fear God?"

"Not if we pray and fear God" Kate reassures her son (*L*, 27).

³²⁸ Notable in frequency in *The Barracks* (1962), *The Dark* (1965) and *Amongst Women* (1990) within the context of the family home.

In a community which is the site of conservative morals and confessional behavioural practices, the highest and most noble profession to aspire to was to serve God by joining the Priesthood. Young Moran's devoutly religious mother Kate impresses this aspiration upon him on a regular basis to the extent that he now takes this ambition to be his own: "I'll say Masses for you when you're dead." "Lots and lots of Masses for you. You'll hardly have to spend any time at all in purgatory with all the Masses."

"You promise to say Mass for me?"

"I promise. And afterwards we'll live forever together in heaven" (*L*, 28). Here, the ultimate reward, the supreme ambition, is to reach one's greater reward in heaven. This ambition displaces and distorts all other thoughts and dreams in the 'mortal' world. In McGahern's world, such a hope has been appropriated by the clergy as a means to influence the conduct of members of the community. Parishioners are coerced into conforming to certain social mores by means of the threat and actual implementation of sanctions which include local exclusion, public shaming, excommunication and exile.

As his current flashback comes to an end, Moran performs a mental rendering of the day in which he now inhabits: 'Two worlds: the world of the schoolroom in this day, the world of memory becoming imagination; but this last day in the classroom will one day be nothing but a memory before its total obliteration, the completed circle (*L*, 35). With the ending of this day also comes the end of his employment as a teacher at the school for conduct deemed inappropriate for a teacher working in a Catholic school. He laments the disapproval and distant treatment he receives from colleagues now that his situation has been made public:

The blackhaired Tonroy who passes me, now in rigid disapproval, (...) O the opposite of my love in the room in Howth, the love of the Other that with constant difficulty extends its care to all things about her so that they shine in their own loveliness back to her at the circle closes in the calmness of the complete self, the love that I'll be fired from this school for at eight (*L*, 22).

Patrick Moran is at this point in a relationship with an American divorcee, Isobel, whom he has married in a civil ceremony in London unbeknownst to his

employers or Irish authorities. Since he has not wed in a Catholic church to a woman who is entirely free of legal encumbrances (i.e. she is a divorcee) nor has he supplied documentation to the effect that he himself can marry freely, the marriage between him and Isobel is thus void under Irish law. It is a situation that gives rise to considerable scandal and results in Moran's dismissal³²⁹ from his teaching post at the behest of the priest who manages the school. In 1965, *The Dark* was banned by the Censorship Board and McGahern was himself dismissed from his teaching position. As a result he was left with little choice to leave Ireland for a number of years. This traumatic episode in the author's life was a key impetus for the writing of *The Leavetaking*.³³⁰

The novel, however, had a complex and rich publication history. Following its first edition in 1974, it was to be revised and appeared in a significantly different second edition in 1984. Rather strikingly, the second edition is twenty-four pages shorter than the first. Changes introduced in the new text mean that the names of minor characters are changed or omitted and details pertaining to action and setting have also seen alterations (for example, concerning Moran's university degree and his room in Dublin). The new edition also reports that Isobel has a second abortion (*L*, 117). More substantial changes involve the removal of a number of passages of varying length. Pages 103 to 105 have seen extensive deletion of text, as have the passages concerning Isobel's narration and the restaurant seen with her father on pages 111-21 and 125-29 respectively. Patrick Moran's views on the process of memory and the subjective transformation of other people's remembering are also removed in the 1984 edition (*L*, 161-66 in the 1974 edition). McGahern is reported to have sought to introduce more distance in the reworking of this work, but one critic notes that the reader is simply left with less detail in relation to Moran's reaction to meeting his father-in-law on the train

³²⁹ At this point of his writing, there is a direct reflection of McGahern's own personal experience since he himself was dismissed from his teaching post following publication of *The Dark* (1965). His teaching appointment was rescinded by Fr. Carton, manager of Scoil Eoin Bhaiste school in Clontarf, Dublin on the direct orders of Dr. John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin. For further detail on the episode see Eamon Maher, "A Glimpse of Irish Catholicism in John McGahern's "Amongst Women", *Doctrine and Life*, Vol. 51, No. 6, (2001) pp. 348-50; Eamon Maher, 'Catholicism and National Identity in the Works of John McGahern, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 90, No. 357, (2001), pp. 73-74; Denis Sampson, 'Introducing John McGahern,' *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (1991) p. 1; Val Nolan, 'If it was just th'oul book...': a history of the McGahern banning controversy,' *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (2011), pp. 261-279.

³³⁰ A reworked text of the book became available in 1984, the edition referred to here.

and boat to Dublin (*L*, 161-66, 1974 edition). Although this enterprise appears to reflect McGahern's concerns over narrative technique and the formal arrangement of his text, it is difficult to escape the feeling that something has been lost in that exercise.

The banning of McGahern's previous book proved a catalyst in reforming censorship legislation in 1967, although the Catholic Church in Ireland, through its hierarchy, continued to exercise considerable power and influence throughout the political system and civil society.³³¹ However, more than forty-years would have to elapse before the Irish state was to acquire a character resembling anything similar to secular in nature.

Gradual shifts in cultural identity, community cohesion and personal conviction were to both reflect and encourage change in how Irish society looked upon itself and that manner in which it expressed the image it saw. As one generation matured and became parents, their children were offered new insights and alternative possibilities to what came before.³³² Before these changes were to come about, however, many young people were taught values consistent with conservative Catholic attitudes that prevailed over the community. Certain expectations were attached to the generation to come. In this respect, Moran notes that his mother had remarked to his aunt prior to his own birth that a certain life was expected of him, which was tinged with and dominated by religious duty: "If it is a boy it will one day raise the chalice in anointed hands and if it is a girl it will live in the ordered days of the convent and not in this confusion of a life" (*L*, 47). This was the prayer, the hope of a pious generation. To serve God, to serve in the cloth, was the noblest of all purposes that a person could possibly dedicate themselves to. At this point of McGahern's writing, it is the benevolent influence of a matriarchal figure that determines the agenda that will govern the protagonist's (Moran) life.

³³¹ See Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2005) p. 609; Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2005) pp. 265-266.

³³² A rather informative encapsulation of the cultural and economic realities requiring management by a new generation is aptly presented in Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland poor for so long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), p. 250 in specific, chapters 5 & 6 in general.

Professional commitments and personal animosities between young Moran's parents ensure that the couple reside separately. However, Catholic family values provide that a woman must entertain her husband's desires and in a situation of a complete absence of any kind of birth control, Mrs. Moran is forced to live with the inevitable consequences: Summer and winter he came then from the barracks on that bike and each year a new child arrived in the house (*L*, 56). The only reaction available to her was clear, as clear as it was any other occasion when her husband came to her in such a sexual mood: 'She turned to him: it was her duty' (*L*, 65). Women in this era were treated as servants of men, an abundance of religious-tinged cultural capital present in the community ensured that prevailing norms provided ample justification for such behaviour.

As his parents live apart, his father a policeman working in barracks in another town, his mother teaching elsewhere, the youthful Moran is asked to join his father in residence at the latter's workplace. He refuses but offers fabricated grounds on which to excuse his refusal (*L*, 50). His father reminds him that he could swear in good company in his residence and not have to worry about the consequences. The young Moran falls back on his indoctrinated piety to find a suitable rejoinder: "But I'd have to tell them in confession, anyhow" (*L*, 50). Reacting in this manner sheds light on the depth to which a pious, confessional philosophy has penetrated his consciousness and habitus and that of others of his generation. The malevolent father-figure presents an unpleasant opportunity, which his son refuses on the grounds that his conduct in his company would compromise the values that he has been indoctrinated with. It is his desire to remain by his mothers' side which motivates him to resist any developments that would separate mother and son from one another.

However, as the young Moran begins to mature, his outlook gradually shifts to take on more secular traits. He identifies one particular experience as having marked his memory of this process having an effect upon him, where once he had accompanied his mother on her journey by train into town prior to Christmas. Noticing something unusual in his mothers' shopping bag, he ventures to offer a comment as means of discovering its true contents, protesting his right to know due to his burgeoning

maturity. She confirms his suspicions and confirms the items as Christmas presents, a revelation that Moran notes that this development felt as if “It was the first break in the sea of faith that encircled me, for what if God was but the same deception...” (L, 62). The boy becomes aware of an uncomfortable fact of life, which prompts him to question a fundamental basis and the principal premise of his faith. However, it does not appear to damage his faith in the short-term, although it does provide a catalyst for his position in respect of his spirituality later in the book. An element of self-censorship surfaces as a means of maintaining the status quo: those who doubt the bona fides of the existing system of faith may not speak out. The minority who transgress fundamental values and those prepared to challenge religious structures and the church-state axis of power are sanctioned, a fate which befalls the adult Moran later in *The Leavetaking*.

Mrs. Moran’s health begins to falter and she is later taken to hospital where it is discovered that she has contracted cancer (L, 63). Surgery is necessary and she enters respite at home a few days afterwards. However, such is the power of the prevailing ideology that Mr. Moran forces his wife to allow sexual intercourse between them despite the fact that such conduct directly contravenes explicit medical advice to engage in abstinence on pain of provoking a deterioration in her condition. In this situation, grave as it is, her only source of solace in the face of her husband’s guilty desire is that of her piety: “I’ll be careful” despite his wife’s cautionary words of “It’s a dangerous time.” After the act of intimacy is completed, Moran senior repeats his earlier assurance but now with a deflated sense of purpose. His wife simply replies: “It’ll be alright” and is unable to sleep for the rest of the night. Placing her fate entirely in the hands of God, the helpless Kate Moran offers half-hearted answers “I’m sure,” “One way or the other it will be the will of God” (L, 65).³³³ Moran follows his natural desires leading to

³³³ On 17 July 1968 *Humanae Vitae* was promulgated by Pope Paul VI. It was a much anticipated document dealing with the Church’s official position on ‘regulation of births’ and proved to be divisive. It was naturally against artificial contraception of any kind. In Ireland the official reception given to the encyclical was warm and it was presented on 29 July 1968 by Professor P.F. Cremin, professor of Moral Theology and Canon Law at Maynooth accompanied by Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. John Charles McQuaid. One cleric who opposed its introduction was a theologian based in University College Cork, Fr. James Good who remarked that represented ‘a major tragedy’ and went on to say: ‘I have no doubt that the document will be rejected by the majority of Catholic theologians and by Catholic lay people.’ Bishop of Cork duly banned Fr. Good from preaching and later ensured he could no longer continue teaching theology at UCC. Fr. Good’s remarks were made in the spirit of the frustration felt by many

procreation and his behaviour is consistent with official Church doctrine on the sexuality of married couples.

As young Moran's mother lay in her sick-bed, pregnant again as a result of her husband's uncontrollable urges, which was to accelerate her untimely death, piety permeates their whole approach to the situation. Confidence in faith asserted through prayer: "We offer up this Holy Rosary for the quick recovery of the children's mother," soon followed by "We offer up this Holy Rosary to Almighty God that His will be done" (*L*, 69). Kate Moran's state of health continues to deteriorate as she receives care in the family home. Moran Senior does not welcome this situation: 'Crazy word came Sunday from my father. The house was to be cleared the next morning. The deathroom alone was to be left alone and necessary pails and cutlery and pots. The children and maid with the beds and the rest of the furniture were to move to the barracks. Owing to pressure of duty he couldn't come but he was sending men and a lorry. She would die alone with the nurses' (*L*, 69). 'After the word came the whole world was arrested around the leaving in the morning and it was with surprise that the morning came much as any morning, waking into the shiver of its first light and the unbelief that this day would be the end of what had gone on for long' (*Ibid*).³³⁴ Kate Moran passes away soon afterwards and funeral arrangements are made and carried out. Young Moran experiences great sorrow and seeks to avoid attending Mass for his mother but his father instantly rejects his plea due to force of habit, patriarchal authority and public perception which exert an influence on the public conduct of private citizens (*L*, 77).

Now reflecting on promises he had made to his late mother on his future career, the adult Moran retains guilty feelings in relation to not having entered the priesthood. He was, however, to turn to an allied profession: "Guiltily and furtively I turn to a second best – I would teach. Had she not taught, was it not called the second priesthood...?" (*L*, 85). In a development that closely mirrors McGahern's own

parishioners in what was seen as an uncompromising position taken by the church on birth control matters. For a detailed context of the occasion see Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: the Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 198-199.

³³⁴ Arguably this is the point in the text from which the book's title can be traced, although there is a plurality of meanings to this experience as the he protagonist as a child has also taken leave of his dying mother. In addition, his wife, Isobel breaks with her father in the course of the novel.

experience, Moran enters training to become a teacher. The author himself was to note the clear connection between teaching and clerical activity:

Teaching was known then as the second priesthood. Everything that happened during that training pointed to the fact that our function had been already defined by the Church. We were being trained to lead the young into the Church, as we had been led, and to act as a kind of non-commissioned officer to the priest, including education.³³⁵

Training priests as teachers was a deliberate policy for Catholic authorities as it offered the opportunity to engage directly in the shaping of habitus of the young children and adolescents that frequented schools throughout the country. This in turn resulted in the future adult population being educated and indoctrinated in a desirable fashion that reflected established priorities of the ruling elite within the Church-State axis of power.³³⁶ Indeed, in this respect the long arm of conservative Catholic ideology retains its stranglehold on Moran and he feels obliged to take up a career as close to church ministry as he can manage outside the priesthood. State policy ensures that teachers are thus trained in a manner and in an environment that contains many of the trappings of a religious training experience. Moran recalls his own experience in teacher-training college:

The Training College itself was reassuringly like a seminary. Mass each morning, prayers in the chapel, last thing at nights, prayers before meals in the long refectory, a prayer before we were free to troop out on the path round the football field where we could hear the roar of the city beyond its high wall (*L*, 85).

In an environment resembling something akin to a cloistered regime, future teachers were instructed in the faith and prayed several times a day. Teachers were also expected to pray with their students everyday during school time, thereby reinforcing religious habits and routines. McGahern also recalls this deliberate strategy of

³³⁵ Cited from John McGahern, 'The Church and Its Spire', in Stanley Van Der Ziel (Ed.) *Love of the World Essays: John McGahern* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 143.

³³⁶ See Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), pp. 53-58.

reinforcing the *Catholic habitus* that began in school and continued in the family home and in the community that accommodated them:

The catechism learned by rote in school, reinforced by constant images and daily rituals: the Pope's hand raised in blessing, the lamp that burned all day and night before the Sacred Heart on the high mantelpiece, the silence that fell when the Angelus rang, the Rosary each night, the Grace before and after meals. We followed the life of Christ as a story that gave meaning to our lives through the great feasts of Christmas and Easter and Whitsun (...) The Bishop came that Easter. With his crozier and rich, colours and tall hat he was the image of God the Father. At the altar rail he struck us lightly on the cheek. We were now soldiers of Christ. (...) ³³⁷

In this manner the *habitus* of these parishioners is thus fashioned in a conservative mould with a view to perpetuating established values from one generation to the next. Arguably, a smooth transition from one generation to the next depends on providing highly similar conditions in which to provide for the propagation of certain values, but such a system is vulnerable to change once citizens become more critically aware through the process of gaining access to higher education and interest in media depicting alternative values and lifestyles. In this context, the inauguration of the Irish national broadcaster Raidió Telefís Éireann (RTÉ) in December 1961 created an unmistakable agent of social change in Ireland. With the launch of the organisation President De Valera remarked that it could build up the character of the whole people, but at the same time he was concerned that it could represent a possibility for demoralisation through decadence and dissolution. His successor as Taoiseach (Prime Minister of Ireland) Séan Lemass welcomed the prospect of opening Ireland out to the world. This more open vision on the part of the latter had been stoked by national excitement in the visit of U.S. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in November 1961 and the effects of net inward migration for the first time in many years.³³⁸ With the changing economic and cultural circumstances of the people, greater interest developed in the outside world, particularly in more affluent lifestyles and the liberal values found within them in countries such as the U.K. and the U.S. This also coincided with the era

³³⁷ Cited from John McGahern, 'The Church and Its Spire', pp. 136-37.

³³⁸ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 2005), pp. 260-261 and John Horgan, *Irish Media: A Critical History since 1922* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 79-87.

of a sustained effort at reforming the Irish economy and the first attempts to gain entry to the European Economic Community.

The outward trajectory of McGahern's central character may be read as reflecting the urges of many in Ireland in this period. Nonetheless, Moran's own ambitions manifest themselves primarily through his attempts to form romantic relationships in pursuit of his own autonomous desires. However, Moran suffers severe heartache when his then girlfriend abruptly ends their relationship and this leads him to adopt a more lacklustre approach toward his professional duties (L, 96-97). Over the course of a number of months he begins to recover his confidence, but there remains an uneasiness within him that he has been unable to remedy: '...As I got better there was no longer any fear of crying like a child, a terrible restlessness came in its place. I had hardened, but wanted to get away from all that was familiar, to shake its dust away. I'd go to London where I knew no one...' (L, 99). His school principal, Mr. Maloney recognises his state of mind. "I've noticed, a mhaistir, you've not been your old self these past few months. I'm sure a change would work wonders" (L, 99). The Manager of the school Father Curry reacts in a manner that reflects the ethnocentric and purist view that Ireland retains all the necessary qualities for a wholesome and happy life: "...You want to go away for a year. What do you want to go away for? Isn't there everything you want in this country?" (L, 101).³³⁹

Moran eventually secures permission for a leave of absence, which means he can voluntarily leave the jurisdiction in which he has spent his whole life. Fr. Curry grants

³³⁹ While in this first instance, Moran is not actually emigrating, he is later forced to do so. Emigration in the Irish context up to 1950s and early 1960s was, in effect, a safety valve for a surplus population, it was also seen as representing a threat to the status quo, where middle class Irish families would be left without a supply of relatively inexpensive domestic servants. Indeed, there was also the issue that when young Irish men and women (particularly women) come into contact with "pagan" culture, emigration became a source of a challenge the values of traditional Catholic Ireland. Foreign culture held a mirror up to the shortcomings of post-independence Ireland that breached the cultural and economic protectionist that became a central feature of the Irish state in the three decades after Independence. Cited in Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Madison-Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). p. 139. Furthermore, in 1947 a statement released on behalf of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy asserted that they noted 'with great alarm the excessive degree to which (emigration) has increased in recent years' and made their concerns known to the Taoiseach, Mr. de Valera. The Catholic hierarchy also lobbied to impose restrictions on the numbers of young girls leaving the country and in 1953 it unsuccessfully sought the appointment of a welfare officer at the London Embassy. They also sought in vain to have restrictions placed upon the emigration of adolescents in 1964: cited in Gráda (1997), p. 212.

permission but does so on a cautionary note: “Yes, now. I seem to recall him mentioning that...If that’s the case I’ll write the letter to the Department tonight, but mind you don’t get any foolish ideas into your head while you’re away. Away isn’t like here” (L, 101). This opportunity stands in stark contrast to *The Barracks* and *The Dark* where the protagonist never really acquires any meaningful opportunity to escape the cultural constraints of conservative Ireland. However, in *The Leavetaking*, Moran creates his own opportunity and maximises it even at the expense of contradicting official Church doctrine and the resultant social practice that the State encourages so as to uphold that doctrine. Furthermore, this opportunity is only a viable option because the protagonist holds sufficient qualifications to begin a professional career in teaching and the security to seek a leave of absence safe in the knowledge that he can return to his position should he respect the terms of his license. In this sense the character has been allowed to develop beyond the limited circumstances of earlier characters in both *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, if only to be cut down in his exercise of that greater autonomy.

On arrival in London Moran decides to find work and quickly does so after meeting a childhood friend who emigrated many years prior to Moran’s own arrival:

...I got work in a bar. It came about on account of a chance meeting one Sunday at Speaker’s Corner with a boy who had gone to school with me in Ireland. His name was Jimmy Doherty. The bar he worked in was looking for a man. There was no need for experience. I’d soon learn...He arranged a meeting with the manager. It seemed that Jimmy’s recommendation was enough, and I was told to start the next day. One of the advantages was that I’d have a small room of my own on the floor above the bar...(L, 102).

His arrival in England on this occasion was a personal choice and not an economic necessity. However, even though he is an educated professional he is only able to secure blue-collar work in the metropolis in common with so many other Irish residents of that city. It is more than happenstance that he has the good fortune of encountering another Irish citizen from his own childhood hometown given the high

level of emigration to England from rural areas in Ireland.³⁴⁰ Moreover, his living conditions are indicative of the relative sparsity of comfort that many emigrants were given to subsist in while they lived outside their country of birth due to the proletarian circumstances under which they live with owing to modest wages from working class their occupations.

Soon after taking up employment at the bar, Moran makes the acquaintance of a glamorous American girl, Isobel, during a quiet period of the afternoon in his place of work (*L*, 102). They build up a good rapport relatively quickly and agree to meet one another for a walk in the city the following Friday evening (*L*, 103). Moran succeeds in inviting her on another date: “Since you’re staying in London, would you like me to take you to a game on Saturday?” I asked. We changed but little. I was bidding for the same security as the Dress Dance years ago, even though the world she spoke about was so outside my life, except in movies, that a yes or no would be equally unreal’ (*L*, 105). Feelings of euphoria on Moran’s part at such simple steps happening for positive reasons stand as a testament to a residual sense of guilt he feels at daring to allow himself to reach this emotional place in his life that is perhaps regarded as illegitimate under his home country’s values since his lover does not have a completely ‘clean’ romantic history which he could avail of exclusively for his own benefit. As Moran and Isobel get to know one another better, he discovers she has been previously married for five years and has a turbulent relationship with her rather eccentric father (*L*, 109).

Moran’s happiness at spending time with Isobel becomes a source of energy and motivation for him in his new life. He basks in this feeling of well-being in the interim before he meets her again:

There are times when we come on people singing or humming as they work, and when they look up with lifted faces we know that though whatever they happen to be doing is included in the

³⁴⁰ The so-called ‘safety valve’ of emigration was also a sensitive matter politically in that the British were anxious to receive migrating workers for their industries and any restriction on this supply of labour was viewed with great caution due to worries of retaliation by the British by means of reducing the supply of raw materials to Ireland, which the country depended upon for its economic well-being. In one period (1939-45), emigration facilitated the reduction of the national employment rate from 15 to 10%, making its continuance desirable for domestic stability and diplomatic harmony. See J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society*. (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2001/1989), pp. 226-7.

energy of the happiness, it is not its source. We know that happiness is elsewhere. Though I cannot sing, all that day each movement and moment was suffused with a silent singing (*L*, 110).

Moran's employer, Mr. Plowman notices his sunnier disposition and is informed of his employee's romantic success. Soon the couple seek to spend longer periods together and Moran seeks suggestions:

"That girl's a friend. She's looking for a room. Do you know of any reasonable rooms round here?"

"Do you want a room together?"

"No."

"There are several empty rooms upstairs. I don't know how they're fixed. I can ask Mrs. Plowman."

Isobel declares her true feelings for Moran amidst the stress she feels: "I am so happy to be with you."

"The Plowmans may give you a room. It wouldn't have been right to ask for a room together. There are several big rooms on the top floor" (*L*, 112). Moran's reticence regarding retaining apprehensive feelings about sharing a bed chamber with a woman to whom he is not married is a manifestation of the conservative, Catholic values with which he was raised and that still characterise his mind-set in a manner that continues to determine his social mores. On the other hand, Isobel, as a modern, liberal woman, still wishes to assert her independence and so delays the cohabitation stage of her relationship with Moran. However, it would seem that this link to past values now appears to have weakened since Moran is acutely motivated to live with this lady, the evidence for which appears in his next remarks: "We can start looking for a place of our own. The room, if they offer it, will give us time..." (*L*, 112).

The two lovers share more details of their lives with each other and Isobel reveals she had had at least one abortion (*L*, 116-7). Such a fact allied with the reality of her divorced parents and the issue of her sleeping with a man to whom she was not

married created a number of grounds from which scandal could be created if it became public knowledge or at least known to Irish clerical authorities given the extent to which such behaviour represented a contravention of Catholic doctrine. As the lovers become closer to one another they become more distant from traditional social mores and as this situation unfolds Isobel also becomes estranged from her usual material comforts until she again reconciles with her father at a later stage (*L*, 119). However, the couple seem to demonstrate an awareness of what they realise that other people may look upon as an irregular situation by briefly discussing how to make their relationship appear more respectable: “Would you like to be married?” remarks Moran, after which Isobel remarks: “We are sort of married” (*L*, 119).

Personal anguish and concern for the welfare of her father motivates Isobel to inform Moran that she wished to visit her father: “Would you mind if I went to see my father?”

“Of course not, but why?”

“I’m worried. I left so suddenly after the row,” an answer which Moran accepts and encourages Isobel to go and see her father (*L*, 119). She returns from meeting her father later in the evening in good spirits and exclaims that: “My father took me out. He was awfully nice. He can be so nice when he wants to” (*L*, 120).

Moran chastises her choice of words as well her complimentary report of her meal with her father: “Why should he not be nice?” before adding: “Sometimes it’s called ordinary good manners” (*L*, 120). He is then informed that she has mentioned their relationship to her father and that he was expecting them for dinner at his home the following evening. On arrival at the house, Isobel asserts: “The evening won’t last long. He’ll be bored after an hour,” (*L*, 121).³⁴¹

³⁴¹ Isobel makes reference to the limited patience possessed by her father. The patriarch here displays some common features with the cantankerous nature of other father figures in McGahern’s work, namely Moran in *Amongst Women* (1990), Mahoney in *The Dark* (1965). While each figure in their respective circumstance are complex in different ways, it is possible to assert that they are emotionally underdeveloped and can be said to be somewhat emotionally removed and distant from the people around them.

