TROUBLED HOUSES: IRISH WOMEN WRITING THE GREAT WAR

by

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Chapter One: Troubled Houses: Irish Women Writing the Great War

Colm Tóibín's début play, *Beauty in a Broken Place*, premiered at the Abbey Theatre in August 2004 as part of the theatre's centenary schedule. Exploring the controversy and ensuing riots that plagued the opening of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* at the Abbey in 1926, *Beauty in a Broken Place* depicts the personalities, politics and most importantly, the struggle over who determines cultural memory and its representation for the Irish Free State of the 1920s. One character in the play, the real feminist and republican Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, denounces *The Plough and the Stars*, set in a Dublin tenement community during the Easter Rising in 1916, as an insulting portrait of the revolutionists—an image that directly offended her, considering that a British soldier murdered her husband Francis as he went to the aid of a wounded man during the fighting. To Sheehy-Skeffington, the play was one in which

> every character connected with the Citizen Army is a coward, a slacker or worse, that omits no detail of squalid slumdom, the looting, the squabbling, the disease and degeneracy, yet that omits any revelation of the glory and the inspiration of Easter Week, is a *Hamlet* shown without the Prince of Denmark. Is it merely a coincidence that the only soldiers whose knees do not knock together and who are not indifferent to the glories of their uniforms are the British Army? (71)

In her view, the play's portrayal of the tenement dwellers as the Rosencrantzes and Gildensterns in a tragedy that lacks the "Princes of Dublin" does not give the play and the times the consideration that the participants of the Rising deserve. Furthermore in her estimation, the cowards, slackers (to either the Great War or the rebellion), thieves and

prostitutes of Dublin's working-class citizenry lack the integrity that the British soldiers seemingly possess in O'Casey's depiction of them. Sheehy-Skeffington's response to the Abbey's staging of *The Plough and the Stars* (along with that of other republican widows such as Maude Gonne MacBride and Kathleen Clarke) was to rouse public sentiment against it and demand its closure.[1] *Beauty in a Broken Place* portrays the eventual outcome of this historical moment with a grudging O'Casey accepting Sheehy-Skeffington's challenge to a debate over the play and its significance to Irish identity, a debate that O'Casey loses. For while O'Casey (in the play) may have come to the debate to discuss free speech and the artistic merits of his play, Sheehy-Skeffington has

> come [t]here . . . to speak about a matter which [she] believe[s] is foremost in [Irish] culture and in the new Ireland [they] have all been working for. It is an easy matter to define and thus it is something which is also easy to destroy and make little of. It is the most important thing [they] have, it is [their] most treasured possession, it belongs to [them] communally and as individuals. *Put simply: it is how [they] remember. And how [they] remember defines more than anything else who [the Irish] are and who [they] will be.* (69-70) [italics mine]

What I find particularly interesting about Tóibín's play is that this issue Sheehy-Skeffington raises, of how and what is remembered in Ireland defining it as a nation, is as relevant today in 2004 as it was during the country's nascent years as a Free State. Further, in situating his play at this point in history and on the question of another play's

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[1] Jane Marcus observes that what is at issue here as well is O'Casey's "class origins and the class contents of his play—a class amnesia. O'Casey's refusal to rewrite the working-class, urban participation in the English war as a nationalist heroism in which the Rising replaces the war in national memory" (Personal correspondence).

authority in representing the Irish in 1916 (in the middle-years of the Great War and at the onset of "The Troubles") Tóibín is following in a literary tradition that began in the 1920s and 1930s when many writers were confronting their memories of the Great War and providing others with a vehicle through which they could confront their own. Yet what is most intriguing about Tóibín's play is that the multiple layers of remembrance that occur within the text are governed by gender. When he gives voice to Sheehy-Skeffington's demand for the proprietorship of Irish memory, a demand that results in O'Casey's play being closed by the Abbey, not only does he suggest that the memory of Ireland in 1916 and 1926 was woven in the pall of Irish widowhood, but that this same memory pall covers the history of modern Ireland.

David Lloyd makes a similar assertion in "The Memory of Hunger," likening the coupling of Irish memory with womanhood and death to the Irish mourning ritual known as keening (when old women gather round the corpse during the wake and wail the passing of life from it) and observes that this practice becomes "the focus for [imperial] discourse on the strangeness and dangers of Irish emotion" (208). Lloyd's observation that the Famine and Ireland's "unworked-through" grief over the event "continue insistently to mark the cultural singularities of pre-and-post independence Ireland" (215), could readily be applied to Ireland's difficulty in coming to terms with the years 1914-1923. If a country is unable to mourn properly an earlier catastrophic event in its colonial history, how can it then mourn one that transforms it into a post-colonial nation? And if a proper keening is needed by the nation for these cultural moments, if women—as widows and mothers—are necessary to bear witness to this process, how will a country ever move beyond the gender stereotypes that contain it? For what is problematic both with

Tóibín's and Lloyd's concept of Irish memory is its embodiment in the figure of mourning widow/motherhood, a reinscription of the Mother Ireland trope that denies Irish women their full identity as women and as a consequence it denies men the truth of their real history. For example, in Tóibín's play, Sheehy-Skeffington, a long-time activist who was imprisoned for her activities as a suffragette, sacrifices the memory of her activism to take on that of her widowhood:

> To those, however, who remember the men and women of 1916, such presentation is a gross libel and a stain on our memory. The women of Easter Week were not like Nora Clitheroe, just as her futile, snivelling husband is not typical of Irish manhood. The women of Easter, as we know them, are typified rather in the mother of Patrick Pearse, that valiant woman who gave both of her sons for freedom. They shall be remembered forever, while the garrison mentality in the Abbey Theatre, which calls the police nightly, will soon be forgotten. (71-72)

By mitigating her desire to have women's participation in the Rising acknowledged on equal grounds with the men's, she subsumes it into the exemplar of sacrificial wife and mother. The "women of Easter Week" to be remembered are thus neither the Nora Clitheroes (who did not want their husbands to die for Ireland) nor the Countess Markieviczes, Helena Moloneys or Hanna Sheehy-Skeffingtons who fought along side the men in the Rising; rather, the women to be remembered are the mothers like Patrick Pearse's, "valiant" women who gave their sons "for freedom."

Sheehy-Skeffington's donning the veil of widowhood was in keeping with the myth-making regarding Irish womanhood and popular support for the Easter Rising that

the De Valeran government propagated from the 1920s onward. Since the 1937 Irish constitution relegated women to the home, Ireland to this day seems unable to think of Irish women outside of the binaries associated with wife and/or mother.[2] Abortion and birth control are still illegal in Ireland (abortion is prohibited in Northern Ireland either), and while limited gay rights have been permitted in Ireland since June 1993, those rights were not extended to lesbians since they were never classified as criminals under Irish law. As Eibhear Walshe notes, "there was more than one attempt (1895 and 1922) to make lesbianism a crime, but this never reached statute books, and so Irish lesbians were both outside the law and at the same time rendered invisible by lack of official recognition or even condemnation" (6).[3] By limiting modern woman to the Catholic confines of heteronomative reproduction (while maintaining the stories of her enormous power in the pagan past), modern Ireland has, in many ways, elided Irish women from the country's social and cultural post-civil war history, and what has taken place is the myth of the sacrificing and self-sacrificing Mother Ireland.

The pervasiveness of Mother Ireland in social and literary consciousness both parallels and intersects the mythic rise of an Ireland that always held the vision of a free Ireland first and foremost in its heart. While Ireland's embracing of works such as Yeats' "Easter 1916" and rioting against the *Plough and the Stars* might suggest that there was overwhelming support for the Easter Rising, in the early years of the Great War much of

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[2] As I write, Pope John Paul II released his document "On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World" (July 2004) which reiterates the Catholic view that woman's natural duty is that of wife and mother, and that nothing, including employment outside the home, should unnecessarily detract her from that role—a credo that was incorporated into law with the 1937 Irish Constitution, particularly Articles 40, 41 and 45 that "implied or declared that a woman's place was in the home" (Foster 546).

[3] See Walshe's introduction to *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing* for an overview of gay and lesbian history in Ireland and its relevance to both nationalism and literature (1-15).

the country agreed with and aided Britain in its fight against Germany. Like the eliding of Irish women's lives from cultural memory, the green-washing of Irish participation in the Great War has ensured that the war is a neglected subject in Irish Literature. Ireland has yet to confront its own role in that war, to honor the dead in the Republic, and to reread the writers who tried to deal with it in their work. Considering the substantial volume of war-themed writings that appeared in Great Britain during the first half of the twentieth century, and those that are still appearing, from published correspondence between soldiers and their loved ones, to the poetry and fiction by servicemen, and to the writings of such modernists as Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, the Great War was a continual source of creative fodder for British writers during the war, and so it is still with Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and a spate of other popular best-sellers. With regard to Irish writing on the other hand, historian Keith Jeffery notes that besides authors and Great War veterans Patrick MacGill and Liam O'Flaherty, whose war-themed prose has been "decently forgotten" ("Irish Prose Writers" 13),[4] there are "actually rather few Irish [Great] 'war novels'" (1), and, he continues, this paucity can be attributed in large part to the fact that politically "except in Unionist Ulster, the experience of the war did not have the centrality which it had . . . in Great Britain or

[4] Jeffery argues that MacGill's writing is "starkly realistic and described as 'bitter' and 'scathing'" yet "was not in any fundamental way subversive" ("Irish Prose Writers" 10). MacGill's vast body of war-themed literature, much of which derives from autobiographical experience as a member of the London Irish Rifles, includes a volume of poems, *Soldiers Songs* (1917), and the novels *The Amateur Army* (1915), *The Great Push: an Episode of the Great War* (1916), *The Red Horizon* (1916), *The Brown Brethren* (1917); *The Dough-Boys* (1918), and *Fear!* (1921), a novel which, had it "been published in 1929," might "have achieved minor fame" (13). O'Flaherty, who joined the Irish Guards in 1915 and was shell-shocked in September 1917 at Flanders, published two explicit pieces of war prose in 1929—the novel *Return of the Brute* and the short story *The Alien Skull*—yet criticism of his work thus far has tended not to include these pieces (13-14).