The evening runs more pleasantly than expected and a positive development results from it: Isobel explains that her father had informed her that: "...He says that the flat is mine, that it's in my name, that he and Caroline –which means Caroline-bought it for me" (L, 124). This character, Caroline, is the lynchpin that sustains the continuance of an artificially high standard of living for both father and daughter in that she provides a clear contrast to the power and presence of the patriarchal figures present in some of McGahern's other novels such as *The Barracks*, *The Dark* and *Amongst Women*. Indeed, while the protagonist is unable to affect any meaningful change to the situation in Part I where his mother dies, he attempts to mitigate this loss by rescuing his lover from the incestuous sphere of her controlling father in Part II of the novel. This need stems directly from the author's own autobiographical experience of the death of his own mother who he comes to refer as 'my beloved' for the first time in his fiction in *The Leavetaking* (L, 64). Soon after the lovers learn that Caroline has succumbed to a long-term illness leaving Isobel's father practically destitute since he depended entirely on her for sustenance. This means that all her assets are subsumed by Caroline's rightful heirs forcing Isobel and Moran to vacate the flat in which they had been living (L, 133-39). Isobel finds it difficult to cope with the stress that her father's actions and Caroline's death have provoked for her. Recognising this situation, Moran offers a degree of security to his lover:

"Why don't you marry me, then?" to which Isobel responds by attempting to deflect from the central idea of the proposal:

"We are married" she defends.

"Do you want it registered?"

"Like a flat?"

"Exactly" (L, 139).

News of their engagement is duly relayed to Mr. and Mrs. Plowman who swiftly organise a modest celebration in the bar. Two weeks later Isobel and Moran are married in simple civil ceremony and their wedding party was attended by those same people who had been present at their engagement party including Jimmy and the Plowmans (L, 142).

Moran becomes ever more cognisant of the fact that his year abroad is soon to come to an end and he must now adopt a strategy in respect of the next chapter of his life: 'My year away from Ireland was almost full. Through that casual morning the course of our two lives had been changed. In three weeks' time my leave of absence from the school would expire' (L, 142).

Conversation regarding a journey to Ireland ensues between the couple, a discussion that produces an affirmative position on the matter. Moran explains his reluctance to resume his old life: "We're only going to come back. I'm not going on teaching. I shouldn't have become one in the first place. But because of our marriage it is now impossible anyhow" (L, 142). The unsustainable situation referred to here is that of Moran's marriage to a non-Catholic, divorcee outside a recognised (i.e. Roman Catholic) religion. To offend official doctrine in this way was a direct affront to established values and would inevitably result in his employment being terminated. Isobel is soon informed by husband as to the vagaries of the political power of the Irish Catholic authorities:

...there were two salary scales for teachers in Ireland, one for women and single men, and a higher for married men. If I applied to go on the higher scale the authorities would discover that I wasn't properly married. If I remained on the single salary, which I'd have to do, they'd find out sooner or later in such a small city that I was living as a married man but not married. Either way I was certain to be fired. All education in Ireland was denominational. While the State paid teachers, it was the Church who hired and fired (L, 142).

Extensive Catholic Church involvement in education in Ireland had reached a very considerable level of penetration by the beginning of the twentieth century, preceding the founding of the independent Irish state by more than two decades. Indeed, by 1900 the Church was in a position of management in over nine-thousand national (primary) schools throughout the country³⁴² and were thus well-placed to effect an indoctrination exercise through schools.³⁴³ Moreover, the practical reality at this time

³⁴² Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900-2000*. (London: Profile Books, 2005), p. 88.

³⁴³ By the 1950s, the Church still retained a domineering influence over the Irish education system and it continued well into the 1980s. Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. 11.

was that the education system was the principal mediator of the cultural heritage that society wished to imbue in its younger members in order to carry those values forward to and through future generations.³⁴⁴

Authoritarian clericalism promoted a distrust of intellectual pursuits, a practice that permeated the teaching culture in the education, and was a strategy designed to reinforce the power of Catholic ideology as the dominant force in the Church-State axis of power.³⁴⁵ It was by this means that a culture was created whereby management decisions were expected to be above criticism and their implementation was not to be questioned. However, this culture of deference began to experience a decline starting in the 1960s.

In order to comply with the terms of the sabbatical leave he had been given, Moran must now return to Ireland and he is joined by his wife. He contacts his friend Lightfoot back in Dublin to elicit assistance in finding accommodation for his return. Lightfoot reacts with surprises and he is told the news of Moran's marriage. On the morning after his return he visits his old school to a warm welcome from the headmaster (*L*, 142-144). Thereafter the concern became a search for rented accommodation (*L*, 144-145). Their search for accommodation remains fruitless until Moran happens upon an old friend from before he left Ireland from whom he receives a reference to obtain accommodation with the Logans, elderly couple in Howth, County Dublin. It is quickly decided the rooms offered in the Logan's were suitable for the Moran's and agreed that the couple would set about moving in the following day. Mrs. Logan enquires as to Isobel: "Is she a Dublin girl or from down the country?" a question which elicits an uneasy response from Moran: "She's American" (*L*, 149).

³⁴⁴ Fuller (2004) op. cit., makes a compelling point in respect of the value of the education system to the Catholic Church in Ireland in acting as a vehicle for social regulation and strong tool for shaping culture throughout the nation. p. 152. The ideological perspective of the issue is given clear attention in Chapter 19: 'The Power of the Catholic Church in Ireland' in *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, Clancy, P., Drudy, S., Lynch, K., O' Dowd, L., (Eds.) (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration/Sociological Association of Ireland, 2001), pp. 596-599. A more general overview of the role of the religious in Irish public life may be found in Séan Healy & Bridget Reynolds, *Social Policy in Ireland: Principles, Practice and Problems* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 1998), pp. 411-428.

³⁴⁵ A persuasive argument in this respect is exposed by the late Trinity College (Dublin) Professor of Political Science, Basil Chubb in his *The Government and Politics of Ireland* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 14-21.

“O you blackguard, I suppose one of our Irish girls wasn’t good enough for you,” she remarks as she playfully touches Moran, much to his discomfort.

Isobel and Moran take the bus to view the rooms together the following day. During this journey the major worry for the couple swiftly arises for discussion with Isobel remarking: “Do you think it will be long before they find out at the school we’re not married in the church?” Little doubt prevails in her husband’s mind and his response dispels any shadow of hope his wife may have had: “It’s a chance, but sooner or later they will” (*L*, 147- 49).

“The old Letter of Freedom and the single and married scales. They’ll check once they find out we’re living together. We might as well be clear.”

“Will they fire you then?”

“That’s right.” (*L*, 149). Moran is well-aware that his marrying a woman outside the Catholic Church, without a letter of freedom, and the fact that his wife is a divorcee is certain to offend the morals of society in Ireland and provoke severe sanction from the Catholic clergy that have control over all areas of management and recruitment of schools in Ireland.³⁴⁶

A number of months pass before clerical authorities become aware of Moran ‘irregular’ marriage. Knowledge of the situation reaches the school through a casual conversation that took place between the wife of one of the teachers and Mrs. Logan while they happened to meet while out shopping on a Saturday in Henry Street, Dublin. These women soon exchange information (*L*, 158). From this encounter news travels through other people and before long it reaches one of Moran’s teaching colleagues in his own school:

By God you’re a sly one. I ran into Mrs. Jones in Henry Street. I used to know her mother in the old days in the East Wall, and she tells me her husband teaches with you, and they didn’t even know you are married. But God that’s the slyest way to do it I have ever heard of. I wish I and my old Johnny had thought to get it over so nice and sly in our day (*L*, 158).

³⁴⁶ See Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopol*, pp. 53-55.

Mrs. Logan's surprise at others' ignorance in respect of Moran's marriage is relatively typical since in Ireland much of the philosophy adopted for quotidian life is heavily parochial in nature and as such, people expect to be informed of such important personal developments such as marriages and other notable events. Privacy is a lifestyle quality that receives full respect only for more powerful members of society, whereas ordinary parishioners are forced to live in a community in which a large amount of information about their lives and families are known and available to the community at large. Moran takes note of what he has been told and soon informs his wife as to the course events now about to take shape: "The game's up at last," he announces on arrival at their lodgings and informs Isobel that Mrs. Logan had informed him in the corridor of her conversation with the third party in respect of their marriage. A local member of the clergy soon becomes involved and calls to the house the following evening (*Ibid*).

Once the priest left the premises Moran explains the content of their conversation to his wife: "The local curate was sent round to check. Their style's to act by stealth. Even for them it's getting dangerous to display their power too obviously. Now that they've checked they'll move tomorrow in the school." Moran then called on the owners of the house downstairs. He explains that '...we were legally married but that in the eyes of the church it was not lawful...' where after he told Mrs. Logan that it was highly probable that his appointment would be rescinded as a consequence of his actions and that he would leave her premises immediately to save her further embarrassment if she preferred (*L*, 159). He soon discovers that the couple do not treat them with any hostility and is relieved to learn of Mrs. Logan's answer: "Sure, love, what'd I be doing putting you out? You never caused any trouble in this house. I don't see why people want to go causing trouble. At least you married and did the decent by the girl, didn't you?" He then speaks with Mr. Logan who, he is surprised to learn, is revealed to hold a strong antipathy toward the clergy: 'He turned out to be rabidly anti-clerical, an opinion no doubt acquired from the breadth of his reading, which he liked to think of as somehow dangerous. "A crowd of bowsies in black," was how he described

all priests³⁴⁷ (L, 159). Moran's earlier remark about the necessity of Church authorities exercising power discreetly and the private attitudes of the Logan demonstrates the changing nature of opinion held by the community toward the monolithic structures of the Irish Catholic Church. Such attitudes are seen to have become more liberal and tolerant toward dissenting opinion in respect of religious and political affairs as Irish society becomes more affluent as a result of markedly improving economic circumstances.³⁴⁸ Indeed, as *The Leavetaking* is set in the mid-1960s, it reflects some elements of a mood of change that can be seen to seeking a foothold in popular culture as a discernible shift in attitudes asserted its presence in Irish society.³⁴⁹ Private convictions and official doctrine began to diverge more discernibly at this time, but it was not to grow in scale for several years to come. Private convictions and official doctrine began to diverge more discernibly at this time, but it was not to grow in scale for several years to come.

It is when he returns to work the morning after speaking with the Logans that matters come to a head. Mr. Maloney, headmaster of the school, informs Moran that he has now become aware of his private family situation. Referring to the local Parish Priest and Manager of the School, Father Curry, Maloney declares: "It's come to his notice that you are living as a married man, when in fact you don't appear to be

³⁴⁷ While this negative comment about a member of the clergy was not likely to echo publicly, it mirrors a growing feeling of hostility toward the clergy. McGahern himself noted this sentiment about priests in the community: "...while they were feared and accepted I don't think they were liked by the people, though they'd have a small court of pious flunkies. They were often big, powerfully build men. In those days it took considerable wealth to put a boy through Maynooth and they looked and acted as if they came from a line of swaggering, confident men who dominated field and market and whose only culture was cunning, Money and brute force. Though they could be violently generous and sentimental at times, in their hearts they despised their own people (...)" see John McGahern, 'The Church and Its Spire', pp. 139-41.

³⁴⁸ Clear evidence exists in respect of recording the improving circumstances of the people. Statistics such as those that attest to the fact that there was a 4% growth rate in the economy and a 50% increase in the standard of living in the 1960s compared to the malaise of the 1950s provide a sound basis for such claims. Falling emigration figures also attest to the reality of more people availing of improving employment conditions at home, where, for example, average emigration fell from 14.8% between 1956 and 1961 to 3.7% between 1966 and 1971. For further detail see: (2001/1989), pp. 359-361. Emigration resulted in a tangible economic loss to the economy in the 1950s in particular. A value of 4 to 5% of GDP in foregone wealth creation has been arrived at by some analysts. Ó Gráda (1997) p. 216.

³⁴⁹ Some notable commentators supply an exposition of this situation that is succinctly described with practical examples in respect of the effect it had on Irish writing and writers on Irish matters of the time which also note the economic and cultural dimension of these developments. See Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2002), pp. 297-300.

married” and adds “You’re still on the single scale. You’ve never obtained a Letter of Freedom.”

Moran offers the inconvenient truth as his explanation: “I married in a registry office during the year’s leave of absence I had.” This information does not prove surprising to Maloney who states: “Father Curry guessed as much. What possessed you to do it, a mhaistir? I’ve always found you reasonable and sensible. Some people fly off the handle and you can’t reason with them, but I’ve never found you that way” (*L*, 161). Defensively Moran offers further justification of his actions: “It wasn’t possible to be married in the church. My wife was married before.”

Reiterating the Catholic Church’s doctrine on such matters and its power over Irish society, Maloney remarks: “I don’t know why it should happen this way. Life should be simpler, but you must know, a mhaistir, you won’t be allowed to continue teaching in a Catholic school.” Maloney strongly advises Moran to simply resign, but he refuses to do so in order to force management to formally terminate his employment:

“I won’t resign, a mhaistir.”

“Why, a mhaistir? You must know I’ve discussed this with Father Curry already. If you don’t resign you’ll be dismissed...”, a declaration that elicits an equally determined reply from Moran:

“I’ve thought about it too, a mhaistir, and I won’t resign. If I was a bad teacher I’d resign, or had committed some crime, or had harmed a child it would be different. But I’m harming no one.”

“While living in sin?” Moran replies as if to make Maloney’s point for him, to which he nods.

That’s no trouble, a mhaistir. You know that as well as I do. All you need to teach is knowledge and skill. If I refused to teach it on a point of principle, then I’d have to resign, but I don’t refuse. It’s written down in black and white in the official notes Notes For Teachers on history that the cultivation of patriotism is more important than the truth. So when we teach history Britain is always the big black beast, Ireland is the poor daughter struggling while being raped, when most of us know it’s a lot more complicated than that. And yet we teach it (*L*, 162).

In retorting to Maloney’s charges, Moran exposes a great deal of the web of hypocrisy that has colonised official doctrine that has in turn permeated into official education policy. Republican-tinged political policies that had sought to perpetuate memories of valent sacrifices of Irish revolutionaries in a utopian enterprise designed to

aid the building of a popular image of the character of the independent Irish state (particularly after 1937) that also sought to further demonise the sworn enemy – Britain- continued to affect teaching practices well into the 1960s. This was a time during which McGahern himself taught before being dismissed from his post.

One final opportunity is offered to Moran to resign, which Maloney relays with glee two days after their initial conversation: “I saw Father Curry and he’s still prepared to accept your resignation. You’ll have no trouble, with your degree, getting a much better position that you can ever hope for here, in England. And if you resign I can give you a glowing reference in good conscience. In fact, your teaching and qualifications deserve no less,” he offers, a proposal that is quickly rejected (*L*, 162). He is then forced to call on the powers of Father Curry as manager of the school to formally dismiss Moran (*L*, 163).

Lightfoot receives an update from Moran on the events to date and is informed of the complex cultural and political position occupied by the Catholic Church in Ireland. He enquires as to what his friend can do at this point: “Will you try to get the Union to take it up or anything?” (*L*, 164).

“No. If it was some sort of inefficiency they’d probably fight, but not such a private matter as faith or morals. They’d not confront the Church in light years on such a delicate matter.”

Lightfoot seeks solace in fact: “At least you’re married in law. You could take it to the courts.” This affirmation does not convince Moran who remarks: “That’s not even certain. There’s the special relationship the Church has...” (*Ibid*).³⁵⁰

After rebuffing Maloney’s final submission that he resign, Moran is sent to see Fr. Curry and a robust exchange ensues with the inevitable result that the clergyman understands he must formally dismiss his teacher:

You know that better than I do. If it got out that I let you go on teaching up there after what you’ve gone and done there’d be an uproar. The Archbishop wouldn’t stand for it. The parents wouldn’t stand for it. I couldn’t stand for it,” he defends before further adding: “Tell me this one

³⁵⁰ A situation that relied upon constitutional recognition in a subsection of Article 44 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, which remained unchanged until a constitutional amendment approved by referendum removed the provision in 1972. See Chubb (1999) (*op. cit.*), p. 31.

fact. What entered your head to do such a thing? Didn't you know it was flying in the face of God? You never caused me any trouble. I thought you'd see my days out at the school. Now you go and leave me no option but to get rid of you. Tell me this, what entered your head to do it?" (L, 166).

After sharing a farewell drink of whiskey together, Fr. Curry queries what Moran intends to do next: "Well, what do you intend to do now?"

"I'll go to London, Father" (L, 167). Moran's response reveals a strategy that has been adopted by large quantities of other Irish people in fleeing cultural totalitarianism and economic stagnation to make a new life in the more prosperous and liberal metropolis in London and other major conurbations in the United Kingdom. McGahern himself was acutely aware of the extent and effects of emigration on his country and had first-hand experience of the phenomenon decimating an already economically disadvantaged West of Ireland county, Leitrim in which he was born:

Between 1915 and 1960, nearly half a million Irish people went to England, and they had hard lives many of them. Most of the people I was at school with went to England, half of my own family went to England, and I think that if that siphoning off of the younger generation hadn't happened then, social change would have happened here (in Ireland) far more quickly...it would have been like an explosion, like the lid blowing off a kettle. In a way, a lot of the Irish problems were avoided through emigration, by getting rid of some of our youngest and best of our people, and that generation who disappeared into England were looked down on by the crowd that stayed, who did very little for the country or anything else...³⁵¹

A final act of desperation, and a feeling of shame toward (i.e. due to the nature of his habitus) to his decreasing religious faith results in Moran seeking counsel from Fr. Curry on whether there would be any possible way of making his marriage acceptable to the Church: "Do you think if the marriage could be put right in the eyes of the Church that I'd be allowed to teach in this country." (L, 168-169).

³⁵¹ See Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland Poor for so Long?* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p. 43.

“I doubt it. Hardly in my time. You see, once any authority makes a judgement it takes an even greater authority to reverse the decision. I can’t see that happening in our time” (*L*, 169).

“The Archbishop?” he ventures.

“Don’t you know the Archbishop knows all about your case, child!”³⁵²

“I was fairly certain” is the answer that Moran proffers as he accepts his fate.

Memories surface in his mind of the time he graduated from teacher training college as he seeks some solace in the face of the traumatic circumstances in which he now finds himself: ‘I see the priest addressing us again as we prepared to leave the Training College, trained to teach the young, the Second Priesthood, and this evening it all seems strewn about my life as waste, and it too had belonged once in rude confidence to day’ (*L*, 168). Feeling the pressure of his stressful experience, Moran begins to work his way through memory as he completes a chronological trawl from his first days in the teaching profession to circle back to his last on this day.

‘My love waits for me in a room at Howth. The table will have bread and meat and cheap wine and flowers. Tomorrow we will go on the boat to London. It will be neither a return nor a departure but a continuing. We will be true to one another and to our separate selves, and each day we will renew it again and again and again. It is the only communion left to us now’ (*L*, 168). In persevering against difficult circumstances and ignoring the reality of the passage of time, Moran and his wife reconnect with the routine they have established with one another and the security it provides for them. Where they seek to dissociate themselves from the flow of time they unwittingly subscribe to a value system relied upon by Catholic authorities who seek to centralise the notion of a static system of regulations common to utopian schemes of societal

³⁵² Moran’s circumstances mirrors that of the author himself in how he himself experienced the censoring of his book *The Dark* (1965) and was dismissed from his position for that very reason. The then Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. John Charles McQuaid, intervened directly by instructing Fr. Carton the manager of McGahern’s school, Scoil Eoin Bhaiste in Clontarf, Dublin to remove McGahern from his teaching position. Eamon Maher, ‘Catholicism and National Identity in the Works of John McGahern,’ *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 90, No. 357, pp. 72-83, (2001), p. 73.

organisation that seek to act as a bulwark against evolution³⁵³ and development beyond established parameters of expression and control.³⁵⁴

Over time barriers that were erected to frustrate the creation and propagation of cultural and intellectual capital become ineffective and the exercise of individual conscience becomes a tangible reality for interested citizens. In the period between the events that inspired the central plot of the book (i.e. 1965) and the year of its publication (1974) a number of developments took place that liberalised the availability of information and the means to consume it. Such developments included the easing of restrictions contained in censorship laws, greater levels of wealth making the purchase of literature more affordable for a relatively inhibited population and a concentrated effort by the state to allow much larger amounts to students to be education at a higher level.³⁵⁵ Changing circumstances also ensured that what was considered to be traditional values were subjected to interrogation and re-interpretation. Where *The Dark* revealed much oppression of a young man's rights and hopes, some hope became apparent toward the end of the novel, McGahern's next novel *The Pornographer* (1979) represents a very different and more open challenge to traditional institutions in society held dear by conservative ideology.

³⁵³ Existing ideology encourages maintenance of the status quo and seeks to reproduce itself. For a complete exposition of such a scheme see: Pierre Bourdieu, P., Jean-Claude. Passer. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 101-102.

³⁵⁴ In the wake of the banning of the *The Dark*, much discussion centred on how public opinion differed so significantly from the views of the governing elite. Writing at the time in an English newspaper, The Guardian, Irish commentator Mary Kenny observed that it is: '...not hypocrisy or despotism which provokes this ban: it is a simple case of arrested intellectual development. It is an inability to analyse. To resolve it is a plain matter of evolution. The ignorant and the sanctimonious have no enemy but time.' Cited in Val Nolan, (2011) 'If it was just th'oul book...': a history of the McGahern banning controversy,' *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp.261-279, (2001), p. 268.

³⁵⁵ Detailed statistics on this reality reveal a dramatic rise in educational participation at all levels between 1965 and 1975. See J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001/1989), pp. 362-363. See also Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*. (London: Harper Perennial, 2002), pp. 239-241.

2.4 Healing wounds, animating the spirit: *The Pornographer*

Following on from *The Leavetaking* (1974), McGahern's fourth novel, *The Pornographer* was published in 1979. In stark contrast to earlier work, the book made an uninhibited entrance to the public domain in a far more liberalised environment for literary art and artistic expression in the Irish state. The novel was received with mixed reactions from critics and was ignored by public authorities. While the central theme of the novel is dealt with quite differently in comparison to the author's preceding works, there are recurrent motifs such as a dying woman, a young male narrator and his romantic involvement with an older woman and the utilisation of first-person narrative heavily influenced by autobiographical experience.

As noted in earlier chapters, McGahern was raised in a near-puritan cultural environment which did not experience any significant change until the mid-1960s when the author himself had already begun to have his first novels published. Since there was a high-degree of collusion within the Church-State axis of power which began at the inception of the independent Irish state, particularly in respect of legislation pertaining to public morals and behaviour, writers experienced grave difficulties in deploying their artistic capabilities within what was experienced as a puritanical public culture. A significant number of such artists, amongst whom was McGahern, drew attention to the more stifling aspects of Irish Catholicism and the distorted perspective on sexuality that resulted from that stance.³⁵⁶ Such was the depth of the power of this regime, the author continued to exhibit effects of his experiences through his work which he eventually came to directly critique in his 1979 novel.

In a review of *The Pornographer*, Fournier observes that the work, 'engages, consciously but unironically, with the issues of morality, self-development and accommodation to society with which the novel from Austen to Hardy has traditionally concerned itself.'³⁵⁷ This latter part of this assertion is, however, challenged by the novel in that the protagonists' actions are an attack on traditional values regarding marriage. His attitude is one that rejects notions of convenience and appearances for

³⁵⁶ See Maher (2011), p. 490.

³⁵⁷ Suzanne Fournier, "Structure and Theme in John McGahern's *The Pornographer*", *Éire-Ireland*, no. 1, (1987), pp. 139-50, p. 43.

which he is sanctioned with both physical and emotional violence. In presenting this issue, it is arguable that the author seeks to provoke debate that would lead to more tolerant attitudes and thus make the community less hostile (if not more accommodating) for those who are unwilling or unable to conform to established cultural norms. In an era that was marked by a strident and tense debate between the political authorities and the Roman Catholic Church on the issue of contraception, McGahern goes further than the references to carnal ignorance and sexual impropriety he had included in *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*. Indeed, 1976 had seen a failed attempt at passing more liberal legislation governing contraception products under restricted circumstances. Three years after that date, the year in which *The Pornographer* was published, a more progressive and definitive position on the legal availability of contraceptive products for married couples became part of the Irish Statute Book.³⁵⁸

McGahern thus sought to take more risks than in previous work, particularly by continuing a project he began in *The Leavetaking*, and this has led certain critics to regard *The Pornographer* as constituting a parody of the conservative social and cultural regime that, although undergoing a notable transformation, remained restrictive. In 1979, the year in which *The Pornographer* was published, McGahern revealed that the ‘conscious risks’ he had taken in writing *The Leavetaking* had given him sufficient freedom to create *The Pornographer*. In highlighting a strong link between the two works, McGahern notes: ‘What is done in *The Pornographer* is basically the same thing started in *The Leavetaking*’.³⁵⁹ Another critic has remarked that one could regard both novels as ‘a single imaginative effort’ that were conceived to break out of the moulds that inspired the process that lead to the writing of *The Barracks* and *The Dark*.³⁶⁰

One of the less-favourable comments levelled against McGahern on the publication of *The Dark* (1965) and its subsequent banning was that he should be regarded as a “Pornographer”.³⁶¹ This would appear to suggest the origin of the title of McGahern’s 1979 work. In selecting such a title, the author was intent on drawing

³⁵⁸ See Fuller (2004), p. 209.

³⁵⁹ A claim made by Sampson (1991), pp- 15-16.

³⁶⁰ See McCarthy (2010), p. 175.

³⁶¹ Fournier (1987), pp. 50-51.

reader's attention to the heart of his motivation for the writing of the book, which he stated in a 2003 interview as:

...a deliberate attempt to see how the reason that the main character is so uninteresting is that this obsession with sexuality is enervating. He falls into that disease, which is a very Irish malaise, that since all things are meaningless it makes no difference what you do, and best of all is to do nothing. In this way ay he causes as much trouble to himself and to others as if he had set out deliberately to do evil.....the pornography was a kind of backdrop to see if the sexuality, in its vulnerability and its humanness, could be written about ...³⁶²

The public reaction to the book was muted and its publication did not elicit any reaction on the part of the Censorship Board and McGahern was able to continue writing in the absence of harassment beyond some isolated instances of disdainful commentary. Mindful of his own experience of having had his work banned and being forced to leave his country of birth for a number of years, McGahern attempts to deal with the issue of sexuality in a much more open and explicit fashion than in any of his previous works. While McGahern had previously touched upon sexual themes in *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*, he dealt with this theme with far greater force than previously. This is done in a manner that resonates with the sentiments expressed by Seamus Deane in 1986, who asserted that due to the ubiquitous impact of religion in Irish society after independence, particular within the sphere of sexual mores, 'the heroism of the individual life tended to be expressed (in Irish fiction) in an increasingly secular idiom, with sexuality celebrated as the deepest form of liberation.' Thus, it was felt that writers could only achieve the desired level of freedom through an obligation to deal with the matter in an outspoken style.³⁶³ McGahern was known to greatly respect E.R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational*, a text that strongly supports the view that sexual passion can be equated to something on the same spectrum as religious experience.³⁶⁴ McGahern took great umbrage at the view of the Catholic Church in it claiming that sex should be regarded as degraded, shameful and suitable only for the purposes of procreation, which he felt was a grave mistake. The author asserted that

³⁶² Cited in Maher (2003), p. 149.