Australia" (2).[5] With estimates of Irish participation in the war varying between 210,000-500,000,[6] Jeffery argues that in the Irish literary imagination it appears as if the "declining ascendancy class [Anglo-Irish] were the only social grouping, as a whole, for whom the impact of war was fundamentally significant" (2). The attention of nationalist Ireland, conversely, particularly after the Easter Rising of 1916 and the ensuing "Troubles," was fixed not on the Western Front, but rather on the "home front" (2-3), and "the absence of much Irish battle front literature, and the concomitant existence of a greater body of home front novels . . . actually helps us put the war in clearer and historically more accurate perspective" (4).

What is of particular interest is that this perspective, like the question of Irish cultural memory, that it is as much determined by the gender of those writing the novels as by the time period in which the novels were written: For of the twelve Irish home front

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[5] Yeats, of course, wrote poetry on the war, as did Francis Ledwidge and Thomas Kettle who actually served and died at the front. Sean O'Casey's play, *The Silver Tassie*, also addresses the war and its effect on Ireland. Recently, Irish writers such as Jennifer Johnston (*How Many Miles to Babylon?*), Frank McGuiness (*Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*) and Roddy Doyle (*A Star Called Henry*) have incorporated the Irish experience of the Great War in their work.

[6] R. F. Foster in *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* notes that by April 1916, 150,000 had enlisted and that over 200,000 were conscripted by war's end (471). However, in the late 1960s, military historian and former British army major Henry Harris postulated, in an "impressive but deeply flawed review of statistical evidence," that 500,000 Irishmen had enlisted during the war (Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* 5). Harris arrived at this estimate based on the number of known Irish dead (49,435) and the casualty statistics for the war of a ratio of 1:10 for those who served (5). Jeffery points out that much of the discrepancy between numbers can be attributed to politics; whether one wishes to increase the number to "relegitimise Redmondite constitutionalism" or to decrease the number as "extreme nationalists" might desire (5-6). Since the1990s, for instance, historians such as Myles Dugan, Terence Denman, Tom Johnstone, and Phillip Orr have claimed that the stories of hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women from the Republic of Ireland were silenced in favor of perpetuating the nationalist myth that there was universal support among the Irish in the South for an Irish republic and that only those Unionists in the North supported Britain in the war. The number that Jeffery advocates is David Fitzpatrick's calculation of 210,000 for Irish *male* participation, though this number does not include "natives of Ireland who joined units in Britain, the empire or the USA" (6), and, I will add, does not also include the number of Irish women who participated as nurses, canteen workers, ambulance drivers, etc.

novels to which Jeffrey refers,[7] half are by women, and of these, three were published in the 1930s: Pamela Hinkson's *The Ladies Road* (1932); Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle* (1936); and Margaret Barrington's *My Cousin Justin* (1939). Additionally, circa the 1930s, four other Irish women published home front novels: Elizabeth Bowen started the decade in 1929 with *The Last September*; Kathleen Coyle's *A Flock of Birds*, published in 1930, was "runner-up to E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* for a major literary award"[8]; Rosamond Jacob's *The Troubled House: A Novel of Dublin in the 'Twenties* appeared in 1937; and Molly Keane (M. J. Farrell) wrote a trio of home front novels during this period beginning with *Mad Puppetstown* (1931), *The Rising Tide* (1937), and in 1941, *Two Days in Aragon.*[9] While the clarity and historical accuracy of Irish recognition of the Great War is complicated both by "national amnesia" (F. X. Martin coined the term in 1967 for nationalist Ireland's downplaying of the country's participation in the war) and by what constitutes the actual perimeters of the war for Ireland, this amnesia also extends to the national perception of Irish women's experience of this era.[10] In the first place, as the Easter Rising occurred midway through the Great

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[7] The list also includes: George Birmingham's *Gossamer*; Lady Carbery's *The Germans in Cork*; St. John Ervine's *Changing Winds*; Edward MacLysaght's *Cúrsaí Thomás*; Eimar O'Duffy's *The Wasted Land*; Forrest Reid's *Pender Among the Residents*; Meta Mayne Reid's *The Land is Dear*; James Richardson's *The Germans at Bessbrook*; and Katharine Tynan's *The Golden Rose.*

[8] On the original 1930 Dutton Press dust jacket for the novel, this award was acknowledged as such: "In a $5,000 novel contest, Hugh Walpole, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and Frank Swinnerton selected *A Flock of Birds* as one of the four best novels out of 600 entries."

[9] Annie Smithson, nurse, nationalist and novelist, was also writing novels during this period. For the purposes of my dissertation, I have decided to use her as a point of reference rather than feature her with the other writers. Smithson was an ardent nationalist and active participant in Cumann na mBan. And while Rosamond Jacob was also a member of the Gaelic League and Republican activist, she, like Kathleen Coyle, Kate O'Brien and the aforementioned writers, were very much internationalist in her outlook.

[10] R. F. Foster addresses this "deliberate amnesia" as well, pointing out that the Free State, in attempting to assert an Irish history for an Irish people, "not only was the record of parliamentary nationalism more or

War and merged with the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921) and Irish Civil War (1922-1923), Ireland was ostensibly in a state of war between the years 1914-1923 and thus, the lack of Irish battle front literature in favor of that of the home front may be due in large part to the fact that the Great War was continued at home for another five years after Armistice.[11] In addition, since the home front affected women's lives on a daily basis, the genre of home front novels became a means by which Irish women could write about war and its domestic repercussions. For instance, notwithstanding a few brief battlefield scenes such as those that occur in Hinkson's *The Ladies Road*, all the drama of the Great War and the Troubles is confined to the home. The home front novels of Irish women during the 1930s should thus be read in the context of the political climate of the times and how these women fought against the pressure to adhere to myths not of their own making. What must be explored is how the Irish cultural memory of the Great War and civil war, so fraught with myths that shape the narratives' historical accuracy, becomes a gendered viewpoint in which "home" truly becomes the site where all battles, whether international or indigenous, are lost or won.

Irish Women, Revolution and the Free State

Irish feminism and its influence on the formation of the Free State manifested itself as early as the nineteenth century when activists who were involved in the suffrage movement and other socio-political initiatives to improve women's domestic, educational and professional lives recognized that woman's subordination to man was akin to

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less dismissed; the real nature of pre-1916 Irish history had to be glossed over, including, among much else, the hundreds of thousands of Irish who had volunteered in the Great War" (535).

[11] Historian Niall Ferguson, in *The Pity of War*, asserts a similar argument in that the war continued unabated in Eastern Europe and Russia after November 1918 (448).

colonial Ireland's subjugation to England (Taillon 2).[12] While the suffrage and feminist movements world-wide shared common goals towards the benefit of women, the "small but influential Irish feminist movement used Gaelicist channels, too" (Foster 449), establishing groups such as Cumann na mBan (the women's auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers) and Inghinidhe na h-Eireann (Daughters of Ireland, founded by Maude Gonne), that identified the national cause with that of feminism, believing that both needed to be fought for to ensure a truly egalitarian Irish society.[13] Many Irish women were likewise involved in the labor movement, agreeing with Jim Larkin, his sister Delia and Helena Molony, founders of the Irish Women Workers Union (1911), that such a union to "'improve the wages and conditions of the women workers of Ireland'" would "'help the men workers to raise the whole status of labour and industry'" (MacCurtain 51). This trinity of "the national movement, the women's movement and the industrial one" was declared by Countess Constance Markievicz, a central member of many Irish feminist and republican organizations including Inghinidhe na h-Eireann, Cumann na mBan and James Connolly's Citizens' Army, to embody the three pivotal movements

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[12] See Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy, *Women, Power and Consciousness in 19th Century Ireland*, for a more detailed historical account of the times and the lives of feminist reformers such as Anna Haslam, founder of the Irish Suffrage Movement, and Anna Parnell, head of the Ladies' Land League and sister of Charles Stuart Parnell, who led the Land League when her brother was imprisoned.

[13] *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension*, eds. M. MacCurtain and D. O'Corrain, provides a concise overview of Irish women's history into the 1970s. Margaret MacCurtain's "Women, The Vote and Revolution" (46-57) is particularly insightful with regard to Irish women organizing politically during the years leading up to the Easter Rising and Troubles. Irish historian R. F. Foster also acknowledges the contributions of Irish women in his tome, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, pointing out the importance of Alice Milligan and Anna Johnson's republican journal *Shan Van Vocht* (449) and Gonne's Inghinidhe na hEireann "whose members had to be of Irish birth or descent, were dedicated to 'complete independence' and aimed to 'discourage the reading and circulation of low English literature, the singing of English songs, the attending of vulgar English entertainments at the theatre and music-hall, and to combat in every way English influence, which is doing much injury to the artistic taste and refinement of the Irish people" (449-450).

shaping Ireland during the years leading up to the formation of the Free State (52), movements that greatly benefited from the leadership and support of Irish women.

However, as historian Margaret MacCurtain points out in "Women, the Vote and Revolution," the convergence of these movements on the Easter Rising in 1916 was not without controversy, and the ideological differences and power struggles that developed, especially after the Great War began, threatened the causes' cohesiveness. For instance, just as British suffragists were split on the question of whether to support the war effort as a means to prove their citizenship to the state and thus, be worthy of the vote, Irish suffragists were similarly divided. When Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's pacifist and feminist husband Francis, editor of *The Irish Citizen*, denounced the war, he "alienated many suffragists in the process" (MacCurtain 52). Furthermore, in addressing the theme "Ireland, women and the war" at a suffragist meeting, Thomas MacDonagh promoted Francis's anti-war stance but was also ambiguous "about the aims of the volunteers," prompting Hannah to insist that the Irish Volunteers "make certain they included women" when referencing the words "liberty" and "people" (52).[14] Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and the subsequent execution of its leaders, among them Thomas MacDonagh and James Connolly "who had understood the importance of the votes for women issue,"[15] nationalism "sublimated all lesser concerns for the next few years" (54). Members of Cumann na mBan not only rallied voters for Sinn Féin during the Anglo-Irish War, but "undertook scouting, despatch-carrying, intelligence work and first aid,

[14] Apparently Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's advice held with MacDonagh and other volunteers, as the *Proclamation of the Republic* addresses both "Irishmen and Irishwomen," guaranteeing "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens."

often in high risk zones" (54-55).[16] When Ireland finally transitioned into the Free State in 1922, these contributions by women were not necessarily acknowledged or rewarded as women may have desired. While suffrage was "universal, no public office was barred to women and there were cast-iron guarantees that none would be," the new regime "quickly discarded the radical rhetoric and revolutionary flourishes of the 1916-21 period and settled into a conservative and respectable state" (Manning 92). Although women were elected to the first Dáil (1923), five of the six women were "relatives of men executed in 1916, or killed in the Anglo-Irish War" (Constance Markievicz was the sixth), strongly suggesting, as MacCurtain concludes, that "Irish women in post-revolutionary Ireland did not make the political traditions: they inherited them from fathers, husbands and brothers" (55).[17] And as evidenced in *Beauty in a Broken Place*, it is no wonder, therefore, that Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington felt that the only way the memory of the "women of Easter Week" could be sustained was through their fathers', husbands' and brothers' martyrdom.