³⁶³ Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), pp. 217-18.

³⁶⁴ E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951)

denying this central strand of the human being would be fatal. In an interview given when McGahern was already in his advanced years, he observed: 'I see sexuality as just part of life', 'Either all of life is sacred or none of it is sacred. I'm inclined to think that all of life is sacred and that sexuality is a very important part of that sacredness.'³⁶⁵ This sacredness in sexuality can only be achieved when the act is separated from instinct so that transcendence becomes possible. Where an important distinction arises, however, is between this sacredness and vulgar titillation involving little more than pornographic portrayal of the sexual function of the body that in turn causes the description to 'die on the page' and causes the spiritual enslavement of the body while eliminating the soul. McGahern recognises this in his writing and when he wrote about the pornographer near identical re-enactment of his sexual escapades with Josephine through the fictional representation of Colonel and Mavis on their trip down Shannon, he writes only a lustful text that deliberately stands as nothing more than bad writing.

The desire and objective to critique establishment attitudes in respect of sexual mores goes to the heart of the most fundamental element of control of the conservative ideology that governed the social, cultural and political agenda of the Irish state. While this ideology predated the formation of the independent Irish state, its proponents increased their zeal in the wake of the horror felt by the bishops after witnessing the potent display of violence during the Irish Civil War. Such was the ferocity of this conflict the Catholic hierarchy developed a deep distrust of the Irish people due to 'their plasticity in the face of false teachings.' Consequently their supposition was the people of Ireland were in acute need of moral guidance.³⁶⁶ This agenda was to be pursued through infusing a puritanical ideology into the ethos of the new Irish state. To this end, the implementation of this ideology was manifested through the belief that social phenomena (e.g. certain sexual urges) can and should be associated with the possibility that it can bring about disorder in the community. This meant, in turn, that conditions of law and morality came to overlap as the Catholic ideology ensured compliance to civil authorities as they pursued a vision of order and perfection through the promulgation of

³⁶⁵ Cited in Eamon Maher, 'Religion and Art', *The John McGahern Yearbook*, vol. 1 (2008), p. 117.

³⁶⁶ Chrystel Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998), p. 77

socio-moral legislation.³⁶⁷ In *The Pornographer* McGahern is thus clearly engaged in interrogating the standing of pornography and pornographic writing as a means to identify the contours and challenge the characteristics of contemporary attitudes toward sex and sexuality. In so doing he also challenges the nuclear family of married parents and children within that unit and contrasts it with his protagonists' flippant behaviour and refusal to marry his pregnant lover in direct contravention of orthodox mores on contraception and the traditional nuclear family.

McGahern's mission to tackle such issues of sexual mores and how they form such a fundamental part of governing human behaviour is arguably presented in its most vivid form in *The Pornographer* since the Church-State axis of power targeted what was believed to be principal element of the human condition: sexual desire and sexual pleasure. By controlling this aspect of human life it became possible to assert the power to police societal order and control at family, school and community level. In order to achieve full regulation of this behaviour to the extent that the expected standards of conduct were upheld, there was a need for individuals to engage in extensive self-denial. Thus, over the course of fifty years, Irish society has moved from a Catholic culture of self-abnegation and self-denial to a situation whereby precedence is given to a self-indulgence and generous consumption of desired goods. Fixation or perceived fixation on sexual matters by people of either gender was regarded as a threat to the welfare of society at large and that Christianity provided an ideal instrument with which to combat these tendencies.³⁶⁸ It also supplied a means to a purer way of life, as one commentator has asserted, "its message of self-abnegation as the way to happiness on earth and afterwards".³⁶⁹ On the one hand, one notable phenomenon intricately linked to the realization of self is that issue of sexual transgression. On the other hand, it can also be regarded as an existential threat to civilization and the prevailing system of organisation of society. Given the depth of the influence of sexuality over human conduct, it is unsurprising that an examination of the historical record reveals that since

³⁶⁷ Hug (1998), pp. 1-2-

³⁶⁸ Tom Inglis, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland,' *Éire-Ireland*, Vol. 40, No.'s 3&4, (Fall/Winter, 2005), pp. 9-37, p. 11

³⁶⁹ Judith Rowbotham, *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 57.

the earliest times ‘sin of the flesh’ and its various facets including the existence and pursuit of sexual desire and its satisfaction have been looked upon from a most unyielding and stern perspective.³⁷⁰

In the case of *The Pornographer*, McGahern challenges the view that sexuality can only be expressed and enjoyed within marriage and that procreation should be the sole purpose of marriage. When the protagonist impregnates his girlfriend Josephine, she immediately begins imagining the details of their nuptials. However, he immediately dismisses any hope of marriage being celebrated between them and refuses to have any part in the raising of the child once his suggestion of procuring an abortion is refuted. His reaction goes against traditional concepts of responsibility, particularly in respect of pregnancy and marriage and directly challenges Church teachings on contraception and the nuclear family. However, despite the protagonist’s intention to forge an independent position for himself precisely to avoid responsibility and escape his lover, his decision provokes (somewhat inevitably, for those other than himself) instant and deep misery for all parties associated with and connected to the process. These people attest to the fact, that while social mores in the community at that point in time have evolved, many principles survive from older values within the habitus and ideology of individuals throughout the community. The protagonist’s ultimately successful desire to break away from his pregnant lover can be seen as another form of leave-taking, but this time a departure on his own grounds and at a time that has largely been determined by himself, but it is an act that forms part of a wider strategy to find a suitable romantic partner with whom he can settle down with and share contentment in a rural setting – in his uncle’s home in the country. He seeks escape from one kind of life and leads himself back into the very idealised kind of lifestyle (with Nurse Brady) that his initial decision to break up with his lover Josephine was meant to evade. Circularity of this kind governs a considerable part of McGahern’s work.

However, relief is granted by the act of writing itself in which the protagonist in *The Pornographer* engages in search of his own sense of peace. In this McGahern takes inspiration from W.B. Yeats and Douglas Stewart amongst other writers. When

³⁷⁰ Rowbotham (1989), p. 12.

McGahern provides the protagonist in *The Pornographer* with the means by which time can be stopped through the act of writing itself he is arguably drawing on a Yeatsian notion.³⁷¹ Stewart's 'The Silkworms' provides direct inspiration for sections of McGahern's narrative within *The Pornographer* that manifests itself as follows:

I sat and type frivolously, like dabbing toes above steaming water: 'There was a man and a woman. Their names were Mavis Carmichael and Colonel Grimshaw. They lived happily, if it could be said that they lived at all, and I ex-ed it out and put a fresh page in the typewriter, and then started to work, the worm at last spinning its silken tent.

Several hours and blackened pages later I got up from the typewriter of the day when the barely audible turning of a key sounded from one of the upstairs rooms after a loud banging of the front door. I thought it could be only two or three o' clock and yet it must have been, close to six if one of the office girls had got home. It has just gone six. Seldom is it given, but when it is it is the greatest consolation of the spinning, time passing-sizeable portions of time – without being noticed (*P*, 49-50).

The respite granted by writing is seldom reached and is fleeting when it comes. Such is the temporary relief of writing that it also reflects the temporary condition that life is and all of its impermanence so clearly evident in each human's mortality, which the pornographer in McGahern's text is so well aware of. The subplot of his dying aunt serves to heighten his sense of consciousness of the delicate nature of human life that grows with each visit he makes to the cancer ward where his aunt is being cared for. Sexual desire and the need to escape his entrapment with Josephine simultaneously accompany the protagonist at this juncture of his experience and follow him to the precipice of perdition. Nurse Brady becomes all the more important as a focus of the protagonist's lust and love as he seeks relief from the condition he sees his aunt experiencing:

The taxi turned in the hospital gates, went past her window, the moonlight pale on the concrete framing the dark square of glass. The wheel had many sections. She had reached that turn where she'd to lie beneath the window, stupefied by brandy and pain, dulling the sounds of the whole

³⁷¹ An argument pursued by Frank Shovlin in his *Touchstones: John McGahern's Classical Style* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 81.

wheel of her life staggering to a stop. I was going past that same window in a taxi, a young man by my side, my hand on her warm breast. I shivered as I thought how one day my wheel would turn into her section, and I would lie beneath that window while a man and woman as we were now went past into the young excitement of a life that might seem without end in this light of the moon (*P*, 172).

In this section it is also evident in the form of these two young lovers and their attempts to forge a path through life and the hurdles that present themselves along the way, McGahern draws further stimulus from Stewart's 'The Silkworms' as is evidenced from examining an unused passage that was destined for *The Pornographer*³⁷² in the McGahern archives:

If she went out with me, and the evening did not work out like the dream, and I was old enough to know that it never did, how was I to be rid of her. Each time I'd to take the brandy, and there was no knowing how long my aunt might still be in hospital. I'd risk having to face her. It was this same caution or cowardice that did not allow me to get to know the people living in this same house as me. I was comfortable here. If I got too involved with them I was afraid I might have to leave. In what must be a galvanic sense of singleness it hardly ever occurred to me that it was them who might have to leave.

And so having thought myself out of this dream of action, the ugly slug makes its painful crawl from where it has stuffed and feasted itself on the mulberry leaves to where it starts spinning its silken tent, and is soon lost in the spinning.

In this excerpt a fruitful comparison can be made between the craft of writing and the spinning of silk where the pornographer finds the only space in which he is capable of reaching a state of limited happiness, or perhaps only solace. But, as Frank Shovlin aptly asserts, seeking refuge in writing is little more than a delusional notion. As is the case with Stewart's silkworms, the pornographer has created a situation whereby he has incarcerated himself into a familiar box that has come to comprise his world, which in turn reflects the human condition.³⁷³

³⁷² Cited in Shovlin (2016), p. 83.

³⁷³ Shovlin (op. cit.)

The Pornographer does not, however, contain the same complexities of narration and narrative arrangement found in *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*. Malcolm (2007)³⁷⁴ suggests that despite the fact that readers are guided through events in the novel in a first-person narrative by the narrator-protagonist, this account can still be regarded as reliable. He also states that that account is the sole perspective supplied to the reader but does not acknowledge the probability that such an approach would result in an obvious bias becoming a key part of the perspective proffered. It is on this rather unsound basis that he asserts that it is possible to rely upon the account provided by the narrator. In support of this claim, Malcolm defends that his view is correct given the narrator is seen to be ‘ruthlessly frank to a disturbing degree at times’, more often than not in respect of his own person. There is an obvious deficit of moral standing on his part (i.e. the unnamed narrator who is also the protagonist in the book), but his searing honesty in respect of his own conduct provides a redeeming feature. One instance of his actions testifying as to his character is where he makes strong criticism of himself on learning of the fact that he has made Josephine, his lover, pregnant (*P*, 102). However, he also makes definite assertions about both general and specific matters, which feature throughout the text. For example, at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist proffers an opinion on the import of his visit and that of his uncle to his ailing aunt in hospital, “Now that it was taking place it amounted to the nothing that was the rest of our life when it too was taking place” (*P*, 13). After an interval of two pages, he remarks on his uncle, “There are many who grow so swollen with the importance of their function that they can hardly stoop to do it, but there was no such danger with my uncle. In him all was one” (*P*, 15).

A succession of opinions emanate from the protagonist as the text progresses. One noteworthy instance of such an opinion is what he states in relation to his own writing, which he later repeats, “Nothing ever holds together unless it is mixed with some of one’s own blood” (*P*, 24). From blood he moves to soul and its relationship to the body (*P*, 24). Observations put forward are almost invariably grim and stems from profound existential cynicism, “What had I learned from the clandestine night?” he asks

³⁷⁴ Malcolm (2007), p. 78.

rhetorically to which he answers as part of his reflections on life, “The nothing that we always learn when we sink to learn something of ourselves or life from a poor other – our own shameful shallowness” (*P*, 203). His view of the world is generally sombre, in a way that accentuates a more melancholic facet of human life (*P*, 53-88). From such a viewpoint, he stresses that the “darkness” and the vacuum in which it resides can only be banished for a limited period (*P*, 238). The depth of despair is so extensive that it is his belief that there is no God, “no one to turn to” (*P*, 62) where prayers are said in vain and as such are not capable of being answered (*P*, 252). Endurance offers the best and possibly, the only way forward (*P*, 97), a position that he communicates to other characters as the thought comes upon him (*P*, 13; 67; 81). His all-encompassing bleak vision means, for him, life is little more than “the womb and the grave...The christening party becomes the funeral, the shudder that makes us flesh becomes the shudder that makes us meat” (*P*, 30).

The narrator is predominantly open about his thoughts, but there are times, however, that he exhibits reluctance to share or express his feelings and views. While he and Josephine are on a journey by car and the vehicle is struck by stones thrown by children, there is no outward reaction beyond mere acknowledgment. On a visit to his terminally ill aunt in hospital, they engage in conversation that in turn stirs deep emotions within him, to which he remarks, “I’d to turn away,” alluding to his sadness indirectly (*P*, 223).

A great deal of the novel is written in direct speech that relies on very little narrative input. This narrative practice is applied quite early in the novel and is used, for example, during the visit of the protagonist’s uncle’s visit to Dublin (*P*, 16-19), and recurs thereafter. A large proportion of the time the protagonist spends during his first evening with his lover Josephine takes the form of dialogue (*P*, 32-44). This latter practice is also found elsewhere in the text (*P*, 52-59). Limited narrative intervention is clearly evident in the wake of the collapse of the relationship that persisted between the protagonist and Josephine, their unhappiness over the dilemma caused by her pregnancy and their attempts to come to terms with the situation (*P*, 114-121).

On the two occasions that the narrator supplies the reader with a sample of the pornographic material he writes (*P*, 22-24; 153-61), he does so for the purposes of providing an insight into his mind-set. Their form owes much to a narrative repertoire of the English language such as extracts from letters or diaries that have featured in the language for almost three centuries.³⁷⁵ It also serves to demonstrate the manner in which he transforms experience into fictional material as he scrutinises what pornography can be taken to be. Despite the presence of such elements, the overall continuity of the narrative remains undisturbed. The narrator makes it clear that he holds a certain view of matters and the character, Josephine, differs from his stance. Her position is differentiated further by the fact that the protagonist's aunt and uncle possess views of another kind still. Notwithstanding this, there is no evidence to suggest that the narrator is misinformed or dishonest in his portrayal of happenings. The novel as a whole does, in fact, support his stance right throughout the text and no alternative narrative is offered to destabilise the credibility of the account presented.

The material that comprises the story in *The Pornographer* is structured in a logical, chronological manner. Sections of varying length distanced by spacing assume the role of the absent standard chaptering. For the greater part, each section represents contained episodes, although there are isolated instances of multiple strands of action converging (e.g. *P*, 60-68; 215-44).

³⁷⁵ Much evidence supports this contention including the assertion by Robert Mayer (1997) that Behn's *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* must form part of the evolutionary process that gave rise to the novel as a recognised form of writing. Mayer defends that while this work was not a novel in itself, it can be regarded as an important initiating work of the genre. See Chapter 7, "History" before Defoe: Nashe, Deloney, Behn, Manley', pp. 141-157 in *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe* (Robert Mayer, Ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 151-52; In his *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin also recognises letter writing as forming an important part of the founding strands that play "an especially significant role in structuring novels," See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas, 1981), pp. 262-63, 320-21. Similarly, in his *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Ian Watt recognises the value of examining the use of the letter in the work of Samuel Richardson for the reason that it, as Richardson himself wrote in the 'Preface' to *Clarissa* 'Critical situations... with what may be called instantaneous descriptions and reflections' that engaged the attention best; and in many scenes the pace of the narrative was slowed down by minute description to something very near that of actual experience. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (University of California Press, 1959), p. 24. From another perspective, Michael McKeon highlights the value found by Richardson in respect of the letter where the latter defends that it 'becomes a passport not to the objectivity of sense impressions but to the subjectivity of mind.' Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 414.

Indeed, other scholars have asserted that in dealing with the inner world of his protagonists, McGahern goes beyond narrative description and interior monologue. To achieve this end, the author employs a technique whereby characters' speeches are frequently given direct representation, which elicits responses from other speakers. Furthermore, this practice then works in turn with calculated speech patterns and select word choice that serve to furnish external indications of internal states.³⁷⁶

The narrative technique McGahern employs in *The Pornographer* involves extensive retrospection. In so doing, the protagonist-narrator narrates the story in a phenomenological way as he constantly analyses and examines the events that comprise his experience including emotionally-charged occasions such as the death of his aunt, his attraction to Josephine, his later repulsion of her, sensations of sex, instinctive desire, the artificiality and hypocrisy of social convention, amongst others.³⁷⁷ Such an analysis becomes possible through a repetition of one or more paragraphs concerned with describing a particular situation and is a hallmark of McGahern's narrative style which the author also applied in other works by the artist such as *Amongst Women* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun*.³⁷⁸

As discussed in the historical context to McGahern's fiction, *The Pornographer* is comprised of a set of characters and a plot that reflect many of the concerns that came to the fore in the context of a conflict of values between the protagonist-narrator and other key characters. The protagonist is relatively care-free male who makes no attempt to disguise his enjoyment of sexual relations and readers find his values quickly come into discord with his conservative lover, Josephine who refuses to use contraceptives (*P*, 112). Once she becomes pregnant (*P*, 114) she dismisses suggestions that she would avail of the opportunity to have an abortion. At the same time, despite persistent pleading the father of child quickly divests himself of all responsibility and categorically refuses to marry his lover once he realises that an abortion will not take

³⁷⁶ See Fiona MacArthur and Carolina P. Amador Moreno, 'Observations on Characters' Use of Conventional Metaphors in John McGahern's *Amongst Women*', *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos*, XXI/1998, pp. 179-191, p. 180.

³⁷⁷ See McCarthy (2010), p. 179.

³⁷⁸ An argument taken up by Michael Prusse, 'Repetition, difference and chiasmus in John McGahern's narratives', *Language and Literature*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, (2012), p. 366.

place (*P*, 115). Josephine is most apprehensive in respect of the high probability of an adverse reaction to the news from her family and resolves to move to London alone as she attempts to cope with the fact that her lover has disavowed any further involvement with her and the life of their child (*P*, 118). Thus, the issue of the traditional Roman Catholic family values relating to marriage, procreation and family planning are dealt with in a far more liberal manner than the wider incidence of society at large. Indeed, the storyline in *The Pornographer* also serves to highlight notable divergences between different generations and segments of Irish society as the country begins to enter the 1980s.

The Pornographer provides the occasion by which moral outrage could be contrasted with the more liberal outlook of the protagonist as a means of critiquing prevailing (although waning) traditional values. In this endeavour he continues on his journey of visceral soul-searching suffering anguish as part of the process, the protagonist mirrors the experiences of other characters in *The Dark* and *The Barracks*. A key part of the process of breaking free from the hegemonic influence of the religious power, the protagonist jettisons most, if not all, of his traditional faith, but not spirituality and some of the notable habits it inspires. In addition, characters who have rejected the provisions of traditional faith and the pieties that sustain it are faced with the burden of self-consciousness, a moral degeneration and find themselves at a loss as to how to love or partake in an experience of random feeling. This in turn leaves the protagonist, as is the case in *The Pornographer*, bereft of an idea of a clear objective in life or the means to communicate awareness of it.³⁷⁹

In an environment that is claustrophobic at best, the characters that inhabit McGahern's world in *The Pornographer* could be said to live under circumstances that revolve 'in a narrow gyre' which are a direct symptom of the authors vision of the culturally straitened nation. In his work of the 1970s - thus encompassing *The Pornographer* published in 1979 - the author provides a minority of his characters with the opportunity to experience an escape from darkness and walk into the light. However, this occasions the acquisition of a problematic freedom where characters walk

³⁷⁹ Denis Sampson, *Young McGahern: Becoming a Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 26.

into ‘an open field’ in which their initial taste of autonomy is sweet, but quickly turns sour as they long for a return to more habitual terrain. In contrast to earlier work, the protagonist in *The Pornographer* encounters the need to return to the place of his childhood, in stark contrast to the protagonists in all earlier McGahern’s works who were exceedingly eager to escape their rural Irish circumstances. Traversing the novel are the escapades of two sets of lovers who are sometimes suspended between competing strands of different ways of life. A considerable number of these characters experience a condition akin to paralysis as they attempt to opt for, on the one hand, a rapidly-disappearing, insular, rural Ireland and, on the other hand, the overwhelming freedom of an exponentially growing, urban and Europeanised Ireland. Indeed, this state of indecision emanates from the author himself who appears unsure as to which direction his characters are best directed and this results in many of them turning in circles. This situation means that the structure of McGahern’s fiction is also circular.³⁸⁰

The localities and citizens of McGahern’s Ireland are rendered into an unmistakable pattern of faults, but this division does not take on an explicitly political form. There is, however, a pointed reference to the “troubles” (the Northern Ireland situation) in *The Pornographer*. In this respect, the reality of the existence of two Irelands, North and South makes only a cursory appearance in his work. In *The Pornographer* the railway infrastructure linking these two political units have been deliberately severed, marking off one space from another. Both at personal and physical level are connections found to be fraught. The protagonist in the story, the pornographer himself, becomes acquainted with a woman who writes for a magazine called “Waterways”, who shares her knowledge of rumours suggesting that a canal system linking the Shannon and Erne rivers may be restored, thus North and South could be joined in friendship once more. He retorts by declaring it to be “A watery embrace,” a remark which demonstrates his adaptation of the dynamic for his own sexual obsessions. Thus, *The Pornographer* contains suggestions of water connections between the two Irelands which are present only in the form of sexual tropes.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Sean O’Connell, ‘Door into the Light: John McGahern’s Ireland,’ *Massachusetts Review*, No. 25, (Summer, 1984), pp. 225-268, pp. 255-57.

³⁸¹ O’Connell (1984), pp. 255-57.

In this work the author concentrates on the themes that comprise the underlying layer of Irish life: provinciality, family enclosure and Church repression of sexual expression. In such a community, the sole manner by which citizens can avail of conforming to expected standards is to do without satisfaction, a physical and sexual starvation. To venture outside the realms of predictability in such an Ireland, particularly in the sexual sphere, invites certain sanction. As the protagonist of *The Leavetaking* notes, "Either you toe the line or you get out." Community values are maintained through suppressive practices against citizens. This point is illustrated through a scene in *The Pornographer* with the sexual adventures of the pornographer's characters, Colonel Grimshaw and Mavis Carmichael. Just as the pornographer and his lover Josephine do, they too travel inland by boat on the River Shannon where they happen upon a 'yokel' battling the effects of his drunken stupor, whom they subject to a sexual assault. Mavis assures the Colonel that the man will be unable to recall anything of the experience and make a comment to that same effect: "He'll think he was dreaming. Doesn't the whole country look as if it's wet dreaming its life away. He'll want to be no exception. He's a prime example of your true, conforming citizen." McGahern's fiction prior to *The Pornographer* also contains characters who are sexually repressed, although a more compassionate treatment is afforded to that set of characters. It could be claimed that the carnal longings in *The Pornographer* may well be a representation of the sombre condition lived by Irish men and women, in particular residents of the land-locked valleys in counties Roscommon and Leitrim. In this sense 'pornography is a black mass celebrating Irish repression' where McGahern's sexual politics jest at Irish containment on a physical, psychic and regional level.³⁸²

Contemporary Dublin is the place of residence of the pornographer where he plies his trade in a city that is a much a site of Georgian buildings and public houses as it is of plate glass and discos. Here it seems, the pornographer has been able to jettison the 'old' Ireland and as he recovers from a broken heart he alleviates his suffering by fulfilling a sense of duty to visit family members. He journeys to the hospital to call on his dying aunt; to his room where he creates further sexual adventures for the fictional

³⁸² O'Connell (1984), p. 257.

lives of Colonel Grimshaw and Mavis Carmichael, as well as frequenting pubs so as to argue sexual and literary aesthetics with his publisher, Maloney.³⁸³

McGahern had the distinct objective of constructing an analysis that would be non-judgmental and impartial relating to aspects of Irish society that had, up to that point, provided an enduring source of controversy: sexual affairs and religion. He provides clear descriptions of the physical environs of urban Dublin where characters are portrayed as having overcome taboos and cast off cultural constraints.³⁸⁴ In providing a portrait of the physical environs in which his desires are formed and lust develops, McGahern demonstrates how the pornographer enters a particular state of mind which allows him to believe his desires can be met and to do so he traces the protagonist's identification of a location in which he can develop and satisfy his lust, which takes the form of a place in which people can socialise and dance. The term "dance" is not only a metaphor, it is also the location: that of a dancehall on O'Connell St. in Dublin where the protagonist-pornographer becomes acquainted with the 38-year old Josephine. A partial virgin, to her 30-year-old lover she represents something typically and deeply Irish. In the first instance, she is fertile Ireland. Through her own contacts, Josephine arranges a boat trip for the couple on the Shannon by means of which they take temporary leave of modern Dublin and enter a dream-like realm:

there was a feeling of a dream, souls crossing to some other world. But the grey stone of the bridge of Carrick came solidly towards us out of the mist around eight." In both metaphorical and tangible terms, this journey reaches its end in Josephine's womb as the pornographer fertilizes her in a bay above Carrick. It is through his act that the protagonist achieves a unity of geography, psyche and of body and mind; he is simultaneously possessed and possesses Ireland-as-woman.³⁸⁵

An even more profound constraint on the characters' development is the figure of Maloney, publisher to the pornographer. In common with *The Leavetaking*, a character named Maloney, a headmaster in a school engages in corporal punishment of

³⁸³ Ibid: 265.

³⁸⁴ Maher (2003), p. 45.

³⁸⁵ See O'Connell (1984), p. 265.

pupils. In *The Dark*, the similarly named Mahoney brutally mistreats his son. Whereas with *The Pornographer*, Maloney, a merchant of filth, unsuccessful lover, cynic and aesthete, Ireland's developing openness becomes embodied in Maloney's flexibility. There is, however, as McGahern demonstrates, a strong moral undercurrent that remains an essential feature of Irish people, which in turn moderates perceived gains of more liberal attitudes. For example, Maloney argues the protagonist was foolish to make his lover pregnant and thus should then suffer penance in the form of marriage. Josephine defends the need to accept responsibility, Maloney argues in favour of retribution.

For his part, Maloney advances an argument that the pornographer has no alternative but accept the consequences of his actions since that is what life involves. Mavis Carmichael does not become pregnant by Col. Grimshaw as events of this kind do not occur in pornography. He notes: "Art is not life because it is not nature." It is this Wildean theorizing which spurs Maloney on to recreate the experiences of his pornography writing in a pornographic manner, as the Colonel and Mavis mirror a number of dynamics of the relationship that persists between Josephine and the pornographer's trip on the Shannon where she becomes pregnant. In such a sense, Maloney holds that "art" is a parody of life. He argues that "Life for art, is about as healthy as fresh air is for a deep-sea diver." Reflecting the authority that is exercised over him, the protagonist-pornographer rigidly follows the instructions given to him by Maloney. It is at this point where the major difficulty arises: he is forced to choose between his "art" and a more honourable and responsible course of action urged upon him by Josephine and Maloney that would lead him to marry Josephine. However, the hero asserts his own autonomy and in so doing rejects imposed values that reflect the contours of Irish expectations. In this, the protagonist reflects certain traits found in Wildean aestheticism that tended to place a higher value on the process of conscious self-transcendence in tandem with its facilitation of the individual's need to accomplish self-expression while ignoring the import of social norms.³⁸⁶ The process witnessed in that immediate context of the pornographic writing also bears the hallmarks of the guiding consciousness of Wilde's aesthetic which Guy Willoughby has refracted as

³⁸⁶ See Frederick S. Roden, *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 98.

directly to “the human power to imagine and impose order, however, fleeting, on experience.”³⁸⁷ In *The Pornographer*, the protagonist’s later desire to build a genuinely loving relationship with Nurse Brady despite his bitter experience with Josephine reveals the character to still be under the strong influence of conformist forces in society, as Wilde himself had struggled with in his own life and which was manifested in his writing.³⁸⁸ In this experience Wilde and McGahern share some similarities in what Ellis Hanson argues:

Like other decadents, Wilde found in Roman Catholicism a florid and profound discourse of sin that gave shape and moral significance to transgression. For Wilde, however, the Catholic Church was itself a troubling and exquisite vision. . . He was tempted by the beauty of the Church. . . [and] by the power of its poetry to transform his consciousness . . .³⁸⁹

The connection between Wilde and McGahern here is the recognition that while Roman Catholicism takes a stern view on all matters sexual, denigrating its importance and condemning its role in the human life, Catholicism’s explicit condemnation of the enjoyment of sexuality reveals contours of language that supply the writer with the tools to recognise certain experiences and in turn to permit these experiences to enlighten the consciousness. What is essential under these circumstances is the form taken by these tools, which are of course, words as Wilde’s Dorian in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remarks, “Words....They seemed to be able to give plastic form to formless things...Was there anything so real as words?” It is words that wield the power to enlighten and shape consciousness.³⁹⁰ Within *The Pornographer*, the purveyor of the conduit of words, the protagonist’s publisher, Maloney, stands as an important presence within the novel. Although it is pornography he publishes, he is a close confidant of the protagonist and acts as a paternal figure who stands in judgement in respect of a number

³⁸⁷ See Guy Willoughby, *Art and Christhood: The Aesthetics of Oscar Wilde* (Rutherford, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1993), p. 18.

³⁸⁸ For a fuller exposition of this position see Jarlath Killeen, *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde: Catholicism, Folklore and Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth Century Writing and Culture, 2005), pp. 19-20.

³⁸⁹ Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 233-34.

³⁹⁰ A point reinforced by Karl Beckson (Ed.) *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 1970), p. 298.

of incidences of dishonourable behaviour by the pornographer. He (Maloney) demonstrates that there are social consequences for those who choose to contravene the conventions of traditional Catholic mores pertaining to the family and sexuality.

The protagonists' beating at the hands of a protective Irish family while on a visit to Josephine shortly after the child is born in London also shows that while a more liberal attitude toward family values has begun to propagate, it is far from being a universal attitude within groups of Irish people, whether at home or abroad. To a certain degree, the protagonist is forced to atone for his dishonourable conduct toward Josephine and suffer both symbolic and physical punishment (e.g. suffering a physical beating in London from a protective friend of Josephine) for his behaviour. New romantic beginnings seem to offer a means of realising a redemptive path away from the meaningless coitus the protagonist has had with Josephine which he pursued to attain sexual release and escape what he calls their 'graveclothes' (*P*, 42).

Moreover, while the otherwise cynical and dead-of-heart protagonist maintains his fondness for treating his aunt and uncle with deference and respect, this indicates that despite his best attempts at rejecting traditional values he is unable to jettison his 'Catholic habitus' entirely. Thus the complexities that populate the body of fiction born by McGahern's hand can said to be in accord with Oscar Wilde's affirmation that it would be impossible for modern literature to exist if it did believe in truth as being something that is either pure or simple.³⁹¹

Despite experiencing considerable economic growth and social development, Irish culture continues to carry a remarkably dense level of religiosity that has found expression in many facets including language, literature and even the geography of the nation. However, this does not mean that every Irish citizen were raised or remain Catholics, but the dynamics of Irish culture was unmistakeably strongly influenced by Catholic ideology. Indeed, this thesis is every much as applicable to those who bitterly reject Catholicism such as James Joyce, or those who express regret at their estrangement from the faith like John McGahern, not to mention people who retain their faith. While the protagonist seeks release from traditional values, he remains firmly

³⁹¹ As so appears in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works* (Isabel Murray, ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxford Classics, 2000) p. 69.

wedded to his perceptions of the purity and authenticity of the countryside and the supposed anonymity and amoral nature of the urban centre. His romantic attachment to Nurse Brady, whom he meets as he visits his ailing aunt on a hospital ward. Like himself, Brady hails from the countryside and this only adds to his love for her. Indeed, as one critic has noted, McGahern's *The Dark*, *The Leavetaking* and *The Pornographer* focus on the dramatic, the *Bildung* (i.e. genesis formation) of a young man, from the country side who is a would-be artist, who suffer a loss of belief in the Catholic faith and seeks and finds some kind of exile. In this sense, it is invariably a male figure who is thus left with no alternative but to abandon any utopian longings for greater peace and harmony in his life in response to what he perceives as the chaotic and futile nature of the world.³⁹²

The protagonist thus finds meaning and value in his confusion in the form of Nurse Brady who provides him a source of new impulse and purpose in life. In marked contrast to earlier novels, McGahern's protagonist here finds a way to remain within his country of birth in a strategy which Declan Kiberd, in a text dealing with McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), the author came to adopt a desire in common with Jane Austen, which was to find a mode of expression for the artist's critical attitudes within rather than outside society.³⁹³ It is thus through making a new life with Nurse Brady, with whom the protagonist shares the experience of a rural upbringing, that the protagonist discovers how to feel again and settles in the very environment that he originally believed had stultified his life. The protagonist seeks respite from the impersonal urban setting that is presumably Dublin and Nurse Brady is soon to become his bride-to-be. In leaving the urban setting and embracing the rural one, the protagonist leaves behind the world of his dead aunt, Josephine, but turns toward the world in which his aunt's brother has found new vigour after his sister's death whence he acquires his own home and farm and is prepared to negotiate the changing dynamics inherent in the modern world. Nurse Brady shows the protagonist how to live in a more positive sense and renews his spirit so that he is 'ready to start all

³⁹² Roberta Geffer Wondrich, 'Survivors of Joyce: Joycean Images and Motifs in Some Contemporary Irish Fiction', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 90, No. 358 (Summer, 2001), pp. 197-206, pp. 198-99.

³⁹³ Van der Ziel (2016), p. 64.

over again' (*P*, 163) after the 'doomed charade' (*P*, 70) of his relationship with Josephine. Brady effectively 'nurses' the protagonist back into a state of living feeling once more and this means they can share the opportunity to 'live in love', a prospect that he had originally thought had long been lost and now impossible. Her presence and his interest in her effectively challenges him to respond (*P*, 70) and his love for her leaves little doubt as to the fact that his response is affirmative and constructive. His cynicism to love has dissipated as his love for Brady grows, a condition that Moran acknowledges prior to this affirmation when he makes love to Brady in her quarters on hospital grounds where he felt a 'terrible tenderness' as he gradually comes to accept the value and need for mortal love. The sexual chemistry that quickly develops between them inspires a real change in Moran's nature as later he recounts: 'I was entering a new life. I was being questioned, and I had no longer the power to turn away...' (*P*, 218).

McGahern was to turn toward more familiar territory in his next book, *Amongst Women* (1990), but the end result was to embrace a coming reality that could not be avoided. It is to this text that attention will now be turned.

2.5 Return to form; back to the future: *Amongst Women*

Amongst Women, hailed by critics and the reading public alike, was published in 1990. McGahern's fifth and penultimate novel is a relatively reduced, scaled-down novel, the principal preoccupation of which is a single family – the Morans – and their domineering father who reside in their isolated farmhouse in Great Meadow. As the Moran offspring mature, all sons and daughter establish their own independent lives and leave for Dublin or London, while the novel retains a centripetal dynamic around their widower-father, Moran and the family homestead. Even in their absence, the emigrant children retain a strong affinity with their rural childhood home and the fatherland in which it belongs. *Amongst Women* covers a time span between the War of Independence and an unspecified date in the late 1980s (the time of completion of the text). It illustrates some of the forces that have contributed to the formation of modern Ireland and also traces the contours of Moran, the authoritative patriarch who was formerly a guerrilla fighter and reveals the destructive facet of Irish political evolution. In the case of the latter, there is clear evidence of a focused effort to direct frustrated energies and failed ambitions into sustaining petty authoritarianism and violence by invoking Catholicism to justify domestic tyranny that maims the succeeding generation through denial of individuality and insistence on conformity.³⁹⁴ The novel is also a critique of the power dynamics which include fear and devotion in the context of a rural Catholic family that, in itself, supplies a valid metaphor of a pocket of post-colonial Irish society.³⁹⁵

The narrative structure comprising *Amongst Women* is evocative of the strategies pursued by nineteenth-century authors such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. A hetero-diagetic narrator is adopted in the text and consistent with this method the narrator is permitted to move through time and between characters without hindrance and also supplies important information at key junctures throughout the text. It becomes quite evident early on in the novel that the narrator is given extensive

³⁹⁴ Antoinette Quinn, 'Prayer for My Daughters: Patriarchy in "Amongst Women"', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Special Issue on John McGahern (Jul., 1991), pp. 79-90, p. 79.

³⁹⁵ See Liam Harte, *Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel, 1987-2007* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 51-74.

freedom as it shifts between Moran's old age and decline to his death. It also focuses on his conversations enjoyed many years previously with his former IRA veteran McQuaid (AW, 8). It continues to effortlessly flow back and forth between Michael and Nell at Strandhill (AW, 104-106). Thereafter it is concerned with Great Meadow onto London before looping back (AW, 140-47). The narrator displays no difficulty in differentiating between one character's perspective and then another and begins by revealing Moran's thoughts in respect of his daughters (AW, 1). In quick succession it pursues the matter of the daughters' minds and thoughts (AW, 2). Both Rose and Moran's points of view are examined (AW, 22-25; 30) and Moran's opinion of her (AW, 27) as well as his feelings concerning the village postmistress and a neighbour (AW, 108; 130). Neither are other characters neglected such as Nell Morahan (AW, 110) and Moran's future son-in-law's mother (AW, 154). Once his marriage to Rose has taken place the narrative focus moves to examine his bride's family's unease at their union (AW, 44-45). The collective consciousness of Rose and her stepdaughters form the ending of the novel (AW, 183).

In a manner that once more resembles the kind of narrator more commonly found in nineteenth-century literature, the narrator comments on characters and the actions and situations that occur in and around them. Such comments frequently offer generalised observations, as when for example, the Moran girls' plan to stage another Monaghan Day so as to rejuvenate their ailing father's (i.e. Moran's) spirit, which is given a stark description: "a gesture as weak as a couple who marry in order to try to retrieve a lost friendship" (AW, 8). Amongst the non-general commentary proffered includes a view of the approach adopted by Rose and the Moran daughters on the wedding day: "They were already conspirators. They were mastered and yet they were controlling what they were mastered by" (AW, 46). Similarly, he concludes that the "attempt to revive Moran with the (Monaghan) day had been futile" (AW, 177). Indeed, Nell and Michael's visit to Strandhill also elicits comment where it is asserted that "they had the whole day," but this is then generalised to saying "there is nothing more difficult than to seize the day" (AW, 106).

In a situation whereby a key value is represented on the occasion of a particular utterance, the narrative accounts for it in the following way: "Such is the primacy of the

idea of family that everyone was able to leave work at once without incurring displeasure” (AW, 123). Then when centring on the head of the family, Moran, at his hour of death, it states: “There are some who struggle and rave on the edge of dying, others who make a great labour of it like a difficulty birth, but Moran slipped evenly out of life” (AW, 179-80).

The traditional narrative strategy adopted in *Amongst Women* is charged with representing both the conflicts and passions of the rural family led by the central figure of Moran. He takes his primary identity from the past and he now struggles to find meaning and acceptance in the modern era. At the time of the publication of the book in 1990, the narrative technique applied by McGahern to his text broadly followed established models such as the writing style adopted by Albert Camus and Gustave Flaubert, the latter of which whose work McGahern greatly respected. In so doing, McGahern differed markedly from canonical British and Irish writers of the 1980s and 1990s such as Colm Toibín, John Banville, Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter.

A notable feature of the novel is what has been described as the ‘profound generosity of the narrative voice’ in bringing together an understanding and judgement in the way the text presents the Moran children, particularly Michael as well as Moran and his second-wife Rose. The focalisation put into practice under those circumstances has the effect of prompting readers to partake in an ethos of forgiveness. It is the narrator that acts as a corrective and guiding force in respect of the girls and the reader, respectively through a sophisticated and varying use of subtlety, tact and the placing of implicit hints. Once questioned about her father’s behaviour and the possibility of physical abuse while visiting Rose’s mother, Maggie instantly rejects any implication and the narrator supplies an unassailable note of authoritative information: ‘Shame as much as love prompted the denial’ (AW, 34). This self-conscious denial appears to stem from the implicit knowledge in the Moran household of the brooding and violence that Moran is given to on frequent occasions. It also alludes to other possibly inappropriate behaviour that he may have engaged in within the household, an observance that resonates with the implication and revelation of sexual abuse in earlier McGahern novels such as *The Dark*.

In this work McGahern succeeds in transcending local and domestic circumstances by concerning himself with only one family and makes brief allusions to the greater Irish nation in tangential incidences. McGahern's novel provides a valuable interpretation of the nature of the exercise of power in a closed community and poses stark questions in respect of the mystique of home and family within which the institution of patriarchy is subjected to intensive analysis. The concentration on this one family, however, still permits the author to highlight and critique the challenges and frustrations they face in common with so many other people and families across the land.

A superficial perspective on *Amongst Women*, would appear to suggest that it presents material already dealt with previously in *The Barracks*: an Irish Catholic country household, a generous, caring and able stepmother who has married in her late thirties who is childless, a belligerent and dictatorial father who also participated in the War of Independence at the head of a household where children cower before his domineering personality and unpredictable moods. There are undeniable similar routines and rituals that appear in both novels, including tensions of family life and the passing of a matriarch after a long process of deterioration. However, the major point of divergence in these novels that distinguishes one from the other is that of the entirely different agenda pursued by their respective narratives.

In *The Barracks* the family and family home provide the immediate setting for the novel where Elizabeth Reegan's consciousness provides the central fictional context. While her thoughts are fundamental to the narrative, other perspectives are represented and the novel does not conclude with her death. In *Amongst Women*, the issue of dying takes centre stage within the narrative structure, as the novel begins by portraying the final stages of the family patriarch, Michael Moran's life. In direct contrast to *The Barracks*, *Amongst Women* is brought to close with the death and funeral of Moran. Despite this, Moran remains the central focus rather than at the centre of consciousness. The overarching trope of the novel is death, but the narrative that completes the picture takes the form of a prolonged flashback that recalls family life in Great Meadow where Moran is cast as a would-be Colossus casting a watchful eye over

his modest kingdom. In place of a plot is a chronicle of the relationship that persists between Moran, his spouse and children who in turn populate the various scenes in which some or all the members of the family are present where the narrative winds in and out of the consciousness of different members of that group of people.³⁹⁶

In *Amongst Women* the patriarchy present in that novel is inspired by patriotism. A hero of the War of Independence, the family patriarch Moran has been unable to secure professional advancement in the army during peacetime and thus directs his frustrations into more restricted circumstances by ruling over the family home. From the outset Moran's standing as a former war hero is continually referred to so as to juxtapose two instances that praise his feats while leading a flying column, and as such this safeguards the provision that all subsequent judgement of his character and actions is to be read in the context of his wartime experience. A fellow combatant, although a junior officer, McQuaid would come to visit Moran on Monaghan Day, a fair day that happened on a day in late February each year that served as an occasion to recall old times. It is Moran's equivalent of Remembrance Day. This guest's visit to the Moran homestead provides a reminder of the changes that have characterised the modernisation of Irish society. A strong secular vein has development within Irish society where certain individuals have chosen a divergent path from pious Roman Catholic ideological devotion and operate instead within a commercial mind-set of profit over principle.³⁹⁷

The events portrayed and the lives accounted for in *Amongst Women* take place within a particular time frame ranging from the Anglo-Irish War to the election of the first women president of Ireland. This latter event is anticipated in the novel as when Moran lies on his deathbed and once he dies, it is the Moran girls who inherit the family home and assume the authority once held by their father since their brothers are absent from the life of Great Meadow owing to their permanent residence in England. Their role is then formally recognised in the community in a manner that may seem proleptic of the moment when finally, for the first time since independence, a female head of state is chosen in the Irish state. John B. Keane's *The Field* also echoes this coming of age of women in the Irish state as the Bull McCabe's daughters and wife inherit his farm on

³⁹⁶ See Quinn, 80

³⁹⁷ Quinn, 81-82

his death and the death of the only male heir in the family. As mentioned previously, from the 1990s onwards women take on a far more active role in Irish public life starting with Mary Robinsons' election as President of Ireland followed by the election of Mary Harney as the first female leader of an Irish political party after her appointment as leader of the Progressive Democrats in 1993 and her elevation to the Office of An Tánaiste³⁹⁸ in June 1997. She would hold the position until June 2007 during which time many changes came over Irish society during which time women took on and continue to share greater authority in key positions in Irish society.

The idea of unity in the war is now transferred to the context of the Moran homestead. He exclaims: 'I haven't discovered yet what brought out all the troops' (AW, 3) and over these 'troops' he assumes the role of commander just as he had been in the War of Independence. In this self-appointed and unchallenged position, he expects loyalty and respect for his will over his family, which forms the central system of his life, to the exclusion of building friendship in the wider community. Where once Moran would only ever consider men suitable to form part of his military unit, in his old age he comes to extend military imagery to include his daughters, itself an indication of the change that has gradually permeated his thinking with the passage of time.

In a practice that shares many similarities with the patriarch Reagan in *The Barracks*, Moran insists on regular family prayer each evening, which he begins with, 'Thou, O Lord, wilt open my lips.' His wife Rose takes up their segment of praying after him and is followed by the children of the family. This daily ritual serves to reinforce Moran's authority and also reminds the family of the order of importance of those resident in Great Meadow. Indeed, these regular instances of prayer form part of a wider strategy to reinforce and regulate the habitus of each family member of the Moran household. However, with the passage of time and the maturation of the children of the family that this process brings, siblings leave the home and less and less members of the family are available to say prayers. As this company diminishes so too does Moran's hegemonic hold over the members of his family. Moran ages and weakens and becomes more feminised as his daughters mature and gain influence over his life and welfare.

³⁹⁸ The title given to the Deputy Prime Minister in the government of the Republic of Ireland as per Article 28.6.1 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

With their ascent to a more powerful position in the household, the Moran girls also become more masculinised. Moran chooses to re-marry after being a widower for many years and his new wife Rose brings considerable change into the Moran family. “Rose changed everything. (...) Then she began to clean and paint the house room by room” (AW, 48-49). Rose is sufficiently mature to please Moran in his older ways, but not so old as to be unable to sympathise and humour the youthful needs of the Moran girls. She proves capable of supporting Moran in continuing to lead the kind of life he is used to, but retains sufficient memory of her time working abroad in Glasgow to be open to being flexible under more challenging circumstances (AW, 22) which enables her to see the new world that can be opened to the children.

Static in his ways and outlook while his children grow and mature, Moran continues to experience grave difficulties in reconfiguring his mind-set for the purposes of living a civilian life, a theme that transcends national contexts. In *Amongst Women*, the author creates a tangible link between the high-levels of violence present in quotidian life and the political violence that marked the birth of the Irish state. The story recounted by McQuaid in which he described how a guerrilla fighter who laid the cold barrel of his gun against the naked posterior of an innocent girl who found herself satisfying a need to relieve herself outdoors provides an association between sexual humiliation and Revolution. What is notable in this situation is that the only common attribute shared by McQuaid and Moran is that both can be classified as domestic tyrants. In the case of the former his family count as only one of many interests, whereas in the case of the latter, Great Meadow has been forged into a power base for its master who rarely ventures outside that territory where Moran expects and receives absolute deference in respect of his authority. The autocracy of this authority is perpetuated by means of the memory of brutal violence and the threat of further episodes of the same, just as had been experienced by Luke, the eldest son of the family. These dynamics of control ensure that the Moran daughters live in submission. In common with a significant proportion of his fellow countrymen, they reside in a community where repression of sexuality and a permissiveness in relation to violence are the norm where puritanical patriarchy denies the development of an awareness of

sadism. Stemming directly from his abject incapacity to build a rapport with other residents in the community, Moran opts to engineer a situation whereby his family functions as a closed community. This in turn means that a deficit in contact with the outside world serves to bolster his own hegemonic authority. Following on from which ensures that such is his power that he exercises his capacity to indoctrinate his children to believe that living reclusively equates to exclusivity and taking pride in and remaining 'separate' from the world outside Great Meadow is something that should be regarded as denoting distinction and that behaving in an extroverted manner signalled commonness over all else. Moran also extolls the congruity between the house and family in conversation with his daughters: "Be careful never to do anything to let yourselves or the house down" (AW, 82).

An illuminating insight into the mind-set of the author comes from remarks McGahern made in respect of his short-story *High Ground* in which he also employs a military-inspired environment and the heroic figures struggling to come to terms to adapt to post-conflict civilian life in the context of the early decades of the Irish Free State. One of the characters in this work, O'Reilly, who was fashioned in the model of a young de Valera, provides probable indicators as to certain aspects of Moran's character:

The idea it isn't of any period. It's that somebody who embraces an idea too literally or too passionately is always a danger to society peacefully functioning, is a danger to the natural order of things and to people's comfort.

Fascism is rooted in the way intelligent people like the teacher can get drawn into inhuman ideas. A narrow single thing – a dogma – can be more attractive because it is easier to embrace than actually dealing with the complicated difficult thing that experience is.³⁹⁹

Indeed, regardless of the changing nature of his moods, Moran's remarks are consistent with his strategy to inculcate his family with certain concepts through fundamental principles derived from Roman Catholic inspired conservative doctrine. He

³⁹⁹ Cited in Ciaran Carty, "Out of the Dark: An Interview with John McGahern," *The Sunday Tribune*, (Dublin), 6 September 1987.

continually reinforces the mantra that all his children are of equal standing in his mind so as to eradicate individualism entirely and also to deny personal ambition. In so asserting his children's egalitarian status he affirms his own unique superiority. The former officer promotes esprit de corps, even though his area of operation is now a hayfield and no longer a battlefield: 'Together we can do anything.' This affirmation of solidarity and the minimisation of individual identity have the purpose of bringing the family together into something akin to a single entity. After the rupture between Moran and McQuaid and the old friends part ways, the former makes the decision to accept the advances from a potential suitor, Rose Brady, whom he soon marries. Moran does not seek a partnership of equals, but a companion who help him raise his children as a surrogate mother. Her previous role as children's nursemaid has helped to instil in her a sense of empathy. The aloofness displayed by her future husband only magnifies her attraction to him and drives her ambition to be mistress of her own establishment once married. Despite his noted shrewdness for strategy in the War of Independence, Moran yields relatively little power within his marriage. His wife regularly outflanks him and carefully nudges him toward making decisions that he would otherwise avoid.⁴⁰⁰

Moran's construct of a family mystique is sustained by patriarchy and *patria*, both of which are in accordance with prevailing Irish ideology. Such values manifest themselves through the attitude of the Civil Service, rather than through the direct provision in the Constitution, affording the institution of the family a privileged position, which in turn provides a recognised justification for temporary non-participation in State business. *Amongst Women*, however, also rises above the singular domestic Irish context since the cult of family can be found to stretch across many nations. Indeed, within the fabric of the novel itself Moran and his son-in-law (by marriage to daughter, Sheila) Sean Flynn acknowledge the universal nature of the family which they regard as "the basis of all society and every civilization" (AW, 117). Moran's defence of the primacy of the family finds official sanction in the Catholic Church, an institution that encourages and benefits from patriarchy and such links appear in the novel as repetitive narrative rituals in the form of family prayers. His

⁴⁰⁰ An assertion pursued by Quinn, 84.

devotion to the Rosary finds justification from familial and patriarchal grounds that works in tandem with the mantra of Rosary-crusader priest, Father Peyton who held “The family that prays together stays together”, sentiments echoed verbatim by Moran (AW, 137).

Although the Rosary frequently designates Mary as ‘blessed...amongst women,’ as she is the mother of Christ, due to the complex circumstances in the Moran household ensure that this construct is subject to radical alteration meaning it is Moran himself who has become this blessed figure. Thus, there is a symbolic ousting of the maternal figure by the paternal one. His final moments also ensure that he happens to die ‘amongst women,’ given that his youngest son is unable to arrive before his passing. Moreover, Moran’s insistence that the family forms the fundamental backbone of ‘civilised society’ also finds official sanction in Article 41.1.1 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (authored primarily by De Valera himself) which continues to stipulate that: ‘The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.’ Indeed, when Michael Moran takes flight from Great Meadow and makes his way to Dublin to seek assistance from his sisters, his family are granted space from their own jobs to help him, ‘Such is the primacy of the idea of the family that everyone was able to leave work at once without incurring displeasure...’ (AW, 123). Such a specific provision in the fundamental law of the Irish state ensured a strong position was taken by the Irish state in respect of family matters and in turn this reverberated through social policy and the literary interpretations of such lived experiences. Thus real-life experience and McGahern’s world may be seen to converge at certain junctures.