The patriarchization of the Free State was firmly rooted during the 1920s by Eamon De Valera's Fianna Fáil party and its collaboration with the Catholic Church, culminating with the infamous 1937 Constitution that relegated Irish women to the home.

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[15] Constance Markievicz was also sentenced to death for her role in the uprising but was imprisoned instead as Germany's execution of Edith Cavell a year earlier for aiding allied soldiers caused world-wide protest, something the British wanted to avoid in executing a woman (Foster 445).

[16] The war literature by Irish women confirms such participation by women and also suggests, such as in Rosamond Jacob's *The Troubled House*, that women were involved in military exploits as well. Further, Ruth Taillon, in *When History was Made: The Women of 1916*, presents a detailed history and chronology of women's participation in the Rising, activities that included gun smuggling and weapons training/use.

[17] In statistics compiled by Maurice Manning, "since the founding of the State to the present time [1977], over 650 people have been elected to the Dáil. Of that 650 plus, 24 have been women—under 4% of the total, over a period of 55 years. In the Dáil of 1923, there were 5 women—and that remained the highest number ever elected at a general election until 1977 when 6 women were returned" (93).

According to historian R. F. Foster, in exchange for the Church's support during the fledgling years of the revolution and Free State, "in education, as in social law, the state followed the Catholic line: divorce was excluded, birth control outlawed, the Ne Temere decree enforced Catholic conditioning on children of mixed [religions] marriages,"[18] and the Censorship Board, established in 1929, officially "anathematiz[ed] everything from jazz to modern fiction" (534-535). In such an Ireland, as in the Church itself, women serving in other than helpmeet capacity was not encouraged, to say the least, as the patriarchal authority of the Church was mirrored both in the state and in the home. Future President Mary Robinson, the first female president in Ireland (1990), notes in her article "Women and the New Irish State" that all the measures that "had a particular significance for women, in so far as they impinged upon or regulated family life," were "processed through the filter of a completely male dominated Parliament and commented on by a completely male dominated media," and she speculates that "if there had been a significant number of women politicians and women reporters in the 1930s, '40s and '50s their general outlook [might] have been significantly different from their male contemporaries" (62).

While there may not have been a significant number of women in such positions to provide overt criticism of Irish policy-making, there were women writers who most certainly addressed the hypocrisies and insularity of the Free State, and the selective memory of national identity. Avoiding the notice of the censor, Kate O'Brien, Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob, three of the previously mentioned Irish women who wrote home front novels during the 1930s, explore the literary and socio-political implications

[18] In other words, children must be raised Catholic if one of the parents was Catholic.

of the myth of Ireland and the Great War, artistic expression, and gender in the Irish Free State by writing seemingly positive accounts of the Irish Revolution. I shall focus here upon these three writers and their texts to provide a sampling of the ways in which they and their contemporaries wrote as part of the continuum of post-Great War literature by British women. Yet, however fully in consort these Irish women writers were with their British peers, they and their characters were always conscious of their Irishness and that of the system they were critiquing, an allegiant factor that British women, as members of the colonial power (albeit in a subordinate capacity as women), referenced quite differently.

Irish Women Writing War and the Free State

Trudi Tate asserts in *Modernism, History and the First World War* that much of the literature written about the war during the 1920s and'30s concerns itself with "the distinction between witnessing and seeing" in that it "worr[ies] about how one is placed in relation to a history one has lived through but not seen, or seen only partially, through a fog of ignorance, fear, confusion, and lies" (1). Whether one experienced the war directly as a frontline soldier or nurse, worked in munitions factories, had loved ones at the front, or received his/her sole impressions of the war through newspapers, magazines and/or jingoist propaganda, the shape and tenor of that writer's experience "helps us to think about how cultures imagined themselves in this period of specific crisis" (3).[19] While Tate argues against classifying "men's writing" or "women's writing," concerned

[19] Tate also argues that the distinction between modernism and war writing is not so easy to discern after 1914 as modernists and war writers (some writers such as Ford Madox Ford fit into both categories) often critiqued each other's works and that "war writings were discussed in avant-garde journals such as the *Little Review* and the *Egoist*," the resultant cross-pollenization thus dissolving the boundaries between the two (2-3).

that "this kind of categorising obscures more than it illuminates" (5), the questions the works raise regarding "who has seen what, and how one is positioned in relation to war's trauma" (5) have been, nonetheless, addressed by women writers keen to have their war trauma privileged as trauma equivalent to that of men's. Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* (1929), a novel narrated from the perspective of a female ambulance driver's experience at the front, is a retelling of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and is one such example of how, "for women, the effects of war last a lifetime and can never be forgotten" as Jane Marcus discusses in "Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War" (154).[20] Furthermore, since the 1980s, particularly with the benefit of feminist historical analysis of the two world wars,[21] anthologies of women's Great War writings have been compiled,[22] suggesting that women were not only writing about the war but, as Margaret Higonnet points out in *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, many were writing about it

> acutely conscious that as women they were instruments of cultural self-representation: as mothers, they became identified with the *mater dolorosa* and the motherland, as nurses, they were "sisters," and as wives and lovers

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[20] Marcus notes that the genesis of *Not So Quiet...* began when publisher Albert Marriot "approached Evadne Price with a free-lance project to write a spoof from a woman's point of view" and that Price, in turn, "convinced Winifred Young, who had kept diaries of her experience as an ambulance driver, to let her write a novel faithful to Young's experience of actual life at the front" (140-141).

[21] See M. Higonnet, J. Jenson, S. Michel, & M. Collins Weitz *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1-17) for an overview of the historical and literary analysis of the wars, especially the focus in recent years upon the significance gender plays in our understanding of these traumas.

[22] Some of these anthologies include Trudi Tate, *Women, Men and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999; Margaret Higonnet, *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World I*. New York: Penguin, 1999; Claire Tylee, Elaine Turner & Agnes Cardinal, *War Plays by Women: An International Anthology*. New York: Routledge, 1999; and Angela Smith, *Women's Writing of the First World War: An Anthology*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. The increase both in the rediscovery of women's war writings and public interest in women's unique experience of war was responsible in large

> they could help secure the masculine strength of men. Aware of their multiple allegorical functions, they played with and against these identifications, as in their writings about the "rape" of Belgium. (xxxi)

The myth that Irish women writers "played with and against" was that of Mother Ireland. The mother figure in Kathleen Coyle's *A Flock of Birds*, for instance, is simultaneously adept at using Irish sentimentality for the mother to her advantage in aiding her imprisoned son while identifying more readily with the figure of Medea; and the mother in Rosamond Jacob's *The Troubled House* similarly claims and rejects motherly responsibility in order to assert her identity as separate from the maternal. For both mothers, the responsibility for keeping the family together on the home front is linked with Mother Ireland's in holding together her country through both an international and a civil war—a responsibility that the mothers reject, particularly when it comes to war. This sentiment is similar to that of British writer Virginia Woolf who, in rejecting the male construct of nationality and its implications for warfare,[23] memorably states in *Three Guineas* that as a woman she neither has nor wants a country because her country is "the whole world" (109).[24] The motherland and her concomitant obligations

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part for the Imperial War Museum's 2003-2004 exhibit, "Women and War"—the first major exhibit of its kind to acknowledge women's wartime lives.

[23] In discussing her concept of the Society of Outsiders, she instructs the Outsiders to tell their brothers regarding their need for war that

> if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or 'our' country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but to gratify my instincts, or to protect myself or my country. (108)

When (most) women do not share in the benefits of nation and warfare but mostly suffer under them, Woolf considers it in women's best interest to disavow a national identity in favor of a borderless one.

[24] As feminist, republican, peace activist, and communist Rosamond Jacob's records in her diary dated August 30, 1938, she thought *Three Guineas* to be "*very* good and easy seen why most male critics disliked it."

are thus liberated, and likewise those of her daughters in the disestablishment of a No Man's/No Woman's land.

Although in *'Sheer Bloody Magic': Conversations with Actresses* Irish actress and lecturer Fiona Shaw acknowledges that "Virginia Woolf was so right when she said that women don't have a country in the same way as men do," she is also quick to note that when it comes to Irish women, gender's ubiquitousness is not so easily applied (Shaw qtd. in Woddis 127). Shaw discusses how her Irishness often distinguishes her from the supposed universality of her gender:

> Nationalism is bred with language from the moment you're born. You have a sense of it. Every time I open my mouth, the history of my accent is in my mouth. There's a great myth that the Irish people speak English. We actually don't speak English at all. We use English to appear to be saying the same things that English people are saying but we're not saying the same things. (127)

The Irish inflection of English necessarily alters both the intention and perception of what is being said and by whom, according to her. While Shaw lives in England and is a renowned actress, her Irishness ostensibly trumps all, including her gender, when she speaks.[25]

Shaw's experience is not unique with regard to gender, Irishness and artistic creation/being. The Irish women writers of the 1930s were also very conscious of both their Irishness and that of their characters when writing Great War novels. Whereas the characters within comparable British women's novels such as Rebecca West's *Return of*

[25] Of course, the complexity of Shaw's Irishness with regard to English would be more apparent within England and Ireland than anywhere else due to the intricacies of colonial history between the two countries.

the Soldier, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet. . .* may refer to their Britishness, the characters use their nationality/ethnicity as a point of reference by which to judge others. Such is the case of Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness* when referring to her mother's Irishness (1) and her lover Mary's Welshness (325-326). Jane Garrity, in *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, examines how at the core of their self-reference English women's "identification with nation was thus submerged in their identification with race, their status as citizens conflated with and compromised by the State's perception that their national role was first and foremost to be the guarantors of British racial stability" (1).[26] In the texts by Irish women, on the other hand, the characters see their Irishness as alterity and are unsure of their position in society. In O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, the Irish governesses are treated as social interlopers in Spain by the Spanish and English travelers. In Jacob's *The Troubled House: A Novel of Dublin in the 'Twenties*, the Cullen family matriarch often situates her Irish identity in relation to her Anglo-Irish connections and to the English authorities. This national consciousness within the texts results in the accentuation of the already contentious divides brought about by war. Irish women, by virtue of their gender and the particular hardships women face during wartime on the home front, identify with many of the same issues British women confront: However, because there is a civil war raging in their own homes in consort with the Great War, and Ireland's status as a colonized country under British domain is in question, Irish women's

[26] Garrity further notes that while British women may align themselves with Otherness due to their gender, "this contention elides the very real distinctions (racial, economic, linguistic, and so forth) between the native and the immigrant, at the same time as it speaks both to the psychic subjugation that British women feel and to the estrangement and alterity that Julia Kristeva, in her work on nationalism, has argued is constrictive of identity: 'foreigness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided'" (25).

alliance with British women is often tenuous in Great War texts. Often in these novels confederacy between social classes is more easily made than friendships between women of similar social standing but of differing Anglo/Irish nationality. Part of the reason for this can be attributed to the blurring of class boundaries within a sparsely populated country whose colonial history did not permit it the same class amenities that its imperial power had. As Fiona Shaw explains, "in Ireland, you can't decide who someone is because class isn't as easy to map"; the intimacy of the country's small population where "you know everybody" is not "quite the same rigour in terms of strata that you get in England" (127).[27] A case in point can be found in the Big House novels of Molly Keane. While the lines between servant and master are acknowledged in her stories, those lines are continuously transgressed nonetheless—the spatial isolation of the elite families from each other (and a dearth of these families as a whole) makes class exclusivity a luxury few could afford.[28] Another reason for mixed-class bonding within the novels is that the war was affecting women equally as *Irish*women, whether their sons/lovers/brothers were dying on the battlefields of France or on one's doorstep. Katherine Munster in Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* is comforted by a poor elderly woman who recognizes her plight as the mother of a condemned IRA man; Katherine in turn eventually accepts her eldest son's betrothal to a woman far beneath the family's social standing. Nevertheless, while the

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[27] Jane Marcus asserts, however, that Evadne Price may have read Virgina Woolf's "The Niece of an Earl," an essay which criticized the gulf that exists between the English novelist and the working classes, and attempted to show Helen, the protagonist in *Not So Quiet. . .*, rejecting her class privilege and position at the front as an ambulance driver to prepare food and wash dishes with working-class women in the WAACs (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) as a way of bridging this divide (156).

[28] Many critics have noted that Keane's servants often wield tremendous power within the Big House, particularly the power they have over the family's children. The class miscegenation that occurs is another consequence of these nebulous boundaries. See Keane's *Two Days in Aragon* for examples of both types of transgressions.

mixed-class bonding between Irish female characters in these texts may be attributed to the clannishness of nationality, it is their status as Irish*women* that underlies that connection. Even though there are affiliations made between Irish female and male characters, they are not made through national or class ties but through maternal or sexual ones and are devoid of the community-building inherent within Irish women's alliance.[29] If, as Woolf states, women are country-less due to their status as women, and if, as Shaw notes, Irish women are still marked by their country despite their second-class status, the Irish women writers of the 1930s were attempting to carve out a space for women that had been denied them during the time of the Great War/Troubles and its aftermath in the Irish Free State of the 1920s/1930s.

One explanation for this impetus for writers such as Kate O'Brien, Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob, and the one upon which this dissertation shall focus, is that the traditional separate socio-spatial spheres of existence for men and women ceased to have clear boundaries when the home, typically the site of women's space, was also the battlefield. Just as the fluctuating demarcation lines of trench warfare and the alliances that Irish soldiers have to both Ireland and England become hardly discernable when considering civil war, the home front for Irish women is similarly problematic. As

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[29] An historical example of this mixed-class bonding occurred in June 1917 at a Sinn Féin convention. Republican Kathleen Clarke, who eventually became a Dáil deputy, senator, and first female Lord Mayor of Dublin, writes in her autobiography of an incident in which Countess Markievicz publicly denounced John MacNeill and his alleged betrayal of the revolutionists during the Easter Rising. While Clarke, a middle-class woman, did not initially support Markievicz's attack, she did so after the men in the audience became abusive towards the countess. Clarke explains:

> This amazed me; here was a woman who had come out and risked her life, had been sentenced to death and imprisoned for her participation in the Rising, and Irishmen were ready to do violence to her for attacking a man whose action had caused the failure of the Rising, and who had not participated in it. The thing was hard to understand, and under the circumstances I felt bound to stand by her. (148)

geographer Linda McDowell observes with regard to the fluidity of boundaries and its relation to power:

> Geographers now argue that places are contested, fluid and uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion ... Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial—they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience. (4)

For Irish women during the Troubles, the separate sphere is erased and home literally becomes the "no man's land" where battles continually rage—fights occur there between fathers/sons/brothers of opposing political views; black and tans barge into the home and destroy property; and even the female body, like Ireland itself, is occupied. For Irish governesses such as O'Brien's Mary Lavelle, leaving post-civil war Ireland for the cloistered life of a governess in Spain gives them the opportunity to define their lives where the possibility did not exist during the war when, like Mary, they may have been dating Great War soldiers while helping their IRA brothers against their fathers' wishes. By setting her bildungsroman in pre-Spanish Civil War Spain, O'Brien constructs a land separate from but mirroring civil war Ireland where Mary can understand what was denied her at home due to the war's permeation of her space. Likewise in Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* and Jacob's *The Troubled House*, the mothers recognize their nebulous position within their war-torn homes and strive to circumscribe it. Irish women's

autonomy as presented in these novels is thus contingent upon their ability to negotiate the boundaries and the power relations that define the battlefield, gender, sexuality, race, class, and ultimately, the home.

Gender, Sexual Identity and War

While war in general wreaks havoc in women's lives, civil wars, according to Margaret Higonnet, have "more potential than other wars to transform women's expectations" ("Civil Wars and Sexual Territories" 80). In civil war literature the "external conflict, which serves as a catalyst of social change and narrative sequence, also becomes a metaphor for inner conflicts and the experience of inner emigration" and determines how these inner conflicts often result in "reversals in emotional and sexual relationships," the inverting of "gender roles under the pressure of social change," and the "gendering of political discourse" in which one finds "that female figures serve to criticize established political ideology" (81-82). Higonnet's observation is certainly true regarding Irish women's war writing and their female characters' proclivity towards critiquing patriarchal authority as their conceptions of self and their role both in the family and society transform over the course of the stories. For one thing in these novels, the Great War is merged with the Anglo-Irish War and Irish Civil War, and the distinct separation of the wars, like that demarcating the battlefield from the home front, is difficult to determine. In addition, the relationship boundaries within families are blurred and the conventional authority of the husband/father/son is often usurped by that of the wife/mother/daughter. In *Mary Lavelle*, Mary leaves her father's home and her fiancé for a job as a governess in Spain; in *A Flock of Birds*, the father is dead and it is up to the mother to lead the family through its crisis; in *The Troubled House*, the mother returns to

a contentious household where she and her sons conspire against the father's authority. The female characters' usurpation of the patriarchal figures within each of these stories indicates a conscious decision on each novelist's part to challenge (through a woman-generated artistic work), the political ideology of the De Valeran government that was restricting both artistic expression and women's autonomy.

Concomitant with the gender-role inversion within these novels is the proliferation of illicit sexual relationships, whether homosexual, adulterous or miscegenational, and are by and large depicted as liberating to women. In Irish male writing on the Great War/Troubles on the other hand, any homoerotic implication is met with self-loathing and violence. Eibhear Walshe notes in *Sex, Nation and Dissent in Irish Writing* that much of the suppression of homosexuality in Irish writing after Ireland's transition into the Free State was due in large part to hegemonic desire to no longer see Ireland as a subjugated, feminized state itself but rather as an autonomous, masculinist nation:

> In Irish cultural discourse, silencing sexual difference became imperative because of a supposed link between homosexuality and enfeebled, 'feminised' masculinity. The post-colonial struggle to escape the influence of the colonising power became a struggle to escape the gendered relation of male coloniser to female colonised. Therefore the post-colonial culture could not permit any public, ideological acknowledgement of the actuality of the sexually 'other'. (5)

The irony of this position is that the masculinist nationalism that the De Valeran government wanted projected was contrary to the republicanism from the nation's outset

that "had a distinct lesbian and gay presence" (3). Walshe provides as evidence examples of gay and lesbian nationalist figures such as Roger Casement, Eva Gore-Booth,[30] Padraig (Patrick) Pearse, and Brendan Behan, individuals who were quite active in the nationalist movement and who were, to varying degrees, "out" to their compatriots (3-5). Nevertheless, the nationalism that the De Valeran government advocated was the one that prevailed, and in the Free State "where religious and judicial codes refused legitimacy and public space for same-sex desire, any lesbian or gay sensibility could only have existed in contradistinction to mainstream cultural discourse" (3). For Irish male writers such as Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty and James Hanley, all of whom wrote Great War texts, self-censorship in the form of condemnation and punishment of those characters who exhibited feminine behavior or homosexual tendencies relieved the Irish Censor from banning their work outright—feminized masculinity was apparently tolerated as long as it was dealt with appropriately in literature. In MacGill's *Fear!*, O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute* and Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, all feminized/queer

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[30] While it is generally common knowledge now that Eva Gore-Booth lived in domestic partnership for many years with feminist and labor activist Esther Roper, Eva's sister Constance Markievicz, also lived in domestic partnership with feminist, labor leader, and republican Helena Moloney according to Rosamond Jacob who had visited the women on a number of occasions at the home they shared with Markievicz's husband—a house near Belcamp Park in the Raheny district (Dublin area) that was intended to be a republican commune based upon that of the Ralahine Commune (a failed venture that did not dissuade Markievicz's enthusiasm for the success of her own). While Markievicz's living experiment failed within three months, and by 1911, she, her husband and Moloney had moved out of the house, they were nonetheless responsible for fulfilling the three-year lease (1909-1912). For more information on this enterprise, see Anne Marreco, *The Rebel Countess: The Life and Times of Constance Markievicz*, (130-134). On May 8, 1912, Jacob also visited the cottage outside of Dublin that Markievicz and Moloney shared—Marreco's biography does not mention this cottage. Jacob notes in her diary that

> there is a young couple named Mulligan, living in the next door cottage, and Mrs. Mulligan cooks for Emer [Moloney] and Madame, and keeps the place tidy for them, which they could never do for themselves. . . In the cottage are two beds, a big cupboard, a dresser, a table, a washstand, a bookshelf, a typewriter, a small table, two armchairs, some tent poles, a painting umbrella, a lot of folded up canvas tents, a few common chairs, some beautiful oil landscape sketches of the Countess's on the walls, and a big wooden box attached to a rope, in which they put their food and haul it up to the rafters to keep it safe from the animals. . .Everyone at St. Anne's was interested to hear about the

characters meet with brutally violent deaths. However, what the snuffing of feminized Irish masculinity suggests in "contradistinction to mainstream cultural discourse" is that the locus for both their "deviant" sexuality and brutality is the state itself, whether it is an imperial or Free one.