With the clear exception of Moran himself, residents of the family home are faced with three choices: compliance, continual confrontation or departure. The women of the house choose compliance, although Rose almost leaves but is given reason to remain. His daughters only leave once they have secured his sanction. The men he has had contact with behave quite differently, however. Both his sons choose flight and make a life for themselves outside Ireland. After a prolonged period Moran and his

younger son Michael make peace, but the eldest son Luke remains estranged from his father and has built an entirely new and independent life for himself completely detached from his birthplace. Michael adopts a romantic view of life in Ireland which he seeks to visit regularly as a kind of haven to which he later brings his bride to visit. In stark contrast to his elder brother, Michael acquires his own taste for things in life much to Moran's chagrin particularly in respect of his preference for horticulture over agriculture, a practice that his father believes has its origins in being 'mollied' by his stepmother Rose. A later incident between father and son reveals the latter's willingness and ability to engage physical force, the sole manifestation of manhood recognised by the father. Thus it is evident that there is a preoccupation with gender associated with the males in the novel where both Moran and Michael treat women with contempt but are, in fact, dependent on them.⁴⁰¹

One particular activity associated with Moran is that of annual haymaking, in which the whole family partake. In retrospect this exercise gains an idyllic form. Looking in from their homes in London or Dublin, Great Meadow in summertime takes on therapeutic, pastoral characteristics, where: "The remembered light on the empty hayfields would grow magical, the green shade of the beeches would give out a delicious coolness as they tasted again the sardines between slices of bread, when they were away the house would become the summer light and shade above their whole lives" (AW, 85). The reader is given a close-proximity insight into the depth of feeling shared by the family. Moran's death reveals the continuance of their primal bonding with their father even after he has passed away that demonstrates their strong respect for his life and memory. Their allegiance to their father's values and memory both during his life and post-mortem is clearly manifested in the form of the 'continual homecomings' reported through *Amongst Women*, who come together as a final pledge of love and allegiance to 'one house and man' (AW, 183). While the novel does critique the institution of patriarchy and its appropriation by Moran's daughters it also highlights the nature of the power they derive from their father is not on a metaphysical epiphany experienced in the twilight of his life, but rather on the unbridled dominance that he has

⁴⁰¹ An argument pursued by Quinn, 86-87.

exercised over them. This quality provides them with a certain strength of autonomy beneficial for adulthood, but also demonstrates how they have assimilated the patriarchal values projected by their father: ‘As they left him under the yew, it was as if each of them in their different ways had become Daddy’ (AW, 183).

The overwhelming and absolute centre of gravity of *Amongst Women* is Michael Moran, a remarkable character in the gravitas that he holds and he remains at the heart of events even in his absence. The overwhelming and absolute centre of gravity of *Amongst Women*, is Michael Moran. A remarkable character in the gravitas that he holds who remains at the heart of events even in his absence. Such is the depth of his influence that it remains undiminished after his death. In common with many others of his generation, Moran was a veteran of the War of Independence who experienced grave difficulties in adapting to civilian life after hostilities had ended and was given to belief that he was virtually ignored by those who later assumed responsibilities for governing the Irish Free State: “Some of our own Johnnies in the top jobs instead of a few Englishmen. More than half of my own family work in England. What was it all for? The whole thing was a cod” (AW, 5). On principle Moran refused to accept a military pension for a considerable period of time due to a conviction that no monetary compensation could be sufficient to acknowledge his service.⁴⁰² In *The Dead Kingdom*, John Montague explored the lives of men who retained a strong sense of bitterness in respect of the provisions recognised by the Treaty and also concerning the issue of partition:

Absurdity leads to atrocity;
Deserters, after Ballyseedy.
Emigrating anywhere, suburban
England, prohibition Brooklyn,
the embittered diaspora of
dispossessed Northern Republicans
scorning their State pensions;
a real lost generation...(Molly Bawn, 65).

⁴⁰² Eamon Wall, *The Living Stream: John McGahern’s “Amongst Women” and Irish Writing in the 1990s*, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 88, No. 351 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 305-314, p. 306.

Much excitement was felt by compatriots like Moran in playing instrumental roles in the conflict that won Irish freedom, only for such positive emotion to rapidly decay into abject dejection once they lurched from combat to the quotidian. Since their struggle was successful a return to civilian life seemed anti-climactic as it became clear that their future in the new state was to be relatively nondescript which was equated with effective exclusion. From Moran's perspective he fought for the removal of the ruling English elite for it to be replaced by an Irish ruling elite, neither of which he could ever be part of. Wartime provided a respite from the complexities of everyday life, a reality that he acknowledges: "For people like McQuaid and myself the war was the best part of our lives. Things were never so simple and clear again. I think we never rightly got the hang of it afterwards" (AW, 6).

What becomes apparent is that it is the peacetime environment rather than the war that governs Moran in his attitudes and instincts, although quite a number of instances resemble acts better suited to conduct in a conflict than the environment of an ordinary family household. It must be acknowledged that he is an embittered and mentally scarred veteran, this condition of experience is not sufficient to absolve him of the cruelties he perpetrates on his long-suffering family over which he rules with an unrepentant, authoritarian and violent manner.⁴⁰³

On one occasion not long after he had married Rose, he objects to what he regards as her verbose remarks and verbally attacks her in the absence of objection of his children as they have been so intimidated by his violent outbursts and tyrannical authority in the home: '...They kept their heads down in their books though they had long ceased to study, unwilling to catch his eye or even to breathe loudly. All they had ever been able to do in the face of violence was to bend to it' (AW, 54).

Great change comes over Ireland, particularly south of the border during Moran's lifetime and this forms a central element of the novel. There are other people who have extruded prosperity from the post-conflict circumstances in marked contrast to Moran who sees the manifestation of this reality through the success enjoyed by McQuaid who he includes as part of a group he holds in contempt. He refers to these

⁴⁰³ Wall, 307.

individuals as “a crowd of small-minded gangsters out for their own good” (AW, 18). Despite this disparity of achievement, he is still able to recognise McQuaid’s success in a sector of society which he himself could not attain:

His fascination with McQuaid’s mastery of his own world was boyish. He had never been able to deal with the outside. All his dealings had been with himself and that larger self of family which had been thrown together by marriage or accident: he had never been able to go out from his shell of self (AW, 12).

As a direct result of his inability to positively engage in the Free State market place, Moran becomes highly insular and treats Great Meadow as his own personal Irish Republic. With the passage of time, his influence gradually wanes within and beyond this environment. 1921 becomes ever more occluded by the mists of time and while this phenomenon advances so too does the acceleration in the decline of Moran’s discreet private claim to be the ‘intelligent conscience’ of his generation. Later in life, already at an advanced age, Moran and Rose make their way to the bank seeking advice on the disposal of bonds he holds and he is treated brusquely by the young bank manager whose interests lie more in being immersed in golf club gossip than displaying respect for a war hero and the national cultural and historical context which gave rise to his experiences. Thus, this incident illustrates that Moran is now effectively invisible to the younger generation with whom such values no longer have very much currency. After his passing two politicians feature as part of the group of mourners and look up the people gathered around his grave with “undisguised contempt” as they witness the draping of a faded tricolour over his coffin (AW, 183). These politicians make an appearance on such an occasion in order to capitalise on the republican values which they do not actually believe in so as to reap an electoral benefit at the expense of the good name and memory of the old republican now held in disdain.⁴⁰⁴

Much material in *Amongst Women* attests to the fact that the economic, social and sexual are interrelated realms, pulsations in one reverberate in the others. Having been born in earlier era and lived to beyond middle age, Moran has known survivors of

⁴⁰⁴ Wall, 309.

the Famine, lived through the Depression and the Economic War and has diligently managed his land and carefully managed his money over many years. On approaching his mortal terminus, he has accumulated sufficient wealth to easily surpass both his own and his wife's necessities so that there is no need to work the land very hard any longer. From personal experience he forms the view that it is only through intensive labour, determination and intelligence that one can achieve the desired material gain. Mealtimes also provide an ideal occasion where faith and prayer is invoked and shared. Prior to mealtimes Moran says the words: 'Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts...' and once the family have consumed their meal he addends: 'We give Thee thanks, O Almighty God, for all Thy bounty which we have received through Christ Our Lord who liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen.' (AW, 59). In maximising quotidian occasions, such as mealtimes when the whole family are gathered and evening prayers, Moran makes every attempt to infuse a very particular Catholic tinged-habitus. He attempts to indoctrinate his children through daily routines, which he hopes will ensure that they assimilate conservative values (i.e. a 'Catholic' habitus) and encourage their reproduction in their own lives. Thereafter it is assumed that the same values will be passed down to their children as they receive the same exposure to the established values in the home.⁴⁰⁵ However, shifting expectations and changing values makes this less probable. A telling remark from Moran's son-in-law attests to such a shift in expectations where, Sean asserting that a civil service position is "no big deal" (AW, 157) leaves him dismayed. For his father-in-law's generation a professional position within the civil service represented a divine gift in that it provided security, a pension and respectability in addition to security against emigration. However, since Sean has been born into an era that is a few generations removed from hunger and where fears of destitution may have been largely mitigated due to modest comforts, his attitude is that "there's more to life than security. There are even people who think it is the death of life" (AW, 158). A generational shift has occurred, but while Moran has not built a connection with the modern way of life, he has never been alienated from the world of

⁴⁰⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2013/1977), pp. 82-83; 95.

land, money and the food it brings for which he fought and worked so hard to guarantee his survival. For the greater part, the social world within and around Great Meadow gravitates around work and prayer, with the latter taking precedence over all other activities. As patriarch, Moran leads the prayers and is followed by Rose and the children.⁴⁰⁶ For Dermot McCarthy, Moran should be regarded as ‘...emblematic of the hypocritical, religiose, repressive, unimaginative, xenophobic, inward-turning, navel-worshipping national clerical society that McGahern reveals in his memoir. It would be difficult to deny the validity of this description in respect of Moran and less still of the world he inhabits. He takes advantage of his position of patriarch and uses the Catholic faith to justify and enforce his tyrannical behaviour and the near-totalitarian environment he has established in Great Meadow. Ensuring a negligible expression of opposition requires the establishment and cultivation of a particular habitus that ensures that his authority is regarded as untouchable.

In her *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf explores the dynamics of male domination:

Inevitably, we we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within those mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially; where, daubed red and gold, decorated like a savage with feathers, he goes through mystic rites and enjoys the dubious pleasures of power and dominion while we, “his” women, are locked in the private house without share in the many societies of which his society is composed.⁴⁰⁷

Terry Rey (2014) defends a direct link between patriarchal structures as set out in Woolf’s literature and the operation of the division of male-domination power structures in society:

the relationship between symbolic capital (the red and gold feathers) and symbolic violence (sinking the private brother, the rigid and artificial penning of individuals, locking up the

⁴⁰⁶ Wall, 310-11.

⁴⁰⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1939), p. 121.

women, as well as the mystic rites that give the air of legitimacy this monstrous male's arbitrary and thus 'dubious power of domination') is central to Bourdieu's entire theory of practice, for it is only when armed with symbolic capital that any agent, or individual, can commit acts of symbolic violence and engender in dominated groups and individuals the misrecognition of the social order as something natural.⁴⁰⁸

Rey's assertions have direct import for the family dynamics found in the Moran family in *Amongst Women*. Moran has created his own world within Great Meadow and has forced his children, in particular his daughters, to live within a home-dominated culture in which they have relatively little power. They do not have any right to express their displeasure at how they are being controlled and the quality of life they have. Instead they are forced to live within a system that has been presented through rhythmic practice and the Catholic dogma (i.e. reinforced through daily prayer and devotions) appropriated by their father to justify the condition of life that dominated their home and its immediate environs.

Denis Sampson believes that "the rosary...recited endless in the kitchen and alluded to in the title is not so much an expression of religious faith as it is a ritual with powerful binding force within this miniature tribe."⁴⁰⁹ There can be little doubt that the rosary brings the family together and in such placid plane of existence serves as a uniting occasion. However, Sampson underestimates the religious aspect of the rosary. Repetitive it undoubtedly is, however, this is to be expected as it forms a central part of Catholic religious ritual, which is itself a fundamental element of the timeless rhythm of rural life. The rosary remains a central element of the receding values of the world that Moran represents. While at no stage do his children express any rejection of Catholic values, it is evident that they do not possess the same level of passion as their father. The family at prayer remains an institutional practice within the household but its purpose has changed from one of faith to homage to the father and his world that has begun its inexorable journey into oblivion. From the perspective of the younger generation, the rosary is little more than a hindrance that limits the pursuance of a

⁴⁰⁸ Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion, Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), p. 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Denis Sampson, *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), p. 219.

vigorous social life as attested to by Mark O' Donoghue, Maggie's future husband. On the train journey home to Dublin after a visit to Great Meadow, O' Donoghue declares: "I need a drink. I need several drinks. I feel as if I've just got out of jail" (AW, 141).). His exclamation is so stark in that he views the world occupied by the Morans in Great Meadow stands in stark contrast to his own world when he opines that:

Everybody was watchful here. It was like moving about in a war area. What had first impressed him about Maggie was her air of separateness and superiority when they had come half-pissed from the Crown. In this house it disappeared as if it had never existed. (She)...was nervous here, cautious, careful in every word and movement (AW, 157).

Neither is Great Meadow immune from the effects of the sexual revolution which is exemplified in *Amongst Women* in the form of Nell Monahan, an emigrant in America on holidays in her country of birth. She and Michael Jr. engage in a passionate affair before she departs once more to her country of residence. A stark contrast is obvious between their enjoyment of lust and sexual intercourse as against the mute, dull environment into which Moran and Rose step into on the night of their nuptials. Economic prosperity has made it possible to treat sexual matters more light-heartedly and mischievously and this is in evidence in Great Meadow when Sean and Sheila absent themselves from haymaking in the fields to escape indoors to engage in love-making. What is notable is that the most radical examples of change in Great Meadow come in the form of Nell Monahan and Mark O' Donoghue, both outsiders, the first from the United States and the other from Britain. Their presence and influence strongly suggest that all official attempts at eradicating outside influence have been a futile exercise. In his poem, "The Siege of Mullingar," John Montague makes it crystal clear that much momentum arose internally within the Irish state that sought change from within:

At the Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar
There were two sounds, the breaking
Of glass, and the background pulse
Of music. Young girls roamed

The streets with eager faces,
Shoving for men. Bottles in
Hand, they rowed out a song:
“Puritan Ireland’s dead and gone,
A myth of O’ Connor and O’Faoláin.”⁴¹⁰

Despite the dominance of Moran, himself a devout Catholic, there are characters in McGahern’s own fiction who regarded the church as an agent of obstruction and an authoritarian force. Declaring his support for the modern state, McQuaid looks to the future suggesting that “the next crowd will be better than this mixture of druids and crooks.” His assertion draws a sharp response from Moran who demands “Leave the priests out of it,” an instruction that was quickly rebuffed. This was to be the last “Monaghan Day” as the occasion had lost its appeal for both men since it had been completely by the conflict of church and state.⁴¹¹

It is a daily occurrence that Moran leads his family in prayer in a display of piety, but this does not diminish his detestation for the ‘mockery’ that has characterised current opinions of what he regarded as a “glorious” revolution. His opinion in this respect becomes vocalised in conversation with McQuaid during the course of their last “Monaghan Day” together when he states: “Look at the country now, run by a crowd of small-minded gangsters out for their own good. It was better if it never happened” (AW, 18). His discontent echoes the disdain felt by the father in McGahern’s short story “Korea” when he expresses his wish that he should have focussed on himself and allow the “fool of a country fend for itself.” These characters have formed the view that the modern Irish state has betrayed its revolutionary leaders and allowed the country to be taken over by dominant middle classes that in turn inspired an acute feeling of hatred in people like Moran that touches all spheres of his life: “Many of them who had pensions and medals and jobs couldn’t tell one end of a gun from the other. Many of them who actually fought got nothing. An early grave or an emigrant ship. Sometimes I get sick when I see what I fought for” (AW, 15).

⁴¹⁰ John Montague, *Collected Poems* (Loughcrew: Gallery, 1995), p. 67.

⁴¹¹ Brian Liddy, ‘State and Church: Darkness in the Fiction of John McGahern,’ *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Summer, 1999), pp. 106-121, pp. 116.

In the transfer of power from British forces to the native Irish, a number of people came to the view that something was lost in that act.⁴¹² Moran embodies a particularly bitter perspective on what became of the revolution, attesting to the fact that it was not entirely successful for all citizens, combatants, civilians or otherwise. A bitterness on Moran's part is different to that of his children's generation since he was involved in the military struggle for independence, but is disappointed with the form of the result, rather than the actual outcome itself. His children's generation find they have been raised in a near-totalitarian environment where every moral is defined and each move carefully watched with transgressions seized upon to exact punishment. Where a significant element of Moran's generation appears to hold the conviction that they have achieved a utopian state of affairs, it is their children and younger members of society that hold a starkly different view in that the cultural context in which they find themselves could be described as being proper to a dystopian narrative.

A clear and undeniable disparity arose between revolutionary desires and post-conflict conditions. Expectations mellowed with time as pragmatic considerations took precedence over utopian longings. Seamus Deane (1996) has noted how such considerations have been moderated by such dynamics where "Irish freedom declined into freedom to become Irish in predestined ways" which were heavily determined by what has been termed the 'Irish Catholic tradition' that asserted its right to be seen and to act as "as defender of a pious and chaste race in a degenerate and promiscuous world." However, as the modern era has advanced the Republic of Ireland has distanced itself from a firm concept of identity that represented "a monotonous and barren anachronism" in favour of embracing opportunities in corporate spheres and on the European stage Ireland's transformation from what could be termed a "pious race" into a people firmly committed to the international economy did not involve jettisoning all of one way of life to permit the beginning of another. Deane also notes that while the Irish state came to dominate Irish political life, it did so with the cooperation and collusion of the Catholic Church rather than at its expense.⁴¹³ In *Amongst Women*, Moran is aware of the bourgeois nature of the state's identity and also notices the shift

⁴¹² Liddy, 116-7.

⁴¹³ Quoted from Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1996), pp. 13-15.

in national Irish identity to embrace a much greater degree of internationalism that leaves him perturbed and disgusted. Where religion might have once been the opiate of the people, it is in Great Meadow. Discontent on Moran's part is not manifested in the ballot box but rather through prayer to God as he kneels to offer prayer instead of sharing his concerns with others and the government.⁴¹⁴ One could argue that the Irish revolution and the later promulgation of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* in 1937 represented a golden opportunity for the Catholic Church to assert its authority over Irish society. The institutionalisation of Roman Catholic ethos in constitutional provisions, legal statutes and social policy was a direct result of the assertion of power by the Catholic Church to ensure a particular character of the Irish state was legally conceived and enforced. For a notable segment of the population this development represented the arrival at a utopian state of life. However, for others, a minority at first, whose ranks gradually swelled, represented in *Amongst Women* in the form of the discontented sons who left their country entirely for the 'sullied' land of the former colonial master. Moran's remaining children, his daughters, live under enormous stress and terror due to his totalitarian ways. They exemplify the adage 'one man's paradise is another's inferno.'⁴¹⁵ Moreover, until major legislative change came to pass beginning in the 1970s and intensified in the late 1980s and mid-1990s, it is arguable that it was women who had suffered the most and would benefit most strongly from progressive changes in attitudes and legislation.

Moran is unable to encounter the means to ameliorate the anger provoked by the loss of a concrete sense of identity. Finding a cure is impossible, but he has the ability to vent his frustrations within his own immediate social context, i.e. upon his family. Moran thus deals with his family as would a man of violence, the former which he sees as a larger version of himself: "Families were what mattered," a thought that occurs to him in the aftermath of the vacuum left in the atmosphere immediately following McQuaid's final departure from his life. The family was he saw "more particularly that larger version of himself-his family" (AW, 22). The family also provides fertile ground on which to explore the issue of resented independence in *Amongst Women* in the form of the strained and almost non-existent relationship between Moran and his eldest son,

⁴¹⁴ Wall, 117.

⁴¹⁵ Cited in Goodwin and Taylor, 6.

Luke. After facing a grave threat of immediate violence from his father, Luke seeks refuge from both father and country and is now permanently resident and professionally active in London. It is this ironic turn of fate that further embitters Moran and it partly inspires one of his outbursts: “What did we get for it? A country if you’d believe them. Some of our own johnnies in the top jobs instead of a few Englishmen. More than half of my own family work in England. What was it all for? The whole thing was a cod” (AW, 5).

From such a perspective it can be claimed that the freedom conquered by Ireland was actually the freedom to continue in the manner of living established by the colonial power marked by a nominal self-identity. The alternative being to otherwise assimilate themselves to become part of English culture again once they reach English shores through emigration. Luke Moran, Moran’s eldest son is a clear example of this irony, in respect of whom Denis Sampson (1993) defends that “his absence is like a curse on Moran. Nothing is more moving in the book that the bewildered, begrudging and wholly ineffective efforts of the man to re-embrace his first-born.”⁴¹⁶ The situation in which Luke is found to be in provides is analogous to the parable of the prodigal son. Moran waits for Luke to return home to declare “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you” (Luke, 15:17-18). Nonetheless, Luke Moran is more than just the firstborn, he represents the antithesis of all that his father fought for. Despite the stark difference in identity and aspirations between father and son, Moran cannot bring himself to look upon his son as Other. Moreover, the vibrant autonomy enjoyed by Luke makes it impossible for his father to assert full control over his own life since his son’s way of life represents an unreachable force that thrives in the very country that Moran had fought so fervently to disentangle from the workings of his nation and life.

Given that Moran is slipping out of life and the hold it has over time and space, home and history, forces that have held him so tightly throughout his mortal journey, demonstrate that these dynamics conspire at a critical juncture as they approach the point of their own extinction. It is through the ‘disarmament of revelation’ that the true nature of things comes to be laid bare. In the clear absence of a strong, centralised

⁴¹⁶ Sampson, 226.

authority of Moran himself the household ceases to be a command economy and the Moran household becomes devoid of the psycho-cultural archetype of the one leader, one voice figurehead which means that the household can no longer continue in its previous form. Indeed, since both Moran sons have departed the family home to construct their own lives in metropolitan England ensures that Great Meadow, a self-proclaimed kingdom of the father, dies with Moran himself.⁴¹⁷

The closing remarks in *Amongst Women* can be viewed as a vignette of the Irish nation firmly gripped by modernising forces in its descriptions of body language and posture that represent efforts at maintaining continuity and change itself. The latter alludes to a fragmentation of both common understandings and feeling which are moderated by conflicting pressures attesting to collective experience and individual perception of such happenings that illustrate the multifarious nature of the condition of modernity. Moran's integrity remains untainted from his daughter's perspective and it is this image of him that resides in their consciousness. His life represents not only a memory that can be honoured but also provides the means by which identity can be created and sustained, an identity that extends to a powerful construct of home from which all else can grow and prosper. This notwithstanding, there is no discernible effect on Michael Moran and his brother Luke, the latter who does not attend his father's funeral. In common with Luke, Michael has only secured his personal autonomy following a concerted effort to disengage from his childhood environment. On the occasion of his father's funeral his inability or unwillingness to adopt accepted behavioural etiquette demonstrates his repudiation of certain traditional values and the ceremonial practices that accompany them on solemn occasions. Moreover, the sight of Michael enjoying the company of his brothers-in-law, Mark and Sean, whose link to Great Meadow is superficial, lends credence to the argument that he finds himself disconnected from his family home since it no longer provides him with life. Indeed, Michael is symptomatic of the major McGahern theme of how "(un)certainly has replaced the traditional destinations." In addition, he represents an instance of where it is possible to pinpoint the transition in contemporary Irish fiction (written in 1999) from

⁴¹⁷ George O' Brien, 'Worlds of Their Own: Autonomy and Anxiety in Contemporary Irish Fiction', *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 35, Issue 3, Article 15, September 1999, pp. 133-153, pp. 145-6.

a position of fearing being enveloped by "... the exterior darkness of a world of one's own to a more willing identification with such a world."⁴¹⁸ Those who have chosen to abandon seeking any meaningful reconciliation with father and homeland, Luke and Michael, no longer command so much attention as before once they begin building new lives in England. In this way they avoid all possible conflict with their father, his values and the issues governing Ireland. *Amongst Women* retains its exclusive central focus of the life of Moran, his and daughters and it is the women who give the book its title and to whom the future shall be bequeathed.⁴¹⁹

Moran, as a patriarchal Catholic figure and a man in possession of a strong sense of conscience and duty in preventing the vista of hunger from famine from ever affecting the welfare of his family. As part of his fear of external forces he fears what the outside world can bring to his family "Within the house the outside world was shut out" (AW, 93). The development of the narrative reveals the Moran family's suffering in the face of Moran's stifling habits of regular practice that forces his family into a certain pattern of behaviour. Despite his success in this sphere of life, his increasingly frailty ensures he is left with no alternative but to surrender to the advancing irony of his position whereby he must rely on his daughters for his welfare and dies in their company.⁴²⁰ However, there is, to a certain extent, a symbiotic relationship in that while Moran depends on his daughters and his wife in his old age, his daughters also depend upon the character he is in their eyes so that the love they feel for him is inextricably linked to not only the fear of him they were accustomed to being raised with, but also the fear of life he instilled in them.⁴²¹

Subsequent to his marriage to Rose Brady, Moran subjects his new wife to incidents of violence as means of exercising his authority over her. She recoils on two occasions but then learns to work around his moods, to manipulate him in favour of helping her step-children, particular the girls to find a more agreeable environment in

⁴¹⁸ O' Brien, 147-8.

⁴¹⁹ Brian Hughes, 'Remembered Light: Constants in the Fiction of John McGahern', *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, Vol. 5 (1992), pp. 93-105.

⁴²⁰ Melania Terrazas Gallego, 'Dialogue and women's lives in John McGahern's "Amongst Women" and Claire Keegan's "The Forester's Daughter"', *ES: Revista de filología inglesa* (2012), No. 33, pp. 321-339, p. 322.

⁴²¹ Sampson, 232.

which to grow up. She becomes more astute and experiences an inner change: “The violence Moran had turned on her she chose to ignore, to let her own resentment drop and to join the girls as they stole about so that their presences would never challenge his” (AW, 53). She gives the impression that she has adopted an obedient stance (uses “camouflage (...) for safekeeping” (AW, 68). The principal beneficiaries of this effort are the girls of the family who enjoy a considerable reduction in harassment at home. Rose also attempts to instil in them a sense of determination that she hopes will stand to them over time: “Rose’s coming to the house had smoothed their lives and allowed them to concentrate everything on school, which above all, they saw as a way out of the house and into a life of their own. (...) Much could be won, a great deal could be lost, and there was always England” (AW, 67-73). The Moran girls understand that their sole opportunity at benefiting from genuine social mobility lies in gaining entry to higher education or by progressing through specialised exam processes that would grant entry to well-paid and secure public sector positions. Failure to gain entry or an inability to overcome obstacles to these aspirations (e.g. Moran’s direct opposition to his daughter seeking to study medicine) equates to remaining within the limited social and cultural paradigm from which they have come. Assistance is sometimes necessary to ensure success in acquiring sufficient levels of cultural capital. Such assistance may come in the form of encouragement or financial support from established figures in the home or the professional world. Moran’s reticence toward the possibility of one of his children gaining entry to the higher education system stands as an example of self-filtering of members of the lower social classes believing, as according to their habitus and the cultural capital they have accumulated, that their current position in the social stratum is appropriate and that higher aspirations are inappropriate and unnecessary.

It is that Rose takes an acute interest in the well-being of the young women in the house (not to mention Michael until his departure). She seeks a way to provide them with the means to determine their own future by encouraging the development of their capacity in terms of self-sufficiency and confidence through study that she hopes will provide opportunities for them outside the home in the future. This theme becomes a

theme of concern and provokes conflict in the Moran household, but Rose learns how to manage the tensions that arise under these circumstances:

Rose scolded and managed to shepherd both men (Moran and his son Michael) to their rooms without further trouble. (...) These visits of his daughters from London and Dublin were to flow like relief through the house. They brought distraction, something to look forward to, something to mull over after they had gone. Above all they brought them bracing breath of the outside, an outside Moran refused to accept unless it came from the family (AW, 93).

With the passage of time, the young Moran girls matured into young women and Rose accompanied their development. As the maturation takes place Moran's authority begins its gradual diminution. The attitude he adopts is revealed in the narrative and it becomes evident that part of McGahern's agenda is to provide a literary defence of women and to recognise the legitimacy of women asserting their own voice as they seek a fulfilling journey from childhood to womanhood.⁴²²

A further instance of the assertion of identity and personal autonomy occurs when Sheila, one of the three Moran daughters, returns to Great Meadow temporarily with her husband to assist her father and siblings with haymaking. Furthermore, *Amongst Women* portrays Sheila as an intelligent, ambitious woman who actively seeks personal and economic sovereignty. She has built a full life of her own in Dublin and has chosen the man she wished to be married too in an act of sexual maturity. It is in the confines of the Moran residence that the sexual act takes place once the couple have conspicuously taken their leave from the working party on the meadow and engage in love-making in the house a vacuum of authorisation from her father. Behaviour of this kind has the result of revealing Sheila's deliberate disavowal of "the inviolability of the house, its true virginity (AW, 166). It would appear that she now seeks a means of working the institution of her family to an advantaging befitting her own children: "She would belong to the family but not on any terms. She knew instinctively that she could not live without it: she would need it, she would use it, but she would not be used by it except in the way she wanted" (AW, 167). Thus, Sheila seeks to guarantee a better

⁴²² Terrazas Gallego, 322.

future for her own children by bestowing on them the necessary nurturing conditions to build confidence and ambition in marked contrast to her own stifled up-bringing: “They were clever and confident. She did not want that confidence damaged in the way she felt her own had been. (...) doors would be open to them that had been locked to her, their lives would be different (AW, 170). In this excerpt, it is evident that Sheila is referring to the increased educational opportunities that have become available in Ireland with the onset of the 1960s. Whereas, she herself and many of her own generation were neither able to secure parental approval, nor did they possess the material wealth would have made it possible to pursue secondary and university study. As mentioned above, owing to a substantial investment in educational provision announced by the Irish government the numbers of students enrolling in schools increased dramatically where secondary student numbers rose from 104,000 to 144,000 between 1966 and 1969, an increase in three years as much as it had in the previous decade. This necessitated the establishment of two new institutes of higher education⁴²³. A younger generation were then able to avail of much greater opportunities than their own parents and grandparents as they were able to partake in the creation and assimilation of much greater levels of cultural capital through participation in institutions of higher learning or from experience of working in professional environments in which the culture encourages learning and reflection.

What is notable about the year of the publication of *Amongst Women* (1990) also coincides with the election of the first female president of Ireland, Mary Robinson⁴²⁴. A law graduate and former law Professor at Trinity College, Dublin. Robinson had also acted as legal counsel for the plaintiff, Mrs. Mary McGee in her case against the Irish state in 1972 for the right to use contraceptives without interference and gay rights activist David Norris in the Irish Supreme Court in the 1980s and on appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. She became an unlikely victor in an election where she faced a popular Fianna Fáil candidate, a well-regarded Fine Gael candidate, but was also supported by a myriad of people including formal support from the Labour Party, the Workers Party and a host of women’s representative groups, community

⁴²³ Data cited in Garvin, 199.

⁴²⁴ A situation duly noted in an earlier chapter.

organisations, environmentalists and social activists of different kinds. Robinson's election as President of Ireland marked the breaking of the Fianna Fáil party's hegemonic and exclusively male-dominated hold over the highest political office in the land.⁴²⁵ During her acceptance speech she roguishly remarked that the Mná na hÉireann (the Women of Ireland), who she specifically gave thanks to, "...instead of rocking the cradle rocked the system" having garnered 817,830 votes as against the Fianna Fáil candidate Brian Lenihan's (a sitting cabinet minister) 731,273 votes. What is in evidence here is the ceding of ground from one generation to the next, where old ways give way to the new, where the younger generation is afforded more opportunities particularly in the area of education. This phenomenon revealed in *Amongst Women* in a manner described by Denis Sampson as akin to "...witnessing not just a local saga but the collapse of a civilisation, and to be re-enacting the process by which the old ways eternally give place to the new."⁴²⁶ What is in evidence here is the ceding of ground from one generation to the next, where old ways give way to the new, where the younger generation is afforded more opportunities particularly in the area of education. This phenomenon revealed in *Amongst Women* in a manner described by Denis Sampson as akin to "...witnessing not just a local saga but the collapse of a civilisation, and to be re-enacting the process by which the old ways eternally give place to the new."⁴²⁷

In this novel, McGahern begins with the terminal phase of Moran's life and concludes with his funeral. His death is not a surprise, but his family mourn their loss with much grief. Much planning has been put into the funeral to the extent that a brown Franciscan habit had been purchased and discreetly stored away until needed. In choosing to attire Moran's corpse in such clothing, there is an argument to be made in that a valid parallel can be drawn between McGahern's fictional character and former Taoiseach Éamon de Valera who was also laid to rest in religious attire.⁴²⁸ Both men engaged in fervent demagogical authoritarianism to advance their own conservative

⁴²⁵ Brown, 358-9.

⁴²⁶ Brown, 360; Keogh, 388.

⁴²⁷ Sampson (1993), 215.

⁴²⁸ In an article discussing De Valera's death that appeared in *The New York Times* on 2nd September 1975, specific reference is made to the fact that he was laid out in the habit of a Carmelite friar.

agendas through repeated recourse to Catholic ideology and the rituals that sustained it in the most intensive conservative era in Irish history (1937-1959).

The changes that took place in Irish culture that created new possibilities for previously marginalised members and sectors of society (particularly women) only became possible owing to a paradigm shift that began in the early 1960s. Its effects slowly began to acquire momentum that grew as greater numbers of people entered secondary and higher education and the attitudes shifted toward a more moderate nature encouraged by the presence of technology such as the car, television and improving economic circumstances. A paradigm shift⁴²⁹ thus became possible and took form over a number of years that resulted in the breaking down of a habitus⁴³⁰ heavily tinged by a Catholic ideology. This was partially brought about by increasing levels of cultural capital being shared by members of the community as the general level of education rose owing to much wider access and affordability following much improved economic circumstances. Notable growth in the economic sphere also made it possible for people to dream of a different way of life within expanding cultural horizons where a new paradigm becomes knowable if not yet immediately tangible.

The two-pronged approach adopted by McGahern permits the analysis of the carefully constructed and claustrophobic Great Meadow, comprising the family home and the farm on which it is situated. Complimenting this is the more nebulous country at large which makes it possible for the author to create a vision of Ireland where private and public worlds are in permanent interrelation, with the former having a slightly stronger prevalence within the narrative. What McGahern portrays is an Irish world on a gradual march toward modernity from a delicate postcolonial identity to a more assertive nation as an active partner in the wider European project. He simultaneously explores elements that are said to be beyond the reach of history: the affections that form a central element of the fabric of family life; a strongly held and generally felt affection for land, particular that of family fields; in addition to the challenges that humans encounter as they deal with navigating the domains of home and the market

⁴²⁹ This Kuhnian concept is explored in detail in the chapter called 'Through the tinted looking glass: towards a three-pronged approach to analysing John McGahern's novels'.

⁴³⁰

place. The author allows the reader to accompany the maturation process of the Moran family as they experience the effects of the forces unleashed by the political, economic, social and sexual transformation of Irish society from the 1920s to the 1970s.⁴³¹

⁴³¹ Wall, 305.

2.6 Embracing the future, remembering the past: *That They May Face the Rising Sun*.

McGahern's final novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* was first published in 2001 and was received with abundant acclamation. Critics were generous in their commentary with Paul Binding of the Independent on Sunday expressing the view that it should be regarded as a "superb novel". Binding praises how the text achieves a detailed, if measured, portrait of the natural world, the nature of rural life and the complexities of the community that is encompassed by its boundaries. Concluding his review, Binding declares the novel an "extraordinary and original achievement."⁴³²

Respected award-winning novelist Hilary Mantel also offered an equally positive set of remarks that focus on the complex interpersonal dynamics persisting between the characters. In this respect she notes "this simply constructed and gently-paced book," and acknowledges the skill exercised by McGahern in placing historical material into the text to powerful effect and the dignity with which he presents the mundane lives of the characters. Mantel further defends that McGahern's text displays "grave integrity" from which it draws its strength: "by virtue of its simplicity the novel accretes power."⁴³³ Another review that appeared in The Guardian authored by Seamus Deane lauds the "capacious style" of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* where he asserts its style is notable for its "lucidity and intensity". He also notes that the narrative of the work is "inflected by a tone of forgiveness and acceptance that adds an amplitude and serenity rarely achieved in fiction."⁴³⁴

Given that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is constructed in an unusual manner for a novel, such praise would appear relatively salient. Analysis of the novel unearths a fundamental feature of the work in how there is a conspicuous absence of traditional narrative elements such as a story line, conflicts, climaxes, finales and significant progression of character's identities and desires. Eamon Maher contends that

⁴³² Paul Binding, "Welcome to Paradise, County Leitrim," review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, *Independent on Sunday* (London), 27 January 2002, p. 15.

⁴³³ Hilary Mantel, "Getting Through", review of *By the Lake*, *New York Review of Books*, 23 May 2002, pp. 10-14.

⁴³⁴ Seamus Deane, "A new Dawn", review of John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, *The Guardian*, 12 January 2002.

this situation has left some readers somewhat bemused and also believes that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is “not a novel in the conventional sense, more a lyrical evocation of a particular place and its inhabitants.”⁴³⁵ While this analysis does shine some light on the structure of the text, the latter is not as desolate of events as the above assertion may suggest.

Husband and wife, Joe and Kate Ruttledge constitute the main characters of the story and they reside on a small farm in Northwest Ireland. They both have had a career in advertising in the city of London, although Joe Ruttledge continues to work on a freelance basis. Mr. Ruttledge (or simply ‘Ruttledge’ as he is habitually referred to throughout the text) was raised in the vicinity of the couple’s property but spent many years away before returning some years before. His spouse Kate Ruttledge has American heritage and the United States was the site of her formative years. Ambivalence surrounds the exact period of time since the Ruttledges have taken up residence in their current home, but it is evident that this period is a substantial one. In comparison to McGahern’s earlier novels, Ruttledge is a character that is shown to have had a positive experience of emigration. He now leads a satisfactory life with his wife in Ireland and does not live with traumatic memories of hardship in his formative years. This is a fundamental departure from the authors’ earlier work as the experience stands in marked contrast to novels such as *The Dark*, *The Leavetaking* and to a lesser extent, *Amongst Women*, where characters were forced to leave the land of their birth by economic necessity or cultural malaise making it impossible for them to reconcile their own ambitions with prevailing community expectations. A certain level of quiet contentment can be detected in the attitude adopted by Ruttledge and is indicative of a sense of optimism and hope that has gradually accumulated within the lives of people in the community.

The Ruttledges’ early days in residence by the lake are captured by means of recollections parcelled into a series of episodes which punctuates the text throughout. The novel accompanies the lives of the couple during approximately one year as the seasons rise and roll and the associated effects on their life on a small farm in the midst

⁴³⁵ Maher (2003), p. 121.

of lambing, calving, harvesting and livestock auctions. Neighbours who share the same environment from their lakeside homes also form part of the text through their bonds of friendship with the Rutledges.

While the book is based on life in a relatively quiet rural environment, a series of events animate the text in a manner that reflects traditional subject matters for a novel. An account is offered of John Quinn's first wedding day, when Quinn himself forces his bride to engage in sexual relations in public which causes her great distress and her departure relatively soon thereafter. Another neighbour and friend, Jamesie is found recalling an incident that occurred during the Anglo-Irish War in the 1920s that resulted in the massacre of a group of Irish guerrillas by British irregulars. Yet another character, Johnny Murphy is shown to have made poor decisions in life after having departed for England for love, his love interest abandons him and this effectively destroyed his life. While these elements are important ones in the novel, the overarching focus is on the discreet and unadorned facets of everyday life: friends and relatives visiting the house, occupational activities, market business, making purchases in the town, the process of acquiring a bank loan, the construction of a shed, viewing a television program and enjoying a drink in a local bar.

In stark contrast to McGahern's earlier novels, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* stands as a testament to the greater spirit of transcendence achieved in this novel. While there are minor examples of conflicts found elsewhere in McGahern's work present in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, they take on only a discrete role and appear more routine than remarkable.⁴³⁶ A close reading of McGahern's earlier novels, particularly *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, in conjunction with his last novel demonstrates a clear shift in emphasis and a transformation in the cultural and psychological condition of both the characters and the community they inhabit. The author's earlier designs on portraying the struggles and near-hopelessness of his characters has been replaced with a discernible sense of plurality (i.e. a clear lack of openly judgemental commentary and sanction of what would previously have immediately provoked condemnation and sanction). Old tensions have receded entirely and have been replaced

⁴³⁶ Malcolm (2007), p. 120.

by a placid sense of belonging as characters live their lives along the lake shore employing gentle manners and discrete strategies to sustain the precious peace that was once just seen as outlandish folly. A sense of peace is evident throughout the novel particularly in respect of the casting off of dysfunctional attitudes regarding a fractured sense of heritage triggered by cultural memories of the struggle for independence, abused women and patriarchal oppression which featured so prominently in early novels.

It is undeniable that McGahern was aware of the declining nature of his subject matter when he set about writing *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. In it he captures the disappearing features of the Ireland he was born into by recording and sympathetically portraying its scents, sights and sounds, the lifestyle pursued by the inhabitants of a particular community and all that contributes to the development of such communities. Eamon Maher (2006) has described the manner in which McGahern writes in this context as ‘simple yet graceful, transparent and dense’. With its clear autobiographical overtones, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* supplies a mature evaluation of the influence of landscape on people’s lives. Such is the strength of the centrality of landscape in the book it eclipses plot and character development entirely. In fact, the very structure of the text makes it difficult to apply the traditional definition of a novel to the work since it is more of a lyrical evocation in respect of a specific place populated by middle-aged to older people in the midst of their coming to terms with events that surround their lives.⁴³⁷

Indeed, for most of the novel the narrative is occupied with portraying the entirety that comprises the world of the lakeside community and the nearby town including people’s manners, language and the many defining idiosyncrasies governing the local culture. Thus, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* assumes a dual purpose to eulogise and recover what has become endangered of a particular way of life that also serves as a means to highlight the value and power of this disappearing world in the

⁴³⁷ Eamon Maher, ‘John McGahern and the Commemoration of Traditional Rural Ireland’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 95, No. 379 (Autumn, 2006), pp. 279-290, pp. 280; 287.

face of the ever-encroaching pace of modernity.⁴³⁸ In this context, one can reference the thought-provoking stance adopted by Richard Kearney who notes that this encroachment process enhances rather than dilutes Irish identity: ‘Contemporary Irish identity is most at ease with itself, it appears, when the obsession with an exclusive identity is abandoned. Irish culture rediscovers its best self, not self-consciously, not self-regardingly, but in its encounter with other cultures’.⁴³⁹

It would seem that by adopting a more conciliatory approach towards difference, deliberately contrasting with past practices of imposing sanctions on those who chose to exhibit conduct considered inconsistent with prevailing norms, a new maturity has been born of an acute paradigm shift that is apparent throughout McGahern’s penultimate and last novels.

The narrative of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* takes the form of an omniscient third-person one and contains all the traditional features of such a device. It provides a portrait of the context in which each character’s views and convictions are posited within situations and events and are remarked upon with the occurrence of particular happenings at certain moments in times. Jamesie’s character and physical attributes are discussed in the first few paragraphs of the novel (*TRS*, 4). Other characters receive similar treatment as when the narrator sketches a profile of the character Johnny and the routine which brings him back to visit Ireland every summer (*TRS*, 6). Thereafter the narrative is concerned with outlining the identity of Jim, Jamesie’s son and his life trajectory to date (*TRS*, 6). Following on from this, Jamesie and Mary’s preparations for Johnny’s return feature as another concern (*TRS*, 6-7). Similarly, a description also appears Bill Evans’ arrival, reticence and his putting down of Jamesie (*TRS*, 11). This segment of narration ends with Rutledge taking his leave of Bill Evans, Jamesie resting at the top of a hill and a mention of Cecil Pierce, a local Protestant farmer with a small holding in a scene when that character is seen to be fishing from the seat of his tractor (*TRS*, 19).

⁴³⁸ Gerald Lynch, A “Fragile Interdependence”: John McGahern’s “That They May Face the Rising Sun”, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (Fall, 2010), pp. 160-175, p. 162.

⁴³⁹ Cited from Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Literature, Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 81.

Despite the omniscient nature of the narrator, there are a number of notable occasions when it adopts the position attributed to Rutledge within the story. This is clearly in evidence when an account is given of his memories of the ill-treatment suffered by boys like the now mature Bill Evans while the latter was resident in a charity (residential institution) home (*TRS*, 13-15). Further examples of his memory are placed centre-stage in the narrative when he ponders on Patrick Ryan's work habits (*TRS*, 79); his visits to Frank Dolan (*TRS*, 162-65); thoughts on Robert Booth (*TRS*, 172); and when he gives consideration to what may happen in the event of the permanent relocation of Johnny Murphy at the lake (*TRS*, 213). Further instances of this kind of narrative appear conspicuously throughout the text where, for example, he (i.e. the narrator/Rutledge) observes the nature of Patrick Ryan's work habits (*TRS*, 79); his visits to Frank Dolan (*TRS*, 162-65); reflections on Robert Booth (*TRS*, 172); and also when he considers what may happen in the event of the permanent relocation of Johnny Murphy at the lake (*TRS*, 213). A number of examples of this kind of text appear throughout the work as do quite a number of instances of where the narrator and Rutledge's perspective appear so similar as to merge on occasion, when for instance, Bill Evan's psychological composition is commented upon (*TRS*, 189). There is even one occasion where Rutledge addresses the reader directly where he remarks "What do we have without life? What does love become but care? Rutledge thought in opposition but did not speak" (*TRS*, 231). However, despite the voluminous space allocated to the Rutledge-Narrator axis of thought, it is not the only consciousness which empowers the narrative. The first and last part of the book highlights Jamesie's opinion (*TRS*, 3; 126). Indeed, as Rutledge and Jamesie share the journey toward the lake it is unclear as to whose point of view is being represented through the narrative voice (*TRS*, 18-19).⁴⁴⁰

As well as the above noted features of the narrative, one of its most remarkable features is its near disappearance at times of retrospective narration and reported speech. Considerable portions of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* are compartmentalised through passages consisting of dialogue that predominate over narration. In this way

⁴⁴⁰ This ambiguity has caught the attention of David Malcolm (2007), p. 121, who notes the difficulty in pinpointing any one speaker in this instance.

some fifty pages of the novel are presented accompanied by a drastically reduced narrative lattice in much of the rest of the work, although narration does feature strongly on other occasions (e.g., *TRS*, 77-84, 99-103, 117-22, 200-205, 292-302). Moreover, the manner in which McGahern resorts to dialogue is one of the distinctive features of the work. In that sense characters are given space to speak for substantial lengths of time during which they usually converse of events now since passed. This happens, for example, with Jamesie on a number of instances (*TRS*, 7-8, 29-34, 35-39, 271-5, 332). That character also joins other members of the community in the novel who engage in monologues or near-monologues largely without interference from others, e.g. Rutledge (*TRS*, 23-24), Quinn (*TRS*, 26-27), Johnny (*TRS*, 91-93, 294-95), Monica (*TRS*, 114-6), a clockmaker (*TRS*, 328-29).

On the first page of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, the text provides readers with a particular sense of place:

The morning was clear. There was no wind on the lake. There was also a great stillness. When the bells rang out for Mass, the strokes trembling on the water, they had the entire world to themselves.

The doors of the house was open. Jamesie entered without knocking and came in noiselessly until he stood in the doorway of the large room where the Rutledges were sitting. He stood as still as if waiting under trees for returning wildfowl (*TRS*, 1).

Thus, this opening section of the text demonstrates that the 'great stillness' is diluted only by the sound of the bells for Sunday morning mass and Jamesie's arrival at the Rutledge residence. His arrival and presence within the home activates a sense of spacial depth and perspective where he stands in the doorway leading into a 'large room', the latter being of such a size as to permit him to make his entrance 'noiselessly'. Time is thus suspended in a held moment, just before his presence is acknowledged, where the words 'he stood' engineer a feeling of spatial amalgamation between the interior and exterior boundaries as persisting between the house and the lake as distinct spaces merging into one. It is at this point in the text that its social dimension becomes discernible. Exemplifying this situation is the long-term friendship of two couples, the aged Jamesie

and his spouse Mary and the middle-aged couple Joe and Kate Rutledge. Their kinship is perpetually renewed through regular visits to each other's homes and the co-practice of many routine activities that form an important part of their daily lives. Such is the depth of the empathy⁴⁴¹ and strength of friendship between these people, that there is a strong sense of sympathy and acceptance at the core of the interpersonal relationships in the community McGahern portrays in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*.

In a letter segment of the text, Patrick Ryan, a confident and outspoken figure, affirms that: "I tell the truth and ask no favours," to which Rutledge answers: "The truth isn't always useful...Kindness...understanding...Sympathy, maybe" (TRS, 75-6). Rutledge's assertion here constitutes a seldom seen expression of moral principles. However, it would seem more likely that in this context McGahern is more concerned with highlighting the 'manners' or the imagination and intelligence necessary to ensure that these values survive in a community where strong individualists seek to advance their own agendas.⁴⁴² The sense of generosity towards other human beings in what is the author's last novel represents an approach that distinguishes this text from all earlier novels, in particular as regards the patriarch in *The Barracks*, *The Dark* and *Amongst Women*. In place of condemnation and criticism directed toward younger members of a household, there is a sense of growth, maturation and openness which can be seen in the conversations between characters. Previously there was an acute sense of claustrophobia and intransigence, for instance, in *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*, where the only means to genuine self-realisation is flight rather than fight. Characters in *Amongst Women* are portrayed over a sufficiently long period of time that readers are given the opportunity to witness their growth, maturity and flight from home to found their own homes and families. In *Amongst Women* authority is seen to pass from a patriarch to his daughters for the first time in one of McGahern's novels, a change in cultural practice that is not completely diluted in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, but which finds fertile ground for relatively non-judgemental reactions to preferred lifestyle choices and linguistic practices. Whereas failures to conform cultural practices

⁴⁴¹ Arguably, this is a form of social capital that arises between individuals and accumulates within a social group that is turn used to generate a sense of belonging, acceptance and security.

⁴⁴² A point raised by Denis Sampson in his book *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), p. 137. As previously referenced.

such as Mass-attendance, daily prayer would immediately result in condemnation and sanction, a far more liberal regime is in evidence in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, where it is acceptable for members of the community to desist from attending Mass and to joke about it publicly. Furthermore, the changes that have occurred during the time that elapsed between the publication of the author's first and last novels is clearly visible, when, for instance, the local Parish priest does have the respect from local people, he can no longer enjoy authority over them in any meaningful way as any of his predecessors just a single generation previously would have been able to exercise.

An examination of the final scene of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* uncovers habits which friends engage in as they bid one another goodnight as nightfall takes hold:

The night and the lake had not the bright metallic beauty of the night Johnny had died: the shapes of the great trees were softer and brooded even deeper in their mysteries. The water was silent except for the chattering of the wildfowl, the night air sweet with the scents of the ripening meadows, thyme and clover and meadowsweet, wild woodbine high in the whitethorns mixed with the scent of the wild mint crawling along the gravel on the edge of the water (*TRS*, 296).

The lake, in its sensuous form, features constantly throughout every episode of the novel. Much more than a geographical feature or a landmark, it stands as a central orientating force of gravity where sunlight and moonlight can be observed on the surface of the water. Moreover, it also acts as a reference point against which the registering of sounds, of smells and the ways in which those who live in the vicinity move around and along its shore. Its presence is so prominent and power that they are lit, rendered and given a definitive point of reference by which their lives can be paced. Likewise, the physical expanse of the lake helps to gauge and interpret the fields that sprout the shoreline around it and the houses that occupy the area above it. It is in the space subtended by these objects that human dramas are seen to take place. For example, Jamesie's wife, Mary, was raised in a house by the lakeside that now lies derelict marked by the growth of a large tree extending above the long-collapsed roof-structure that formerly covered the living room of the house. With her marriage to Jamesie she left that place and her home with her husband in his house uphill on the

opposite side of the lake: “The Ruttledges felt that the spirit of that roofless house by the water’s edge had never died but simply moved to the other house across the lake” (TRS, 95).