Illicit sexual relations that occur within the war texts by Irish women, conversely, act as emancipatory venues whereby the female characters circumvent the confines of the home and state. In *Mary Lavelle* does Mary not only has an affair with the married son of the Spanish family where she is employed as a governess, but also cultivates the friendship of a lesbian who confesses her attraction to her. Catherine, in *A Flock of Birds*, contemplates her daughter's adulterous affair with a Frenchman and her eldest son's intended marriage to a woman far beneath the family's social class with recollections of the secret love she harbored for a cousin during the early years of her marriage. In *The Troubled House* Margaret develops a friendship with a lesbian artist couple (despite her eldest son's seduction by one of the women) and helps her younger cross-dressing, militiaman son with his IRA exploits. As with the female characters' appropriation of patriarchal authority, the women's sexual unconventionality further destabilizes societal norms—heteronormative or otherwise—especially considering that none of the female characters regrets any sexual transgression on her part and none of the relationships ends with death or punishment.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter Two, **Becoming a Brute: Irish Soldiers in World War I,** I focus on the masculinist rewriting of the war in three Irish male-authored novels. I will look at the

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cottage, especially C. Cronsdaile and Helen Beale. [Two friends of Jacob's] were very scornful, they have a great down on Emer and the Countess. (Diaries)

ways an Irish male homosocial Great War is rewritten with brutality and the thrill of bloodshed as opposed to British writing which emphasizes the pleasure of male bonding and revulsion against the violence, an *esprit de corps* that is celebrated in the poetry of Sigfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and other British writers whom Paul Fussell reviews in *The Great War and Modern Memory.* Furthermore, it will provide a point of reference for the war writings of Irish women whose work at times echoes the language of the Great War to reflect the Irish home front experience.[31] James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, Patrick MacGill's *Fear!* and Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute* not only share in creating characters who express "a wild and wicked joy" in killing[32] but also seethe in their hatred of women. In these writings, the feminine is to be destroyed, whether it is a quality a man inherits from his mother or a beautiful young German soldier whose soft, pink flesh is intolerable.[33] Ireland's status as a colonial country (at the time of the Great War) and its resultant association with the feminine, as many post-colonial critics such as Seamus Deane, David Lloyd, Anne McClintock, and Luke Gibbons have acknowledged, underlies a great deal of the aforementioned misogyny and is examined in relation to the WWI texts. This misogyny manifests itself through homophobia as well. Queer theory will help us look at how "homosexual panic" is

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[31] The Irish soldier's experience can also be seen in Pamela Hinkson's *The Ladies Road*, where the heir to one of the Big Houses dies fighting in the same battle with his male lover; and in Margaret Barrington's *My Cousin Justin*, the lead female character is ostracized by both her cousin and husband who, as Great War veterans, revel in their shared experiences of brutality and misogyny.

[32] Harry Ryder in MacGill's *Fear!* delights in shoving his bayonet through a German soldier's gas-mask (139).

[33] In MacGill's *Fear!*, Harry Ryder struggles throughout the novel with the sensitive nature he inherited from his mother, particularly her fear; in Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, the encounter with the enemy's "feminized" body brings about unmitigated brutality towards it.

heightened in the trenches and triggers the soldiers' brutal fury.[34] For instance, Anne Cheng in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief,* considers how the grief and mourning internalized by the "racial other" as a result of colonization/slavery is often expressed through the abuse of one's own or another's body. The Irish soldiers, as the racialized other, are thus brutal because they are responding to their internalized grief over being continually persecuted. Ultimately the violence that Irish soldiers perpetrate against themselves is linked to internalized colonial cues that have taught Irishmen that they are the "other" and must be held accountable for their alterity wherever and however it manifests. While these texts act out the fury against the female and homosexual self-hatred fostered by patriarchal Ireland, it is crucial that their genius be recognized now for understanding the place of World War I in Irish history and culture.

Up/Down the Republic!, the third chapter, focuses upon Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle.* Set in 1922, this novel is a bildungsroman of a young Irish woman who takes a year's reprieve from marrying her fiancé, a Great War veteran whose kisses she finds "no more than a passing discomfort" (32), to work as a governess in Spain. The novel functions as a simultaneous critique of Free State Ireland and Fascist Spain, indicting the

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[34] In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the importance of borderlands in defining her identity—not simply the borderlands between Texas and Mexico but psychological, racial, sexual, gender, and class borderlands as well. I will look at how this "borderland" concept applies itself to trench warfare and its affect on soldiers. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is helpful in examining how the *esprit de corps* and the militarization of the male body are potentized in the trench through brutality as a means of punishing the offending flesh. Additionally, Foucault's theory of "confession" in *The History of Sexuality,* is applicable when considering how the "confession" of the "homosexual secret" (see Sedgwick) is "wrung from a person by violence or threat" in the trench/no man's land and demonstrates how "the most defenseless tenderness and the bloodiest of powers have a similar need of confession" (59). Eve Sedgwick's theory in *Epistemology of the Closet* of how "the closet of imagining a homosexual secret" is threatening (205), reflects how the confines of the trenches and the immediacy of male bonding stoke the secret rage of homosexual desire where the only permissible physical contact in warfare other than the *esprit de corps* is in killing men.

stranglehold the Catholic Church has in the governing of both countries and highlighting the covenants that De Valera and Franco made with the Church.[35] The novel was banned by the Irish censors for its portrayal of the adulterous affair between Mary and the young married son of the Spanish "Big House" in which she is employed, but interestingly, the overt lesbian desire that Agatha Conlon, another Irish governess, has for Mary, apparently passed unnoticed by the censors. Agatha's confession to Mary, that she likes her "the way a man would," occurs outside a church after Agatha has attended Benediction, and although she feels ashamed and guilty about the admission of her "very ancient and terrible vice," Mary consoles her by affirming that what she spoke "wasn't rot" (285-287). This chapter explores how such illicit female sexuality and emigration conspire to subvert the hyper-masculinity of two countries whose civil wars destroy more than simply the peace.

The fourth chapter, **Medea Ireland**, investigates why the mothers in Kathleen Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* and Rosamond Jacob's *The Troubled House* side with their rebel sons during the Troubles inside and outside the home. In *A Flock of Birds*, Catherine Munster comforts her son Christy in prison while he is awaiting execution for an IRA murder he did not directly commit. In *The Troubled House*, Margaret Cullen protects and supports her son Liam and his IRA involvement against the wishes of her husband, who is vehemently opposed to his son's politics and activities. For both mothers, their sons' insurrections trigger their own revolutionary thoughts, not so much

[35] While the Catholic Church had a long-standing influence on the politics in Ireland, in the 1937 constitution, it was given a special provision in officially approving government policies. With regard to the Catholic Church's influence on the Spanish government, it is well known that the Church supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War. However, Backus argues rather that the Catholic Church is more the bugbear of repressive social conditions within Ireland, a convenient scapegoat for the neocolonial Irish and

against the oppressive British imperial government, but rather against the patriarchal confines of motherly responsibility. As Catherine recognizes when staring at a painting of Mary before the body of her crucified son: "Women could escape motherhood, and Medea-like get things all their own way. But only for a time, only for a time" (Coyle 109-110). This chapter considers how the covert activities of Irish mothers within the family are no less stealthy or dangerous than those of civil war revolutionaries fighting their way towards independence for the motherland.

The overall intent of *Troubled Houses: Irish Women Writing the Great War* is trifold: to highlight home front texts written by Irish women during the 1930s that have been given little, if any, critical analysis; to examine how these texts resonate with Irish men's and British women's (anti)war writing of the period; and to explore the literary and socio-political implications of these texts with regard to the myth of Ireland and the Great War, artistic expression, and gender in the Irish Free State during the 'Thirties. The plays of O'Casey, the war fictions of MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty, I want to argue, are texts that must be revived and read by a new generation of Irish readers as a counter to the Widow's Discourse, a continual mythologizing of the Great War and the Troubles. The three home front novels that I have chosen for this project represent a literary cross-spectrum of the issues Irish women were facing in the aftermath of the Great War, the Troubles and the formation of the Free State. It is clear that Irish memory, mythmaking and history continue to give a certain picture to Ireland, the Great War and the place of Irish women in the socio-political landscape—an image that has most recently been

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British states that continue to perpetuate "social mechanisms containing women within families . . . [and] enforc[ing] the production of children" (217-218).

reinforced by Colm Tóibín in *Beauty in a Broken Place*. *Troubled Houses: Irish Women Writing the Great War* tells a different and wider set of stories.

Chapter Two: Becoming A Brute: Irish Soldiers in World War I

In 1985, the Irish band, the Pogues, recorded "And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda," the last track on their album "Rum, Sodomy and the Lash." While the album title itself brings a certain degree of acumen to the subject of this chapter, the song is a tribute to the ANZAC forces that fought at Gallipoli in 1915.[36] But this song is not

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[36] "And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda" was written in 1972 by Eric Bogle, a Scotsman relocated to Australia, after observing his first ANZAC Day parade:

When I was a young man I carried my pack
And I lived the free life of a rover
From the Murrays green basin to the dusty outback
I waltzed my Matilda all over
Then in nineteen fifteen my country said Son
It's time to stop rambling cos there's work to be done
So they gave me a tin hat and they gave me a gun
And they sent me away to the war
And the band played Waltzing Matilda
As we sailed away from the quay
And amidst all the tears and the shouts and the cheers
We sailed off to Gallipoli

How well I remember that terrible day
How the blood stained the sand and the water
And how in that town that they called Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter
Johnny Turk he was ready, he primed himself well
He cased us with bullets, he rained us with shells
And in five minutes flat he'd blown us all to hell
Nearly blew us right back to Australia.
But the band played Waltzing Matilda
As we stopped to bury our slain
We buried ours and the Turks buried theirs
Then we started all over again

Now, those that were left, well we tried to survive
In a mad world of blood, death and fire
And for ten weary weeks I kept myself alive
Billabong
But around me the corpses piled higher
Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over tit
And when I woke up in my hospital bed
I saw what it had done and I wished I was dead

So they collected the cripples, the wounded, the maimed

And they shipped us back home to Australia
The armless, the legless, the blind, the insane
Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla
And as our ship pulled into Circular Quay
I looked at the place my legs used to be
And thank Christ there was no one there waiting for me

To grieve and to mourn and to pity
And the band played Waltzing Matilda
As they carried us down the gangway
But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared
Then turned all their faces away

And now every April I sit on my porch
And I watch the parade pass before me
And I watch my old comrades, how proudly they march

Renewing old dreams of past glory
And the old men march slowly, all bent, stiff and sore

The forgotten heroes from a forgotten war
And the young people ask, "what are they marching for?"