McGahern’s conjuring of the link between identity and place and person and their sense of self can be read in conjunction with Seamus Heaney’s *A Sense of Place*, where Heaney observes that: ‘I think there are two ways in which place is known and cherished, two ways which may complementary but which are just likely to antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious.’⁴⁴³

Resonating closely with these sentiments are Rui Carvalho Homem’s remarks where he holds that attaching meaning to a place is verbally constructed. He defends that by adopting this approach, acknowledgement must be given to the fact that a space and a location which are the object of such attention fosters the growth of specific identities that can in turn trace their origins to the relationships that delineate and locate one as against the other.⁴⁴⁴

Indeed, it is significant that the narrator passes comment on the location of Mary’s old home and her new one since this stems directly from what Tom Inglis (2009) has noted when he argues that identity with a specific location comes about through processes of social labelling and identification. He also instantiates one of the most common communication probes in Ireland – once a person’s name has been asked for the next immediate question relates directly to where they trace their origins. This is because place is believed to be a strong indicator of important social characteristics such as culture, class, nationality etc.⁴⁴⁵ A further indicator of the powerful role played by place in the construction of a person’s identity is what Savage et al (2005) affirm as pertaining to the role of places ‘as sites for performing identities’ where home stands out as being related to the ‘reflexive processes in which they can satisfactorily account

⁴⁴³ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations, Selected Prose, 1968-1978* (London and Boston, Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 131.

⁴⁴⁴ See Rui Carvalho Homem, *Poetry and Translation in Northern Ireland: Dislocations in Contemporary Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴⁵ Tom Inglis, ‘Local belonging, identities and sense of place in contemporary Ireland,’ *IBIS Discussion Paper: Politics and Identity Series*; 4, Dublin: University College Dublin, Institute for British-Irish Studies, 2009), pp. 1-16; p. 3.

to themselves how they come to live where they do'.⁴⁴⁶ Contemporary studies on identity and its relationship with a sense of belonging in Ireland⁴⁴⁷ carried by Mary Corcoran and her colleagues detected the presence of an unmistakable social 'embeddedness' and 'connectedness' in surveyed communities that also manifested positive views regarding their place of residence.⁴⁴⁸ Corcoran and her colleagues documented the existence of an acute sense of belonging in the suburbs within which research was carried out and that this was linked to references to the character and heritage of the local area.

Just as Jamesie indicates the outline of a moral code to Kate Rutledge through dialogue, so too is dialogue used to reveal the contour of characters throughout the text. *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is constructed almost entirely almost entirely of a series of dialogues and descriptions of nature. What is conspicuously absent from the text is a stream of consciousness and there is a scant presence of an interior monologue. However, a strong narrative voice generally omniscient in nature is found throughout the text, which displays a tendency toward metaphoric and the proverbial over the discursive. The acts undertaken by characters are almost invariably directly concerned with occupational interests such as the treatment and care of livestock, the consumption of food and drink, local commerce and the interring of the deceased. Tact and levity form a central element of interpersonal relations where gentle manners help to ensure relatively friction-free dealings between people in possession of an understanding of the fragile interdependence that exists between them that is precious and must be protected in order to preserve the carefully constructed harmony and tranquillity which is effected through strategies that '...deal in avoidances and obfuscations. Edges were softened, ways found round harsh realities. What was spoken was often far more important than

⁴⁴⁶ Mike Savage, Gaynor Bagnall, Brian Longhurst, *Globalization and Belonging* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 29.

⁴⁴⁷ See M. Corcoran, 'Mall City' in M. Peillon and E. Slater (eds) *Memories of the Present*. (Dublin: IPA, 2000), Corcoran, M. 2002 'Place attachment and community sentiment: A European case study' *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, Vol. 11, No. 1; M. Corcoran 'Finding your place: forging an identity and sense of belonging in suburban communities' International symposium on Civic and Social Life in the Suburbs, (NUI Maynooth, 2005); Corcoran, Mary, Jane Gray and Michel Peillon 'Local Sentiment and Sense of Place in a New Suburban Community' pp. 146–59 in M. Breen, E. Conway and B. McMillan (eds) *Technology and Transcendence*. Dublin: Columba Press, 2003).

⁴⁴⁸ Corcoran (2003), p. 157.

the words that were said. Confrontation was avoided whenever possible' (*TRS*, 186). These interpersonal relations in McGahern's lakeside community are marked by a sense of powerful affection that equates to a form of love that provides the adhesive bonds which persist in bringing neighbours and friends. Respect in this form ensures the existence of a tolerant community, even an ideal one, where every individual receives liberal and sympathetic attention to the effect that no single person is marginalised from the rest of the community.⁴⁴⁹

McGahern's work shows a definitive evolution when one compares the situations faced by characters in the authors' earlier work. A certain circularity is evident in McGahern's other works. In *The Barracks*, *Amongst Women* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* words, images and phrases from the introductory part of the text are repeated on the final pages. Examples include blinds being drawn by the children in the kitchen in the presence of Elizabeth Reegan in *The Barracks*, Moran's daughters 'becoming' their father who remains a fixture in their lives post-mortem, the sound of church bells radiating out across the lake and the conversation that takes place between Jamesie and the Ruttledges in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. In these three novels, and particularly the latter, there is a marked progression away from McGahern's more pronounced earlier circularity. McGahern's last novel does not contain a repetitive cycle of behaviours that are found in many of his earlier novels, which suggests that a formerly impregnable closed cultural loop in which characters are shown to be enslaved by (such as mindless labouring on the land in *The Leavetaking*, the narrator's holding his raincoat over his arm on the first and last pages of *The Pornographer*, engaging in insincere prayer due to coerced family habits in the *Amongst Women*) a hopelessly repetitive life-system. Where once despair was the order of the moment, the day, of life, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* offers a much more open reading of character's lives. Critics have noted how this deviation from the precise details imbues 'eloquent simplicity' on each cycle making such circling more authentic

⁴⁴⁹ For a wider interpretation of this social dynamic see Denis Sampson, 'Open to the World': A Reading of John McGahern's "That They May Face the Rising Sun", *The Irish University Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), pp. 136-146, p. 140.

in relation to the genuine vitality of life occurring on a daily and annual basis.⁴⁵⁰ Examples include: 'Everything that had flowered had now come to fruit' (*TRS*, 177). Here the narrative voice governing the text conveys information so as to reflect the connection between the universal law of existence which is far more relevant to the experience of living in comparison to the curt beginnings and endings that comprise works of realistic fiction.

Certain tendencies in McGahern's work can be productively compared with writing preferences expressed by Virginia Woolf who was also heavily inspired by social and natural rhythms in relation to structuring the nature of their writing. In *The Waves*, Woolf writes that 'my difficulty is that I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot...though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction.'⁴⁵¹ In his 2016 book *John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition*, Stanley van der Ziel has suggested that another likely influence on the author's pattern of writing may well have been Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' where it reads 'Being and cease, and then again being.' This structure manifests itself earlier in his career where the narrator of *The Leavetaking* looks upon his life and attempts to render it with the imagery and ebb and flow in highlighting 'the long withdrawing tide of memory becoming imagination' as the sea moves in surges against the harbour defences on the Howth shoreline in County Dublin. (*L*, 45, 193).⁴⁵² McGahern came to adopt the 'great tides of nature' with gusto in his later work. For example, where Rose in *Amongst Women* recalls her time in Glasgow while working as young nurse: 'Mona and Sheila were so poised on the edge of their own lives that they listened as if hearing about the living stream they were about to enter (*AW*, 80). In this excerpt, it is difficult to ignore the parallels with Yeats' 'Easter 1916' which includes the lines:

From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.

⁴⁵⁰ See Hermione Lee, 'Everything under the Sun', Review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, *The Observer*, 6 January 2002, Review, p. 16.

⁴⁵¹ For further information see: *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Nigel Nicolson (Ed.) 6 Vols. 1975-80 (London: Hogwarth), vol. iv, p. 204.

⁴⁵² Stanley van der Ziel, *John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), pp. 210-11.

(...)
 Hearts with one purpose alone
 Through summer and winter seem
 Enchanted to a stone
 To trouble the living stream.
 The horse that comes from the road.
 The rider, the birds that range
 From cloud to tumbling cloud,
 Minute by minute they change;
 A shadow of cloud on the stream.⁴⁵³

-echoes of which can be found in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. By the time McGahern came to pen his last novel, the phrase in Yeats' poem concerned with asserting the immovable core of ordinary life. More specifically, it relates to the movement and vivaciousness of urban living as so regarded by those who reside in relatively isolated rural communities so what attracts the Ruttlidges to London is the 'living stream of its people' (TRS, 156). Moreover, Rose's time in Glasgow would have been characterised by her seeing Georgian homes on her walks in the public domain. Similarly, in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* the Ruttlidges would have seen very similar house designs as part of the streetscape they would have frequented during the period of their residence in London.

Rui Carvalho Homem makes a vivid and pertinent observation in respect of a key feature of traditional mark of Irish culture in general; 'an inordinate trust in the word, and in the power it is supposed to wield.' Carvalho Homem also notes that the poetic voice in Ireland has a history of being revered to the extent that Irish bards were held in "high regard and estimation".⁴⁵⁴ Clearly resonating with this consensus (whether real or imagined), McGahern has Patrick Ryan in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* defend the curative capacities of conversation and yarn. On becoming a victim of an attack by Ruttlidge's irritated bees he resorts to not only whiskey – something he humorously labels 'Yer Irishman's morphine' – but more importantly than this he

⁴⁵³ *Collected Poems W.B. Yeats, 1889-1939*. p. 179.

⁴⁵⁴ Rui Carvalho Homem, 'The word mistrusted: Rhetoric and self-irony in some modern Irish poets', *BELLS: Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies*, No. 11, (2000), pp. 101-118, pp. 101-102

identifies storytelling itself as an analgesic agent. Immediately thereafter he remarks: 'He talks as if talk itself could ease the pain' (*TRS*, 72-3). Further aligning himself with this tradition, McGahern also has Patrick Ryan state 'we'll have great times from this out telling stories of the villainy of Mayo and the fools is here'.

Where extensive conversation went hand in hand with an older traditional lifestyle, it also assists the reader in identifying the existence and contours of such a culture. Furthermore, in exemplifying and exposing such traditions, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is a de facto retrospect of a fading way of Irish rural life. McGahern's last novel is the only one of his works with regard to which Seamus Deane has noted:

This book is a strange and wonderful mixture of various genres of writing – narrative in the basic sense, but also a meditation, a memoir, a retrospect, an anthropological study of a community...a celebration of an Ireland that had formerly been the object of chill analysis as well as loving evocation. All these aspects are contained within a capacious style that has all the lucidity and intensity we have become accustomed to in McGahern, but inflected by a tone of forgiveness and acceptance that adds an amplitude and serenity rarely achieved in fiction.⁴⁵⁵

In this comment, Deane correctly identifies a mixture of the many different genres employed by McGahern in his last novel in what amounts to what amounts to "an anthropological study of a community" that is on the precipice of extinction. The ways of old seem assured of becoming defunct given that residents of the community are all aged at least fifty and over and those who come after them are certain to be quite different than their forebears.⁴⁵⁶ Thus it is here that a tangible link is to be found between McGahern's portrayal of a lifestyle that is in permanent decline and the authors' admiration for Ó Criomhain's *An tOileánach* in which the following assertion is made: *Ni bheidh ár leithéidí arís ann* (our like will not be there again).⁴⁵⁷ In *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, character Patrick Ryan, a local handyman and rather blunt-of-mouth, acknowledges the cultural twilight he and his contemporaries reside in: "We're going to finish that building...It takes a hard jolt every now and again to learn us that

⁴⁵⁵ Seamus Deane, *The Guardian*, 12 January 2002.

⁴⁵⁶ As per Maher (2003), pp. 121-2.

⁴⁵⁷ Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *An tOileánach/The Islandman* (Oxford University Press, 2000/1929), p. 244.

we'll not be in it for ever (*TRS*, 297). An earlier conversation reveals his acute awareness of the great changes to come: "After us there'll be nothing but the water hen and the swan" (*TRS*, 45).

In a further sign of the great changes that have already taken hold in the community, values once publicly proclaimed as sacrosanct are now the subject of jesting. A prominent and regular visitor to the Ruttledge household and reliable friend and neighbour, Jamesie brings news of local people and events. He makes humorous references to the fact that the Ruttledges do not frequent Mass. It transpires that Joe Ruttledge was in the process of training to be a priest when he discovered he no longer believed and thus feels unable to attend religious services. Jamesie is aghast at this justification and defends that hypocrisy should be no barrier: "I don't believe", "None of us believes and we go. That's no bar." (*TRS*, 2). His hypocritical agnosticism is justified on the following grounds: "To look at the girls. To see the whole performance... We go to see all the other hypocrites" (*TRS*, 2). With the passage of time local traditions, in many cases from a pagan past, have come to supplement and in some instances, supplant official Catholic doctrinal practices. The local parish priest, Fr. Conroy has garnered respect in the community not due to his position in the church, but for his diplomatic and non-invasive approach to his parishioners, a stance complimented by Patrick Ryan: "Fr. Conroy is plain. The priests had this country abulling with religion once. It's a good job it's easing off" (*TRS*, 82). He later goes further in making such a public assertion of relief at the fall of religiosity and the rise of secularity in his community: "They had this whole place abulling with religion once. People were afraid to wipe their arses with grass in case it was a sin" (*TRS*, 224). Much relief is evident in this declaration which is in itself highly indicative of the more secular nature of human affairs and community conduct that has now become the norm in the community.⁴⁵⁸ Ryan and his contemporaries remember how stifling their lives were in an age when nationalism and Roman Catholicism were synonymous. Now the local parish is no longer in a position to coerce anybody into a particular course of action and must instead rely on gentle encouragements and verbal tact. In a conversation he has with

⁴⁵⁸ See Maher (2003), pp. 124-5.

Ruttledge, he prefaces his remarks by apologising for his interrupting before saying: “I believe in living and letting live. The man up in Longford (the bishop) is very interested in you and why you left the Church and has me persecuted about you every time he comes” (*TRS*, 66).

Fr. Conroy performs his duties in a discreet and empathetic fashion and does not wish to impinge on the lives of residents around the Lake. On the occasion of the death of Jamesie’s brother, Johnny, he makes a perceptive comment on how, up to relatively recently, those living in economically challenging and culturally restrictive conditions in Ireland faced the prospect of remaining in their communities or opting for emigration:

These people forced into England through no fault of their own were often looked down on - most unjustly looked down on - by some whose only good was that they managed to remain at home with little cause to look down on anybody. It’s always the meanest and poorest sorts who have the need to look down” (*TRS*, 295).

In this situation the priest is to be seen speaking from personal conviction and is prepared to state uncomfortable truths about members of the community despite the possibility of causing personal rancour. His knowledge of people and events comes from time spent living in the community and from his experience and conversations with local people and he is well-aware of the petty rivalries and interpersonal prejudices that persist between them. He also appears to be mindful of the effects of the vulgarity and cruelty exercised by neighbours in their judgements and dealings with one another, a phenomenon that he believes comes about when people seek to contravene the natural course of things.⁴⁵⁹ Fr. Conroy’s comments suggest the clergy are attempting, amidst great change in Irish society in 2002 when the book was published, to align their public sympathies with the private concerns of their parishioners. Under such circumstances the clergy could be described as working towards a position whereby they adopt a more empathetic approach to the people rather than presiding over continuing insularity in respect of social standards. This may suggest an implicit acknowledgement that the

⁴⁵⁹ See Maher (2003) above.

public has adopted a life-philosophy that sets them against many of the key provisions of Catholic doctrine that were so central to the administration of the nation for so long.

While the passage of time cannot be stopped, speculation on what form the future may take does occupy the concerns of Jamesie for a period while he partakes in dialogue with his granddaughter, Margaret. He speculates on how she will remember him and his wife, Mary and indeed, the Ruttledges:

‘She’ll be talking nice and sweet to her young man. She’ll be saying they were decent enough people. God rest them, but they never went to school and they had no money and never learned manners but they weren’t too bad. They were decent old skins when it was all added up.’

‘I will not’, retorted Margaret as she stamped her foot (*TRS*, 123).

Eamonn Hughes (2005)⁴⁶⁰ suggests that Margaret’s response should be regarded as negating this future in a number of ways and that in saying what she does, she involuntarily reveals that she is likely to forget her family experiences. He also holds that her responses can further be interpreted as the girl’s denial of the possibility of their ever being a ‘nice and sweet’ young man in her life. An alternative reading of the remarks made by the character would advocate a position whereby the child wishes to repudiate designs placed upon her future that could possibly yield undue influence or prejudice the development of her own values and the making of autonomous choices. It could further be interpreted as creating a distance between her ideals and the values of previous generations, thus further alienating her generation from an already weakened system of traditional values. So, where there is a clear remove between the modern day clergy and an ageing generation, a tenuous connection still persists between them. However, it seems highly improbable that the younger generation will ever enjoy the same level of proximity that their grandparents’ generation lived with in respect of their relationship with conservative Catholic ideology.

Within the Roman Catholic ideology, human sexuality is a major concern and thus in Irish culture, recovering from the trauma of clerical sex abuse, the topic requires

⁴⁶⁰ Eamonn Hughes, ‘All That Surrounds Our Life’: Time, Sex, and Death in “That They May Face the Rising Sun”, *Irish University Review*, Vol. 35, No.1, (Summer, 2005), pp. 147-163, p. 158-59.

some treatment. To this end, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* does not avoid the issue of sexuality. It is through the womanising ways of the character of John Quinn that readers are presented with the issue. In contrast to the *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, sex and sexuality are dealt with in a much more liberal way. Virtually all of the stigma and shame of public discussion or contravention of traditional thinking on the subject appears to have dissipated in McGahern's last novel. As mentioned, John Quinn links sex to the future with his remark that lovemaking for him is akin to 'like going in and out of a most happy future' (*TRS*, 175). Readers are informed that Quinn used considerable sexual violence against his wife to dominate her. He later became a widower and re-married on a further two occasions. However, the circumstances of his subsequent marriages were very different as his other wives refused to accept his mistreatment and took permanent leave of his company after he attempted to dominate them and acquire a share of their material wealth in the form of money and property. Such is the power and public awareness of his sex drive, that other characters reference him in discussions about sex where one character excuses his own celibate life by saying: 'I don't have to even contemplate that job...John Quinn has agreed to do my share' (*TRS*, 202). Modern media provides the means by which sex can be openly discussed in the form of an episode of *Blind Date* on television, where sex becomes something that has evolved from being a shameful subject of physical intimacy to something that resembles a spectator sport (*TRS*, 188-9). A number of other humorous references about sex appear in the text, where in one instance, the auctioneer on Monaghan Day states 'Nobody ever does the like of that in this part of the country' (*TRS*, 221). While another character, Big Mick Madden is reported to have 'rode nothing either here or in England' (*TRS*, 247).⁴⁶¹

While it would seem that the community that McGahern fictionalises in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* would appear to be mature people and relatively disinterested in sex, the topic itself is no longer taboo. Despite the fact that there are people in the story who have had children, they are mostly absent from the narrative. Thus, since sexuality as a central instrument of shame and control of the individual has

⁴⁶¹ Hughes (2005), p. 159.

now been virtually trivialised beyond shame and control, traditional Catholic doctrine on such matters and many others have declined as much as the taboo about sex has itself. Characters can disengage from the issue at will and are left with no sense of embarrassment or shame, as would have been the case in the past. Religious values no longer dominate personal consciousness and thus a distinctly secular wave has washed across the Irish cultural landscape leaving a much changed public psyche.

One of the key achievements of McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is that it depicts how the modern era in Ireland has brought technology into every community, in this case in the form of the television, and with it a piercing light has been shone on traditional beliefs. Public piety has, in many areas of the country, been replaced by open apathy and the disappearance of religious pretence as an acceptable excuse for the mistreatment of women and children. Judgemental narratives have largely been superseded by sympathetic solidarity as previously fossilized ideological barriers of both religious and political hues rapidly dissolve into one another. Thus, a system of values seen as utopian in nature by the ruling classes that shaped independent Ireland in its early stages, but which has brought much suffering to disadvantaged individuals and communities has been superseded by a more pluralist polity where the contours of aggregated cultural capital and social capital and their accumulation and propagation have evolved significantly over four decades. More conservative classes who were once accustomed to a community heavily regulated by Roman Catholic ideals now search for ways to negotiate a radically altered system of values where few constants are to be found. The centre of gravity of a conservative culture has now been transformed into a fading minority view which represented many of the characteristics proper to a dystopian narrative. What could be regarded as a previously binary system of values of equal resistance and pressure- on the one hand, Roman Catholic ideology, on the other British imperialism and its resultant post-colonialist condition - has now almost completely decayed leaving a rising tide of tolerance previously unknown and unwelcome.

As the tide of organised faith in denominational religion ebbs outward and away from the critical mass of the community, other ways are found to bring meaning and

perspective to the human condition. When Ruttledge's uncle, the Shah, enquires of the former's wife, Kate, as to why she enjoys painting she offers her interpretation of the activity: "It brings what I see closer" (*TRS*, 67). Immediately thereafter, her husband converses with handyman Patrick Ryan and discusses his acute fascination with the framing of the shed roof, which the narrator has described as being akin to a frame of a work of art. Moreover, Ruttledge himself is fixated on "how the rafters frame the sky. How the squares of light are more interesting than the open sky. They make it look more human by reducing the sky, and the whole sky grows out from that small space" (*TRS*, 71). In making this claim, Ruttledge is suggesting some kind of connection in the relation between his home and the heavens. Once he has attended Johnny's funeral, he returns home to continue to assist Ryan with his work on the unfinished shed that stood as a means of concluding the long first day portrayed in the novel. Thus, McGahern is seen to be placing the aesthetic and life philosophy in a single image. The unfinished shed becomes the self-reflexive figure for the novel as a whole (where *That They May Face the Rising Sun* stands as a kind of 'anti-novel') which cannot be easily contained by a single narrative type given the expansive and calm unfolding of events within the story. A careful framing of the delicate organisation of the lives of the characters, and the locations in which they spend them produces what Gerald Lynch (2010)⁴⁶² has referred to as a better overall perspective of life including the way people take leave of the mortal realm.

Another vitally important facet of modern Irish society is the radically changed perspective held on the role of women. Whereas in *Amongst Women*, the Moran girls matured into women who embodied many of the authoritarian characteristics of their tyrannical father, Moran and inherited his authority once he died, a very different dynamic is to be found in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. Moreover, in *The Barracks*, Elizabeth Reegan does not enjoy her husband's confidence and feels unable to share her private thoughts with him even after she has been diagnosed with cancer as she lies alone in hospital prior to undergoing surgery. A yawning deficit in intimacy between them is illustrated when the narrator outlines the kind of relationship they

⁴⁶² Lynch (2010), pp. 170-71.

actually have: ‘Their lives were flowing apart, and she was alone and he was alone and it was somehow sad and weepy creepy’ (*B*, 116). However, an enormous degree of maturity has come about the relationship that defines the main couple when McGahern wrote *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, where a solid dynamic of equality persists between Rutledge and his wife Kate as it does in respect of Jamesie and his wife Mary. In comparison to the domination of women and children in *The Barracks*, McGahern’s last novel provides ample of a just, respectful, and affectionate treatment of women. In that instance Kate Rutledge is offered a professional opportunity in her former home city of London. Her husband exerts neither pressure, nor power or offer any opinion on her situation in a reflection of his recognition of her personal autonomy. Once his opinion is sought as to whether or not he believes his wife is likely to accept the offer she that has been made available to her, he simply responds: ‘It all depends on Kate’ (*TRS*, 164). Anita Morgan (2017) interprets this behaviour as Rutledge’s acknowledgement of his wife’s absolute right to decide how to live her own life without having to seek his consent⁴⁶³, which is undeniably a major shift in attitudes between the writing of *Amongst Women* in 1990 and the publication of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* in 2002.

McGahern’s final novel also acknowledges the existence the existence of residential institutions run by religious organisation in Ireland for many decades. He also recognises the long-term harm done to the well-being of people who had direct experience of living in such institutions in the form of character Bill Evans, a former resident of an orphanage and industrial school. Evans was later forced to work as a farm labourer under challenging conditions before he reached matured and took responsibility for his own welfare. His experience also concerns women and mothers in Ireland in a manner which Eamon Maher (2003) defends as being ‘an uncomfortable reminder of the injustice done to many Irish women who, for various reasons, were forced to give up their children and hand them over to institutions run by the religious

⁴⁶³ Anita Morgan, ‘Understand the Imperfect in John McGahern’s First and Last Novels’, pp. 51-67 in Luz Mar González-Arias (Eds.) *National Identities and Imperfections in Contemporary Irish Literature: Unbecoming Irishness* (London: United Kingdom, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 55-57.

orders.⁴⁶⁴ McGahern's earlier work such as *The Barracks* (1963), deals with sexual abuse in an oblique way where Church and family were seen to have abused people like Evans. However, by the time *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002) came to be published the community treats Evans with sympathy and protection. In a community that has taken on a strongly secular conscience where many previously regarded absolutes have fallen away, McGahern's imaginary community of Shruhaun, even in the presence of disagreeable individuals' self-restraint is exercised so that differing opinions and lifestyles can be accommodated within rather than outside the existing society.⁴⁶⁵ Faced with insensitivity, for example, in the case of where Jamesie's pride is wounded by in the face of cynicism and disapproval from his pseudo-sophisticated, urban-dwelling daughter-in-law Lucy, his friends and neighbours feel as incredulous as he does as if they themselves had been the target of the offending comments. Their reaction is telling and reveals their own nature: 'they were all too fond of him to say another word until he recovered and a path was found out of the silence' (*TRS*, 35).

What is evident when one engages in a comparative exercise in respect of McGahern's earliest work and his final novel, is that there has been a significant evolution in lifestyles and attitudes. In this last novel, it is possible for members of the community to absent themselves from attending Mass without fear of coercion and censure from the clergy and the community at large. Furthermore, the authority of the Catholic Church is no longer absolute and it is permissible to ignore official doctrine in the pursuit of one's daily life and concerns.

Where, in many ways, human life could be described as cyclical so too can the cultural that have unfolded in Ireland between the publication of *The Barracks* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. The death of one way of life has given rise to the birth of a new one; one group of people who lived under a regime that they experienced as a dystopian system of government now live relatively unencumbered in comparison to other societal cohorts that have entered an era that does not concur with their sense of morality. However, despite their discomfort, what has been termed a more liberal public

⁴⁶⁴ See Maher (2003), p. 129.

⁴⁶⁵ An observation advanced by Declan Kiberd in 'Fallen Nobility: The World of John McGahern', *Irish University Review: Special Issue on John McGahern*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2005), pp. 164-74, pp. 170-71.

conscience has developed permitting a much greater accommodation of diverse views in modern society. Mutual respect remains a central element of ensuring harmony in the community and McGahern demonstrates that such tact is a fundamental tool in navigating a changing world.

Conclusion

The discussion of John McGahern's six novels in the chapters above will hopefully have highlighted the grounds for the writer's distinguished career, but also for the controversy that it tended to attract in a variety of ways. His denunciations of various forms of oppression, iniquity, and denial of human dignity under the social and political conditions proper to mid-twentieth century Ireland characterised his novels in an evolving manner. This itinerary of writing began with *The Barracks*, which as seen above, presented the reader with a stern, widowed-patriarch, Sergeant Reegan who rules over the family home in a broody and at times, tyrannical fashion. While his children cower from his authoritarian approach, the whole household suffers as step-mother Elizabeth succumbs to terminal cancer. While the title of the novel relates directly to where the family resides and where Reegan works, it also serves as a metaphor for the stultifying conditions present in the home and Irish society that only began to change incrementally from the 1960s.

As McGahern's first novel demonstrates, Reegan's life and professional situation stands as a testament of the failure of the Irish Free State and later the Republic of Ireland to live up to self-professed grand, utopian ideals of the founding fathers of the fledgling state. Despite being a Sargent in the state police force, Reegan's position has not bestowed any material comfort on him or his colleagues alike, who struggle to be able to feed and clothe their families on the paltry salary they receive from the state. As becomes apparent as the reader progresses through the text, relatively little hope is offered in this, McGahern's first novel.

This thesis then exposes the fact that in *The Dark* (1965) McGahern also deals with an abusive patriarchal situation in family home, but in this text the central concern is the portrayal of the struggles of the young protagonist, young Maloney as he matures and seeks release from his oppressive environment. A personal struggle ensues as he grapples with his desire to join the priesthood and his hunger for a life of autonomy. As a dysfunctional relationship persists between the widowed father and his long-suffering son, it leads to sexual abuse in the boy's own bedroom at night-time, an experience which further complicates an already difficult path characterised by much inertia and

uncertainty. However, it does not defeat the protagonists' spirit and he continues with his studies as means of securing an opportunity to escape his father by utilising his cultural capital to gain entry to a higher social stratum. Young Maloney's psychological journey is frustrated by an over-abundance of religiously-tinged cultural capital within the family home that is continuously cultivated and reinforced by his domineering father. Through the considerable breadth of examples it provides, the reading offered above will also have highlighted the broader implications of the challenges faced by young Maloney, when considered against the socio-history of independent mid-twentieth-century Ireland.

The analysis above also emphasises that by the time McGahern saw the publication of *The Leavetaking* in 1974 he had lived abroad for a number of years (as recalled in the introductory chapters) but had, by then, returned to his native County Leitrim. *The Leavetaking* is a semi-autobiographical account of McGahern's experience of having lost his teaching position following the publication and subsequent banning of *The Dark* in 1965. In this text the protagonist, Moran takes a leave of absence and marries a divorcee while away which provokes the ire of the local Parish priest who also serves as the Manager of the school. He is dismissed on his return but refuses to absent himself quietly and confronts Fr. Carton and demands a meaningful justification for his dismissal. This is the first time in McGahern's narrative fiction that a character directly confronts the superior source of authority in the cultural context in which he lives (i.e. a representative of the Church-State axis of power). Although he is unable to extract an explanation, he demonstrates his willingness to challenge unjust treatment, which had hitherto not been common practice both in quotidian life and Irish fiction. Once this confrontation has ended he returns to London with his new wife and resumes the life they had begun together. Emigration is thus a device that is relied upon to escape the ills of a stagnant and stultified cultural condition. It is an unattractive but functional option, but this is the first time in any of McGahern's novels up to that point in which the protagonist is in a position to avail of just such an option since Moran is a mature man, whereas in *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, those suffering under a tyrannical patriarch do

not enjoy the independence that would allow them to escape their oppressive circumstances.

The moral concern that prevails in McGahern's artistic initiative emerges in the analysis above, as he is seen to progress in a more secular fashion between the writing of *The Leavetaking* and the publication of *The Pornographer* in 1979. Factors that contributed to how this change came about are analysed in the chapter on the novel, which foregrounds the broader cultural conditions of McGahern's writing. This has led some critics to declare *The Pornographer* as being one of McGahern's most complex texts, reflecting a period when cultural values in Irish society were being subjected to vigorous debate. As previously noted above, the special relationship between the Catholic Church and the Irish state had been removed in a referendum in 1972⁴⁶⁶ and Ireland had acceded to membership of the European Economic Community in January 1973. Unlike in 1965, the Censorship Board took no action against McGahern following the publication of *The Pornographer* and no official opinion on the book was expressed at the time. In this text McGahern attempts to satirically interrogate sexual values as he deals with pregnancy, marriage and sexuality outside wed-lock. The protagonist in the book, Patrick is portrayed as having lost his will to love and this has damaged his enthusiasm for life in general. He meets another woman and as a result of their sexual relations she becomes pregnant, after which he repudiates her and his child so as to escape accepting responsibility as traditional values demand in the form of marriage – which never happens. Although the protagonist has sought greater autonomy from traditional values by opting to live in a large urban centre, once he falls in love with a Nurse Brady after he has ended all involvement with his lover. This experience reanimates his human spirit and activates a genuine desire to settle down with this lady and move back to the countryside where he grew up. In this way there is a sense of circularity here as the protagonist originally seeks to escape the rural environment of this youth, but he eventually chooses to return to that same environment and make his residence there. Such a development suggest that McGahern, despite the experiences of

⁴⁶⁶ Referred to as Third Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1972, promulgated on 8 June 1972. See p., iv of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

mobility that his characters undergo, retains a belief in the potential of a rural setting to afford serenity and peace to the human lives he represents in his fiction.

As is asserted in the analysis above, in *The Pornographer*, McGahern openly challenges the conservative sexual mores strongly encouraged and defended by the Church, but by the time the book had been published the integrity of the Church-State axis of power had suffered a severe fissure with the decision of the state to formally legalise the availability of contraception under restricted conditions. Although the issue of contraception had been subject to vigorous debate since the early 1970s, it only received mature treatment from the Oireachtas in the same year as the publication of *The Pornographer*. This reality dovetailed quite conveniently with McGahern's undisguised attack on traditional values; namely sexual mores and their role in pregnancy outside wed-lock and on the institution of marriage itself. Given the manner in which the author deals with the theme of sexuality, some critics have quite credibly suggested that the text exhibits many characteristics of a satire. The title of the text recalls the unfavourable descriptions that entered the public domain on the publication of *The Dark* in the mid-1960s.

Readers have been given a number of examples throughout the corpus analysis which help to identify a notable feature of *The Pornographer*: the protagonist's publisher advises and chastises him in respect of his dishonourable conduct toward the mother of his child and his refusal to support either of them. Arguably, this indicates that many in Irish society were still in possession what may be termed a conservative habitus, although the desire for change is apparent in the attitudes expressed by the protagonist himself and the limited sympathy he receives from a doctor friend when he seeks advice on procuring an abortion for his lover. In a way, there is a sense of circularity, *the road away is the road back*. The protagonist seeks release from restrictive conservative rural circumstances, but given the nature of his habitus he is eventually drawn back to this same environment when he decides to settle down with his new girlfriend and indicates his desire to live in one of his family's cottages in the area in which he was raised. Thus, certain traditional values persist in the life and lifestyle of the protagonist although major changes in cultural values are clearly coming

to the fore. Indeed, a personal awakening occurs in the midst of an ongoing debate on sexual mores in Irish society, which the text clearly touches upon as it charts the romantic fortunes of its emotionally wounded protagonist.

Continuing its chronological analysis of McGahern's writing, this thesis then turned his following novel, *Amongst Women*, published in 1990, after an eleven-year gap. Widely regarded as McGahern's most-respect and best-crafted work consensus opinion on the text holds that it returns to form after the experiments pursued in *The Leavetaking*, and *The Pornographer*. Closely resembling the patriarchs in *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, widower and War of Independence guerrilla fighter, protagonist Moran stands as a tyrannical ruler over his family resident in Great Meadow, a rural setting that contains echoes of the author's first two novels in both setting and family predicament. Moran carries a strong sense of bitterness in respect of a failure to live up to the utopian ideals that persisted and formed a key element of the momentum in the struggle for independence. His violent and uncompromising ways precipitate the inception of schism between him and his eldest son who chooses to leave Ireland permanently and allows his relationship with his father to wither and decay. The tense environment Moran cultivates in the family home incentivises his younger son to build a new life for himself away from Great Meadow in London, although he chooses to maintain contact with his father. The net result of these absences mean that Moran's authority is inherited by his remaining children: his daughters, which is an ironic twist of fate, since Moran's insistence on invoking traditional Catholic values to maintain order and to impose his own iron will in the family home, as a means to perpetuate the patriarchal ideology he believes to be correct one, results in the foregrounding of women as power brokers for the first time as their father's demise nears. His passing confirms their status as the trustees of the next generation of their family since the male heirs are mostly absent from the life of Great Meadow. The strong bitterness that held Moran's character in suspension for so long dissipates on his death and it is left to the daughters who remain resident in Ireland to carry his legacy forward in their own vision. Utopian designs (just as mentioned in the introductory chapter above) of their father's generation for a free and independent Ireland were quickly dampened by petty nepotistic political practices

following a bitter Civil War after independence that severely retarded intra-political dialogue in the Irish state for many decades to come. However, the fact that this tension existed and was a source of bitterness created a target for utopian projects, even if they were discreet in nature and effect. Arguably, one could say that writers such as McGahern provided much material on which readers could ponder with a view to coming to a more settled position on such strong differences of opinion. Thus, the strong man standing as a bulwark against change gradually becomes the focus of dialogue as a prerequisite for a liberalisation of attitudes.

The thesis then continues in this vein of analysis when it focuses on a strong male character in McGahern's last novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), in the form of Ruttledge. There is, however, a major difference in emphasis between the two figures in *Amongst Women* in the later novel: in *Amongst Women* a powerful patriarch dominates all around him until he grows too weak to exercise his authority any longer. In the case of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, Ruttledge presents as a more discrete figure who lives contentedly with his wife Kate alone in their house as they are a childless couple. His attitude is very different to Moran in that he seeks to facilitate his wife's wishes, respects her personal convictions as well as valuing her opinion as an equal. The role of the local Priest is also acknowledge, but it is now firmly circumscribed to that of respected, but distantiated community adviser. Given the (Kuhnian) paradigm shift – discussed above – that has taken place between the cultural circumstances that marks the lives of the characters in *The Leavetaking* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, clerical power has been severely reduced and it is possible to openly jest about Mass attendance and religious hypocrisy. As can be seen from the analysis above, a new sense of maturity is noticeable in cultural values present within the community portrayed in this novel. Such maturity is charted above in the chapter 'The cultural landscape of John McGahern's imaginative writing' which explores the historical circumstances under in the treatment it gives to the legislative reforms introduced soon after the banning of *The Dark* in 1965, from 1967. Proposals for radical educational reforms were published by the Irish government in September 1966 which would enable significant numbers of young people from modest backgrounds to avail of

previously impossible opportunities to participate in secondary higher education. It sought to remedy a situation whereby more than half of children from working-class backgrounds left school before the age of thirteen with many of them deficient in basic educational skills.

Before the 1960s was to come to an end an important Papal Encyclical dealing with human sexuality and reproduction, *Human Vitae*, was published. Its appearance in 1968 caused grave consternation for many Irish Catholics who were already experiencing serious difficulties with reconciling their conscience with what they viewed as out-dated official doctrine from the Vatican. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that it is at this point in modern Irish history when the Irish Catholic habitus⁴⁶⁷ began to fracture as a gradual schism developed between the views of ordinary citizens and the attitudes of the religious authorities. With the passage of time this schism grew and by 1979, when legislation on contraception was finally approved by the Oireachtas, there was a notable absence of public offense when the provisions of the law, which diverged significantly from official Catholic teachings, was promulgated. After highlighting dysfunctional Irish sexual attitudes and behaviour in *The Dark*, McGahern deliberately wrote a more provocative text in the form of *The Pornographer* which was designed to challenged traditional attitudes toward marriage and sexuality in Ireland. Garnering a muted response from official authorities was a strong indication of the degree to which attitudes had changed between 1965 and 1979. With the coming of age of a younger generation motivated and empowered by greater levels of education in comparison to their parents and grandparents, allied with the severe diminution of the machinery of the censorship regime, a vastly increased incidence in the generation and propagation of cultural capital and the means to change its character resulted in a remarkable shift in the cultural paradigm by which private morals and public conduct

⁴⁶⁷ While the term ‘habitus’ is an old one and was heavily promoted by the late Pierre Bourdieu, it has been used in conjunction with religious practice more recently by Susie Donnelly & Tom Inglis in an article referred to as ‘The Media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting Clerical Child Sex Abuse in Ireland’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 25, No.1, pp. 1-19, p. 4. Inglis has also associated religious practice that both sustains and gives rise to this kind of habitus with the social prestige that the Catholic Church in Ireland once possessed in abundance in his *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p. 65. This reference has been given previously but is repeated here to refresh the readers memory of the original source of this information.

came to be governed. In aggregate terms, it would seem difficult to refute suggestions that this is a sure sign of maturation on the part of the Irish psyche even though notable stores of moral prestige remain embedded on the side of a weakened Catholic clergy. By then a growing chasm between parishioner and priest was openly acknowledged and could not be denied any longer.

This thesis was also conceived to highlight how the artistic endeavours of McGahern and other writers helped to create a growing awareness in Irish society of the ills of the hegemonic position of the Church-State axis of power and the abuses a deferential public suffered. One could argue that McGahern's *The Barracks* and *The Dark* and to a lesser extent *The Leavetaking* portray characters suffering under restrictive and stifling conditions that would normally be found to be consistent with a dystopian narrative. An oppressive ideology promoted by religious authorities and fervently endorsed by state agencies sustained the Church-State axis of power which also perpetuated the accumulation of religiously-tinged cultural capital and its appropriation by certain segments of the governing elite. Arguably the concentrated accumulation of particular kinds of cultural capital by certain agencies in society resulted in what may be termed a dystopian condition becoming the prevailing norm within the community. Gradual relief from this situation came about for a number of reasons, but chief among them were the artistic endeavours of key writers such as John McGahern himself, which served to advance 'the education of desire'.⁴⁶⁸ His conscientious impulse to expose the abuse⁴⁶⁹ of trust by agents of authority both in the home and in wider society within his imagination of tradition through a semi-autobiographical lens stands as a testament to the impulse of hope⁴⁷⁰ that remained even in the face of severe adversity and personal hardship.

⁴⁶⁸ A phrase used by Ruth Levitas in her *The Concept of Utopia* (Oxford et al: Peter Lang), p. 223.

⁴⁶⁹ Behaviour that accords closely with Paul Ricoeur's contention that a utopian initiative can have the effect that 'introduces a sense of doubt that shatters the obvious...the order which has been taken for granted suddenly appears queer and contingent'. See Paul Ricoeur, (G. Taylor, ed.) *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 299-300.

⁴⁷⁰ Recognised by Ernst Bloch as a key element of the utopian impulse in his *The Principle of Hope* (Vol. 1), (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 246-47. A fruitful discussion of the role of the artist in discovering or uncovering truth in a society is to be found in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996/1988) pp. 48-50. Page 104 of his text contains an illuminating discussion on the role played by imagination in the process of forming dreams of

As previously noted earlier in this thesis, April 2002 saw the first major failure of the Church-State alliance to coerce public opinion to its desired hue when the then government's referendum on abortion was not approved by a narrow margin despite heavy involvement of the Catholic hierarchy. Publicly documented revelations of physical and sexual abuse that took place in religious-administered institutions over a period of many decades further eroded trust amongst an already sceptical Irish public. A decline in trust in religious institutions coincided with a fall in prestige associated with those bodies. This in turn made it possible for a further fragmentation of what would previously have been regarded as a typically conservative religiously-tinged habitus. Such a phenomenon can be regarded as symptomatic of an ongoing paradigm shift in cultural attitudes in Irish society. A clear example of the liberalisation of attitudes within the Irish polity the approval in a referendum on Same-Sex Marriage by margin of 62% in May 2015.⁴⁷¹ This dramatic paradigm shift is a testament to the yawning gap that has developed between the values held by the general populace and the clergy throughout communities in the Republic of Ireland that is highly unlikely to be reversed. Indeed, any consideration of the reading above will hopefully reveal the gradual proliferation of this deficit in understanding that assisted in building momentum for alternative paradigms.

While women were finally recognised as equal in the Irish political system from 1990 onwards with the election of the first-female President of Ireland in that year, other marginalised groups only came to be officially embraced from the implementation

a better world, which is arguably one of the strongest qualities implicitly inspired by McGahern's early fiction.

⁴⁷¹ For an academic exposition of the factors that coalesced to ensure the passage of the proposal see Johan A. Ellkink, David M. Farrell, Theresa Reidy & Jane Suiter, 'Understanding the 2015 marriage referendum in Ireland: context, campaign, and conservative Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 32, 2017, Issue 3, pp. 361-381. Breda O'Brien considers the theological consequences of the referendum in her article: 'Reflections on the Forthcoming Synod', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 104, No. 415, Pope Francis and the Synod on the Family, (Autumn, 2015), pp. 292-301. An equally valuable contribution to understanding the said situation from a jurisprudential perspective is presented in Brian Tobin, 'Marriage Equality in Ireland: The Politico-Legal Context', *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, Vol. 30, Issue 2, (August, 2016), pp. 115-130.

date of the Same-Sex Marriage Referendum in late 2015.⁴⁷² This followed on from the wafer-thin approval of the Divorce Referendum in November 1995.⁴⁷³ Women were then able to seek to have their marriage dissolved in the local Circuit Court and were thus able to escape abusive and controlling husbands. Women were thus empowered to leave unhealthy marriages and pursue their own lives as best they could under their new circumstances. Arguably this represented a moment when unhappily married women, who had inherited the opportunity to define the dynamics of the future in McGahern's *Amongst Women*, were in a position to finally step outside their husband's shadows and start anew. Not only are women permitted to start anew, they bequeath the next generation of women a *tabula rasa* in relation to the path and character their own lives could take in the future.

While a new way of life was recognised for women from the 1990s and with it the Irish Nation began to mature as it embraced modernity, the times to come were not to be without challenges. Remarkable economic prosperity, particularly from the early 1990s to 2008⁴⁷⁴ satisfied much consumer demand but also fuelled further hunger for social reform. The artistic class, John McGahern among them, viewed such prosperity with caution. McGahern's fiction, particularly his last novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002) – published during a particularly prosperous period in Irish society – presents a gentle and sympathetic portrait of a way of life in rural Ireland which (at that

⁴⁷² An *Irish Times* article from Saturday, 29 August 2015 begins with the title 'President signs same-sex marriage into Constitution', and notes "...President Michael D. Higgins has signed the result of last May's marriage referendum into the Constitution..." For a broad examination of the advancement of liberal politics in Ireland general see: David T. Buckley, "Secular Evolution in Ireland: Religion and Post-Catholic Politics", in *Faithful to Secularism: The Religious Politics of Democracy, Senegal, and the Philippines*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) pp. 62-83. See also: Yvonne Murphy, 'The marriage equality referendum 2015', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 31 (2016), Issue 2, pp. 315-30.

⁴⁷³ The complex forces that sustained the conservative Catholic ideology which ensured that no marriage in Ireland could be legally dissolved under the Constitution in Ireland up until the Act's introduction is treated in great depth and clarity in Christine P. James, "CÉAD MÍLE Fáilte? Ireland Wlecomes Divorce: The 1995 Irish Divorce Referendum and the Family (Divorce) Act of 1996", *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (1997), pp. 175-226.

⁴⁷⁴ A banking crisis and the onset of the world-wide recession also arrested and severely impaired the economic means of the Irish state. An exposition of the causes and effects of the crisis is provided in Mary Murphy, 'Ireland: Celtic Tiger in Austerity – Explaining Irish Path Dependency.' *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (2014), pp. 132-142. In addition, insightful analysis is provided by Rob Kitchin, Cian O' Callaghan, Mark Boyle, Justin Gleeson and Karen Keaveney in 'Placing Neo-liberalism: The Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, Vol. 44, Issue 6, (2012), pp. 1302-1326.

time) was gradually fading out of existence. In a collection of essays and reflections published titled *Love of the World*, McGahern writes in 'Rural Ireland's Passing' of how modernity has soiled the riches provided by Mother Nature. He remarks on how things have changed so radically:

There has been gross and short-sighted mismanagement. People have been given and encouraged to borrow to increase cattle numbers and to build slatted sheds on shallow lands unable to take slurry, with a devastating effect on the lakes and rivers and even the fields. (...) The spring lake is dead alongside the deserted farm. Once people came to the lake for their buckets of spring water. It was teeming with pike and perch and eels, and there was a pass for otters. More than thirty houses drew water from the lake in a group water scheme. The lake might have been polluted anyhow, but the Agriculture Institute rented ten acres overlooking the lake. They drained and reseeded it at enormous expense, though the same experiment was proved useless years ago in Britain. Tons of nitrates were poured on the reseeded land and drained into the lake. A green scum decorates the shore. The fish are dead. People in the water scheme have to boil their drinking water before use. This is but a microcosm of large parts of the rest of the country.⁴⁷⁵

McGahern's reference to the 'microcosm' as he puts it, resonates with remarks he had made some years earlier when he said:

Everything interesting begins with one person in one place, though the places can become many, and many persons in the form of influences will have gone into the making of that single woman or man. No one comes out of nowhere; one room or town or locality can be made into an everywhere. The universal is the local, but with the walls take away.⁴⁷⁶

If McGahern's sense of individual presence and how each individual can be seen to reverberate with other people to contribute to a community resonance is to be accepted as valid, and there is little to suggest any doubt in this respect, then one can also assert that his late fiction serves as a swansong for all his work. In that respect his early work (e. g. *The Barracks*, *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*) was designed to critique

⁴⁷⁵ John McGahern, 'Rural Ireland's Passing' in *Love of the World: Essays* (Ed. Stanley Van der Ziel) (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 170-71.

⁴⁷⁶ John McGahern, 'The Local and the Universal' in *Love of the World: Essays* (Ed. Stanley Van der Ziel) (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 11.

that profoundly dysfunctional nature of the Church-State axis of power in a manner that contained distinct elements of a dystopian narrative. An element of hope emerged internally in *The Barracks*, more explicitly and realistically in *The Dark* and hope was available but only outside the original jurisdiction in which the protagonist was raised, as in *The Leavetaking*. While *The Pornographer* was somewhat anomalous in comparison to the author's other work, its satirical nature served to demonstrate the artistic freedoms that had been won to allow matters such as sex and pornography to be discussed unfettered in a publicly available work of fiction. *Amongst Women* demonstrated that legacy can shape each individual's character but that while the next generation may be tinged by bitter memories, knowledge of unhealthy relationships and excessive authority vested in the hands of a small number or a single individual may well sensitise those who follow to be wary of allowing such practices to go unchallenged in the future. The latter also shows how a new generation can choose to accept their own heritage but without allowing it to constrict the foundation of new ways of thinking and new ways of living. Thus, maturation toward autonomy does not necessarily require jettisoning one's heritage to embrace new frontiers.

This thesis aims to show how McGahern's novels up to 1990 were concerned with a specific critique of power structures such as the family and the Catholic Church. However, once these agents of authority had been subjected to severe critique and even near-collapse as in the case of the Catholic Church in Ireland, McGahern returned to his examination of a rural setting in his final novel, but did so in such a way that it may serve as a warning. This warning consisted of acknowledging that while the source of abused authority had now been confronted and the people who led it identified and shamed, ordinary members of the community who had been swept up in a wave that had been given its momentum by the modernisation process must not be forgotten. Furthermore, while many obstacles to the free realisation of human endeavour and freedom of conscience had been defeated (i.e. particular state sponsored-structures and dysfunctional ideologies), the author cautions his readers against jettisoning the important asset that is the social capital that has sustained relationships between people for generations. Without this fundamental ingredient that underpins the functioning of

healthy local communities, there is a real danger of witnessing the collapse of society and with it the complete disintegration of the timeless values of love, kinship and the need to respect one another as each person makes their journey through life in relative ignorance of the greater forces that govern human spirituality.

In many ways, the key message emanating from McGahern's final work of fiction is that while we can reform or even collapse the power structures that supported dysfunctional cultural practices, we cannot abandon the constellation of communities that has grown within the fabric that formed the basis of these power structures. Ideology can be changed, thinking reformulated, but a timeless quality cannot be forgotten: the social capital that persists between people and forms the life-blood of the communities that in turn form a national system upon which a society can be constructed. It is only through a healthy respect for one's natural environment and one's fellow human being that one can expect to be able to sustain one's ways and provide the means to ensure the survival and prosperity of the generations to come. With the onset of the various manifestations of modernity – mass communications, corporate economics, cultural diffusion and the atomisation of individuals – one cannot forget that to change the world means beginning a conversation with a single person at a time. From the local to the universal, since fundamental values are shared among all peoples, although their expression may vary, their essential nature has remained the same: wonder at the existence of thyself, survival, self-expression and speculation of what lies beyond the mortal world. This is McGahern's legacy: while cultural values and their expression may change form with different times, the fundamental needs of human beings will always need to be met, to ignore this reality is to imperil our own very existence.

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