And I ask myself the same question
And the band played Waltzing Matilda
And the old men answer to the call
But year after year their numbers get fewer
Some day no one will march there at all

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
Who'll come-a-waltzing Matilda with me
And their ghosts may be heard as you pass the Billabong
Who'll come-a-waltzing Matilda with me?

simply about the "forgotten heroes from a forgotten war" or "that hell that they called Suvla Bay." Performed by the irreverent, anti-Thatcherite Pogues (the band's "proper" name is Pogue Mahone, a phonetic adulteration of the Irish "póg mo thón" for "kiss my ass"), the song transforms into a bitter requiem for the maimed Irish male body and the state's participation in that destruction.[37] The gravelly-brogued vocalist of this rendition mourns the loss of his amputated legs, grateful that nobody was there "to grieve and to mourn and to pity" as he and other disabled soldiers are carried down the gangway to the tune of "Waltzing Matilda," the same song that was played for them just ten weeks earlier as they shipped out for Sulva Bay. Moreover, just like the vagabond's ghost who forever haunts the banks of the "billabong" (creek) in "Waltzing Matilda," (the vagabond drowns himself to avoid capture for stealing a sheep), the soldiers' ghosts in the final refrain are also heard near the billabong asking "who'll come-a-waltzing Matilda with me." Social deviancy and military service thus coalesce, and with the emphasis on men volunteering to destroy themselves in order to avoid persecution by the state, the Pogues' Celticization of this song aligns insurrection with Irishness.[38]

But why would an Irish band choose to cover a song about the Great War, societal persecution, and punishment inflicted on the Irish male body? Is it merely coincidence

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Never knew there were worse things than dying
For I'll go no more waltzing Matilda
All around the green bush far and near
For to hump tent and pegs, a man needs both legs
No more waltzing Matilda for me

[37] The band's name, (considering the song's focus on the Irish male body), is, in itself, ironic and representative of insurgency.

[38] The fact that early on in Australia's colonial history many Irish were transported there for stealing and other petty crimes, or that in the early twentieth century assisted passage schemes encouraged immigration for a great number of poor and unemployed Irish, only heightens the Irish inflection of a thoroughly defiant song.

that in 1985 when the Pogues recorded "And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda" the Irish National War Memorial outside Dublin was in the midst of being restored, not to be formally dedicated until 1988, fifty years after its initial completion, and seventy years after the Great War (Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* 135)? Or coincidence that in 1928 Sean O'Casey's wrote *The Silver Tassie*, a play in which a working-class Dubliner and football hero volunteers for the "killing machine" of the Western Front and returns home paralyzed and embittered—a play that was rejected by Yeats and the Abbey Theatre for simply acknowledging that Dublin's working classes contributed to the war effort and to the British military (Dungan, *Irish Soldiers and the Great War* 42)? Whether the Pogues intended it or not, their rendition amplifies Irish "national amnesia" regarding the Republic's remembrance of the Great War (F. X. Martin coined the term in 1967 for nationalist Ireland's downplaying of the country's participation in the war) and also taps into the Irish working-class veterans' acrimony at the war's injustice and society's repression of both the soldier and his experience. This figure of the Irish soldier ultimately embodies the rage of the disenfranchised other, whose body serves as the battlefield for race and class warfare, a motif which finds its naissance in the Great War writings of Irish working-class veterans and socialists Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty and James Hanley.[39]

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[39] Patrick MacGill (1890-1963) was born in the Glen of Glenties, Donegal, the eldest child of a family of eleven. At twelve, he left home to work as a farm hand in the Irish Midlands, and at fourteen, he traveled to Scotland where he worked as a navvy and at other laboring jobs for another seven years. Although he only had three years of schooling, he was a voracious reader who spent his spare time reading and writing poetry, and at nineteen, published his first book of poetry, "Gleanings from a Navvy's Scrap-book." MacGill joined the London Irish Battalion in 1914, was wounded at Loos, and wrote several books about his wartime experience some of which are *The Red Horizon* (1916), *The Great Push* (1916), *The Brown Brethren* (1917), and *Fear!* (1921). A staunch socialist, much of MacGill's writing concerns itself with the plight of the working classes. For more biographical information on MacGill, see Aspinwall and Greacen.

While Paul Fussell asserts in *The Great War and Modern Memory* that in the writings of many British soldiers there is an "obvious figure of gross dichotomy" in the prevalence of an "us" versus "them" binary, where "one of the poles embodies so wicked a deficiency or flaw or perversion that its total submission is called for" (79), in the novels of MacGill, O'Flaherty and Hanley, this binary, although topically apparent, is as fractured as the Irish soldiers' identities. Binaries like British versus German, civilian versus soldier, man versus woman, officer versus subaltern, and the like, are not neatly compartmentalized for the Irish working-class soldier whose colonial position within the British Empire was considered tenuous, at best, during the war, and whose class status compounded an already suspect identity. To be Irish and a soldier in the British military, especially after the Easter 1916 Sinn Féin uprising in Dublin, heightened many Irishmen's resolve to prove they were not part of "the insanity of a small section of [Ireland's] people," whose traitorous action against the empire threatened Britain's promise of post-war Irish Home Rule (Redmond 1). Additionally, by serving in a military where officers were drawn from the upperclasses, and the censoring of letters and other documents was a privileged class(ified) effort to manage the war's public representation, being working-class in-and-of-itself was implicitly seditious. Although binaries may appear in MacGill's *Fear!*, O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute* and Hanley's

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Liam O'Flaherty (1896-1984), born on the Aran Islands, joined the Irish Guards in 1915 and was shell-shocked in September 1917 at Flanders. He published two explicit pieces of war prose in 1929—the novel *Return of the Brute* and the short story *The Alien Skull*—yet criticism of his work thus far has tended not to include these pieces (Jeffery *Irish Prose Writers*13-14). Shortly after starting his career as a writer in the 1930s, he "engaged in radical politics and ran up the red flag over the Rotunda in Dublin, holding the building as 'Chairman of the Council of the Unemployed' for three days until ejected" (See Welch, 430).

James Hanley (1901-1985) was born in Dublin, but spent most of his childhood in Liverpool. At thirteen, he went to sea as a ship's boy, and then at the outbreak of war, deserted ship in New Brunswick to sign up with the Canadian army. Gassed in France, he was discharged and returned to Liverpool where he worked at menial jobs until taking up his writing career in the 1930s. For more biographical information, see Rice.

The German Prisoner similar to those that appear in British war writing, the instability of the lines demarcating race and class are entwined with those of gender and sexuality, ultimately ensuring that the binaries' deficiencies, flaws and perversions, intensified through the mechanism of war, are subsumed into the central protagonists' identities. Moreover, these lines, when deepened by male hysteria (shell-shock), contribute to the conflict between homosexual desire and suppression, omnipotence and impotence, so that the trench becomes symbolic of "the closet" and the struggle between the line of public and private knowledge that results in "the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" (Sedgwick 70). The enemy in all three novels is thus found within, and as the disabled Gallipoli veteran laments in his song, "the forgotten heroes of a forgotten war" are all that remain in the end.

Ireland's history as Britain's first and oldest colony and its association with the feminine and racial other as the result of that colonization defines Harry Ryder in MacGill's *Fear!*, Bill Gunn in O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*, and Peter O'Garra in Hanley's *The German Prisoner.* Although Ireland had technically become incorporated into Great Britain with the Act of Union (Ireland) in 1801, throughout the nineteenth century it underwent "two kinds of experience that between them summarized the condition of a country under [British] imperialism . . . It was modernized and Anglicized" (Deane 363). Irish customs, arts and language were suppressed as much by official British policy as by "ambitious parents [and] English-speaking schoolteachers" who wanted their children to assimilate into the dominant English culture (Foster 340).[40]

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[40] See Declan Kiberd's "Deanglicization" in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* for an analysis of Anglicization on Ireland (136-154).

Additionally, in the nineteenth century, a pseudoscientific theory of racial categorization ("scientific racism") developed and assigned traits to a country and its people based upon physical characteristics and whether countries were the conquered or the colonizers:

> The Irish became Celts or Gaels, the British Anglo-Saxons, and each racial grouping was depicted as inalterably opposed to one another in the drama of world-historical conflict. The Celt was given to culture—imaginative intensity, poetry, story, mysticism; the Saxon was given to power—empire, pragmatic politics, commercial greed. (Deane 364)[41]

The pseudoscience further divided countries into "masculine" or "feminine" classification accordingly. The Celts were "repeatedly described as a 'feminine' race, while the Anglo-Saxons were regarded as 'masculine' and therefore the natural rulers" (Livingstone 56). Irish and Jewish men were "represented as the most inherently degenerate 'female races' within the white male gender, approaching the state of apes" and Irish working-class women were "depicted as lagging even farther behind in the lower depths of the white race" (McClintock 55-56). Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold similarly associated the Irish with the feminine, believing that "The Celt is . . . peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy; he has an affinity to it; he is not far from its secret" (56), and Rudyard Kipling once referred to Ireland as a "damn pernicious little bitch of a country" in regard to its desire for Home Rule (66). Ireland's association with the feminine and non-Teutonic worked to justify Britain's

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[41] The proponents of this theory "divided humanity into races on the basis of external physical features. These 'races' were said to have inherited differences not only of physique, but also of character . . . Needless to say, the Teutons, who included the Anglo-Saxons, were placed at the top, black

imperial claim over the country while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal authority over the feminine in all its manifestations in the empire.

While many Irish resisted racist and misogynist inscription by the British in their personal and political lives, challenging such impugning stereotypes through legal, social and martial means, the consequence of anti-Irish racism was a powerful impetus to self-hatred. Anne Cheng in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* notes that the way in which a "racially impugned person *processes* the experience of denigration exposes a continuous interaction between sociality and privacy, history and presence, politics and ontology" which ultimately is "tied to the psychical experience of grief" (x). Furthermore, this grief is not simply that which the individual racial other experiences but is a mutually shared phenomenon between the individual (or individual group) and the dominant culture. As Cheng posits,

> segregation and colonialism are internally fraught institutions not because they have eliminated the other but because they need the very thing they hate or fear. This is why trauma, so often associated with discussions of racial denigration, in focusing on a structure of crisis on the part of the victim, misses the violators' own dynamic process at stake in such denigration. (12)

England's definition of its country and people is as much dependent upon its denigration of Ireland and the Irish as Ireland's self-definition is dependent upon its reflection through the distorting convexity of England's imperial mirror. Resonating the way that the intangible effects of segregation in the United States became a "racist weapon" in

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people—especially 'Hottentots'—at the bottom, and Celts and Jews somewhere in between" (Livingstone 55).

considering psychical injury as a "*naturalizing* injury" (5),[42] the alleged feminine and atavistic traits of the Irish became naturalized, inherent qualities, regardless of whether these qualities existed prior to Ireland's colonization by England or as the direct result of that colonization. The Irish status as victim within the British Empire was thus simultaneously self-and-state perpetuated, and the grief that arose from the trauma of colonization was invariably confronting that victimization—whether in accepting or rejecting it.

Though Ireland may have been considered feminine, and therefore, a powerless country, from the latter half of the nineteenth century on, the political lobbying by such individuals as Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Home Rule Party, and the terrorist activity of groups such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, challenged the notion that Ireland, and the Irish, were passive victims. In the years following Parnell's death in 1891 and the defeat of the 1893 Home Rule Bill, the Home Rule Party along with other groups within Ireland began reinventing themselves. In 1908 Sinn Féin, a separatist organization, was founded and had as its core membership representatives from such Irish nationalistic groups as the Gaelic League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Erin) (Kiberd 191). In 1914, the Ulster Volunteer Force, a unionist organization in Northern Ireland, was founded in response to the passing of the Home Rule Bill in May of that same year that gave Ireland self-governance while remaining part of Great Britain and that allowed for the "opting out on a county

[42] Cheng notes that while the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision may have originally been an "unprecedented judgment about the necessity of examining the invisible but tenacious aspect of racism—of allowing racial grief to have its say even if it cannot definitively speak in the language of material grievance" (4), the defense for Stell v. Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education (1963) argued that separate classrooms for black children were psychologically "healthier" for them, citing Chief Justice Warren's statement in the *Brown* case that "racist effects" are "'unlikely ever to be undone'" (4-5).

basis for six years only" (Foster 470-471). Civil war seemed imminent in Ireland as Unionists in Ulster reacted angrily to the Bill (because they wanted to remain with Britain), but the start of World War I put an end to the civil war before it began (471). Some Irish politicians such as John Redmond, head of the Home Rule Party, saw the war as an opportunity to bring the country together, and he pledged that the Irish Volunteers would support the war effort "wherever they were needed." Instead of defending Ireland "alongside the northern bretheren," however, they were "consigned to Flanders as British cannon-fodder" (472). The majority of the Volunteers who supported Redmond's position (approximately 150,000) took the name "National Volunteers" while the "radical, militant IRB-influenced element" (3,000 – 10,000) called themselves the "Irish Volunteers" (473). As the war progressed, enlistment dwindled and demoralization grew in the National Volunteer ranks while membership in the Irish Volunteers increased along with revolutionary zeal against Britain (473).[43]

Although Harry Ryder, the narrator of *Fear!*, is a barber from the fictitious English village of Little Fobythe, his self-identification with the feminine marks him more as an Irish character than as an English one, according to the pseudoscientific classification system of the day.[44] Ryder starts his war diary during his first days in the trenches and surmises that "in the first place [he is] alone," though soldiers surround him, and that "mateless and fellowless," it is "partly, if not wholly, due to [his] own behaviour" (9-10), believing his victim-status to be self-induced. Stating that he has "no

[43] See Foster "War and Revolution" in *Modern Ireland* for more detailed information on this history (461-493). Additionally, as Myles Dungan notes, Irishmen of military age were "more attracted by jobs in the exempt munitions industry in Britain than they were by military service," and that the decline in enlistment was not entirely due to Republican sentiments after the Easter Rising (1916) (34).

next of kin, no sister, no wife" (10), he begins his narrative by recalling his childhood and how his mother "never spoke much and lived in continual fear of [his] father" (15). Admitting that he "had not the making of a man" in him even though the War Office conscripts him (41), Ryder attributes this to his inheriting his mother's "weak, shrinking character and . . . timid vacillating temperament," though physically he is the "exact cut and replica" of his father (18). It is not surprising, therefore, that Ryder imagines himself alone among dozens of men in the trenches, as for the previous twenty-seven years his world has been associated with the feminine. Kin, in his mind, are comprised of sisters and wives rather than brothers or sons, and though physically as powerful as his father, he identifies with maternal fear as opposed to paternal brute force. Echoing the sentiments of Social Darwinists, Ryder considers that at the root of his cowardliness is a genetic "crime" because "marriage, which has effect on the race and mankind, should have its own rules and disciplines" (19), rules that his parents did not follow when begetting him. His very Englishness lies in question as a result, and his inability to bond with his masculine British comrades accentuates his already deficient masculinity.

Like Ryder, Irish-Canadian Bill Gunn, in *Return of the Brute*, questions his own masculinity, but his doubt derives from camaraderie rather than from reclusivity. Gunn, a powerfully-built man whose strength developed over years of manual labor, resembles "a mastiff, that most ferocious-looking and most gentle of all animals; who, however, when roused or made vicious by brutal treatment, becomes as ferocious as he looks" (15-16). His bunkmate, on the other hand, is quite unfit for trench-life. As a nineteen year old, upperclass, "beautiful boy, with pink cheeks, dazzling white teeth like a girl and big blue

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[44] As Keith Jeffrey notes, much of Patrick MacGill's vast body of war-themed literature derives from his autobiographical experience as a member of the London Irish Rifles, and *Fear!*, written as an

eyes" (19), Louis Lamont's upbringing and timid constitution make it exceptionally difficult for him to survive in the deplorable conditions of trench warfare. His appeals to Gunn to give him a "blighty one" (an injury sufficient enough to have someone sent home from the war), provoke Gunn into repeatedly caviling that Lamont is "like a woman" with his cowardliness (14-15). But what is most troubling about Lamont's behavior for him is that he "associated Lamont's cowardice with himself," and that the youth's unmanly conduct might draw attention to his own fears of being associated with the feminine, especially by the Corporal whom Gunn despises (30), and who refers to Gunn as "a wet nurse" when he tries to comfort Lamont after a shell attack (34). While Gunn initially believes he took on the role of Lamont's protector to play the part of a father or big brother to him, he admits that it was really to nurture himself through the boy as "there had been no gentle influence like this in his [own] rough and nomad life" (19). Additionally, when Gunn receives a letter from Lamont's mother "thanking him for being kind to her boy," he "almost shed tears" (19). Gunn's own need to identify with the feminine and to express his grief over his vicitmization as the racial other is what is stirred by his relationship with the boy who will become the conduit for his grievances.

The history of Ireland's entrance into World War I combined with the British conflation of race and gender with Ireland as a subject country is embodied in *The German Prisoner's* Peter O'Garra, who represents the problematic borderlands that are inherent in Anglo-Irish relations. As Anne Rice notes regarding O'Garra's status as an Irishman within the British military, *The German Prisoner* "undermines the idea of British soldiers as innocent victims, showing rather how the war machine exploits class

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autobiographical account of the war, is no exception (Jeffrey, "Irish Great War Fiction"13).

divisions, misogyny, homophobia, and repressed homosexual desire, inciting soldiers to the vicious slaughter of other men" (76). O'Garra, whose eyes "resembled the dried up beds of African lakes" (Hanley 9), lived on Tara Street, "known as the filthiest street in all Dublin" (8), before he went to war. Aside from the irony of his living on a street named after the ancient kingdom of Celtic myth that represented the height of Ireland's glory (in that it now represents Ireland at its lowest point), he, himself, is depicted as an amalgam of contradictions. In his fifteen years on Tara Street he has been considered

> a strange man—a misanthrope—a Belfast Bastard (his birth-place)—a lousy bugger—a rake—a closet—a quiet fellow—a tub of guts—a pimp—a shit-house—a toad—a sucker—a blasted sod—a Holy Roller—a Tara lemon—a Judas—a jumped up liar—a book-worm—a traitor to Ireland—a pervert—an Irish Jew—an Irish Christ—a clod. (8)

While many of the terms associated with O'Garra define him as a lout in general such as a "tub of guts," a "blasted sod," and a "clod," other terms are complicated with racial and sexual overtones. With regard to O'Garra as the racial "other," his eyes like African riverbeds and the epithet of "Irish Jew" resonate with the British notion of the Irish as being racially akin to Africans and Jews. Furthermore, his racial otherness ostensibly predisposes him to being untrustworthy. As a Jew and a "Judas," his birth in Northern Ireland's city of Belfast (a Unionist stronghold), makes him a "traitor to Ireland" because he did not originate in the pro-Republican counties of Southern Ireland. O'Garra's otherness additionally exposes him as a sexual "pervert," a "lousy bugger," a "rake," and a "pimp." His degenerate "feminine" sexuality, (feminine in opposition to the ideal British "masculine" heterosexuality), suggests the "acute anxiety about the desecration of

sexual boundaries and the consequences that racial contamination had for [British] male control of progeny, property and power" (McClintock 47), and the "litany of insults with which his Dublin neighbors revile him constitutes the same equation between homosexuality and treason found in British propaganda" (Rice 80).[45] O'Garra's status as an unemployed, displaced, racial other is thus inextricably linked to his sexuality and his misanthropic, antisocial, and violent behavior in which his "stalking the women" causes them to flee "in terror" (Hanley 8). Moreover, the boundary between his aggressive heterosexual drive and his implied "buggery" is indistinguishable—as a pervert, his degeneracy is amalgamated in the eyes of society. The fact that it is the Irish of Tara Street that are convicting him of this degeneracy only suggests how embroiled British anti-Irish racism is with Irish self-identity. After all, like the Jews who had brought Christ before the Romans according to *The New Testament*, the Tara Street Irish have delivered O'Garra, the "Irish Christ," to the British army. The civil war on Tara Street is emblematic of the larger one between the Unionists and Republicans.

While men (and women) of all classes served in the war, the physical and moral condition of the lower classes was of great concern to the British government in its efforts to maintain imperial power. With the discovery that Britain's poor military performance in the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902) was due in large part to the "puny physiques, bad teeth and general ill health of the working class recruits," the government undertook a vigorous campaign to improve public hygiene in order to breed a "virile race of empire-builders" (McClintock 46-47). For instance, while only 14,000 out of 20,000

[45] Rice points out that O'Garra's untrustworthiness combined with the question of his sexual identity resonates with British propaganda regarding Irish treachery and sexual deviance surrounding Roger Casement's trial for treason (1916) "following the revelation of scandalous diaries containing evidence of [his] homosexual encounters throughout the colonies" (79).

volunteers for the Anglo-Boer war were deemed "fit to join," in some cities such as Manchester, men's bodies were considered "notoriously inadequate" in that "out of 11,000 volunteers, 8,000 were rejected outright and only 1,200 were accepted as fit in all respects" (Bourke 13). The government thus began monitoring the lower classes by the "weighing and measuring of babies, the regimentation of domestic schedules and the bureaucratic administration of domestic education" (McClintock 47). Although women held the direct responsibility in ensuring that their children were being raised according to governmental standards, men were also accountable for advancing the national interest. Education in "manual training" that began for lower class boys in 1862 "became a compulsory part of the curriculum for secondary school boys in 1904 and for elementary school boys in 1909" in order to prepare them "for manual trades and for masculine domestic duties" (Bourke 13). Additionally, although physical training classes had been instituted in some elementary schools as early as 1871,[46] in 1902, "after consultation with the War Office, the Board of Education issued a Model Course of Physical Training based on the Army Red Book" (181).

With the advent of the Great War, more than a million British men had enlisted by the close of 1914, yet in London, "during the first five months of war, over one-third of those rejected for military service were turned away because of defective chest measurements" (Bourke 172). The physical standards for military service lessened as the war continued, and one response by the army was to form "special Bantam battalions of undersized men" such as those comprised of working class men from the North who worked in steelworks, shipyards or mines and who were not as healthy and tall as men

[46] See Bourke for a more detailed account on the progression of physical training courses in Great Britain (180-198).

from other occupations or areas in Britain (Moynahan 95). Ironically, though their bodies may not have been highly acceptable for military service prior to war, for the vast majority of lower class soldiers who survived the war with their limbs intact, their bodies were in much better physical condition as the result of their wartime activities. Local residents in one working class town, for instance, were "astonished" on seeing how physically improved returning servicemen were: "men were 'pounds—sometimes stones—heavier, taller, confident, clean and straight, they were hardly recognizable as the men who went away'" (Bourke 175). The regimentation of the physical and social body of the lower classes thus produces, according to Foucault, "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" in that discipline "increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (*Discipline and Punish* 138). Bodies that did not improve under discipline, did not meet the standards of manliness, were not only considered "feminine," but threatening to social order as well by their very physical rejection of obedience.

While Irish working-class soldiers also benefited from enlistment and the rigors of war training, their Irishness proved to be especially subversive to military authorities from the Easter 1916 Rising onwards. Most of those who joined the Irish regiments, "and many British regiments to which drafts of Irish soldiers were often diverted," were the "urban working classes (and the unemployed)," as Irish farmers were more apt to emigrate than join up (Dungan 25).[47] Historian Keith Jeffrey notes that "some recruiting calls explicitly emphasised the value of army pay and dependents' allowances," citing the

[47] The Irish Divisions were the 36th (Ulster) Division, the 16th (Irish) Division, the 10th Division, the first Irish division formed which included "far greater proportions of Protestants and southern unionists than did the 16th," and the 7th Dublin Fusiliers, comprised of a "group of middle-class rugby players recruited at Lansdowne Road as well as a contingent of Dublin dockers" (Dungan 18-19).

case of a laborer who discovered that, "with separation allowances, he and his family were 154 per cent better off once he was soldiering" (Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* 19). Irish socialist revolutionary and war veteran, James Connolly, considered this enlistment of Irish working-class men to be "economic conscription," arguing that "British colonial exploitation had so depressed employment and wages in Ireland that men had no alternative to joining up" (19).[48] But whether men joined as the consequence of economic necessity, politics, religious beliefs, or for camaraderie, support for the Irish troops and the war was high during the first years of the war. This support even extended through the Easter Rising in 1916 when approximately 1,800 armed Republican rebels occupied a number of buildings in Dublin, the violent suppression of which resulted in 500 individuals killed and 2,500 wounded, "the majority of whom were civilians caught in the crossfire" (51). Women, in particular, were incensed by the insurgents' actions. As Tim Pat Coogan, in his biography of Michael Collins, describes the public's anger towards the rebels as they are being marched through Dublin's streets to prisons:

> Generally it is the women who are most vituperative. These are 'separation women'. Their only income is the separation allowance they are paid by the British Government while their husbands are away fighting for the rights of small nations. Their comments express both their disgust at the destruction and killing caused by the week-long rebellion and their

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[48] A study by David Fitzpatrick concludes, however, that before the 1916 Rising, "'the readiness of individuals to join the colours was largely determined by the attitudes and behaviour of comrades—kinsmen, neighbours, and fellow-members of organizations and fraternities', rather than by economic, religious or political factors" (Fitzpatrick qtd. in Jeffrey 20).

> fears that the Government may react by cutting off their livelihood. (Coogan qtd. in Dungan 29).

Sean O'Casey portrays a similar Irish working-class woman's reaction to the insurrection in his play, *The Plough and the Star*, when Bessie Burgess, whose son is at the front, curses the rebels for "stabbin' in th' back th' men that are dyin' in th' trenches for them" and proceeds to sing the refrain from "Rule Britania" (III, 220). Apparently, the fact that the rebellion was organized in large part by members of Dublin's middle-and-upper middle classes (Yeats' "Easter 1916" gives an overview of the key players), contributed to the ire of those from the working-class who considered the insurgency a direct threat to their physical well-being and tantamount to class warfare. Furthermore, the concerns of working-class women challenged the purpose of an Irish revolution at all when the people who could most use help were those who were taking the brunt of the consequences.

The British military's response to the Rising was "hell bent on reducing the 'Irishness' of Irish battalions" as a way to circumvent any potential insurrection in the ranks (Dungan 35). From 1916 onwards, "drafts of newly trained Irish troops were, it seemed, being diverted with frustrating regularity to English platoons, while non-Irish drafts were 'diluting' Irish regiments" (35). By the military's mixing the races in this way, it was not simply easier to prevent Sinn Fein from organizing, but the British manly character might infiltrate the Irish feminine nature that was prone to such irrational behavior as rebelling against the empire. Just as the rigors of war-training could discipline the docile, working-class body, depriving the Irish corps of the familiarity of

its otherness would force assimilation into the larger and more masculine corps of the British Empire.

An example of the Irish working-class soldier who aligns race and class oppression with war is Myles MacMahon in *Fear!*. MacMahon joined the army in 1914 because "'twas much easier in the Army than out iv it, explainin' to the old ladies iv both sexes why [he] hadn't joined up" (57), and he ridicules the jingoist reporting that equates dying soldiers with English glory:

> There's never a bit iv change in what they say in the papers . . . It's always our brave boys, our brave English boys, and it doesn't matter a damn whether their skins are black, white or piebald, whether they wear kilts or loincloths, they're still English. What fool writes that, matey? Whoever he is, he's a fool. (56)

MacMahon finds the conflation of all British Empire subjects into Englishness, despite their Celtic or African or Aboriginal or Asian origins, as appalling as the very notion of Englishness itself. He realizes that if the papers recognize the contributions to the British war effort by soldiers from the empire's subject countries, the definition of "our brave English boys" and the England that they represent would be called into question. The association of his Irishness, and the atavistic attributes of the other soldiers who wear "kilts and loincloths" with the feminine, would thus undermine the masculine character of Englishness. Those who subscribe to the notion of a universal Englishness are "fools" to him, and those who coerce others to fight for such a notion become old ladies of "both sexes"—the ladies whom England defends and the ladies who, as atavistic Englishmen, are unable to fight for something that does not include them.

Although MacMahon believes that Englishness has contributed to perpetuating the war, what is central to maintaining it is the oppression of the working-classes (according to him). He tells his platoon mates that it is

> the upper classes that make war in the first place . . . Their money depends on the war. They get the soldiers under their fists and when all's said and done, what is the soldier, but the working man. He's as much under their control in khaki as in corduroy. (59)

Capitalism and war are one-in-the-same, and even if there were no war, the working-class soldier would still be under the fists of the upperclasses. When two of the English soldiers, Crabtree and Shorey, counter that rich men have also joined the war in great number, MacMahon responds by saying that

> if the rich didn't come out and fight he'd have something to say in the matter . . . The seed of business may have been gettin' the working man under control. But the job has become such a big draggledy one that all had to come out, Jerrys as well as ourselves. Rich and poor. It's a great job this, and who the hell knows what it's goin' to lead to. And who the hell cares, either! (59-60)

Ultimately for MacMahon, war and capitalism do not assert themselves merely in the struggle between one country's rich and poor, but rather in a class war that involves the whole world. Germans as well as British, rich as well as poor, contribute in making the Great War a "great job," and the uncertainty of where it will lead civilization is inconsequential to the "big draggledy" business of it. Much of this business is linked directly to British imperialism for MacMahon, for when it is suggested by a couple of

comrades that if men chose not to participate in the war, England would be "in the soup," MacMahon replies that it would be good enough for the British as "they'd get a bit iv the same medicine that they gave Ireland in the old times!" (61). England's subjugation of Ireland is at the core of working-class oppression and the propagation of war for him, and if Germany were to defeat England, British identity along with its imperial status would be subsumed into the position of "other," something which has happened to Ireland since England's first occupation of the country. When an unidentifiable soldier yells out "Damn Ireland" in response, MacMahon defends his homeland by questioning "has any other neutral country put as many men into the field?" (61). As the story takes place in 1917, a year after the Easter Rising and Roger Casement's execution for treason,[49] the military's association of Ireland and insurrection was at its height, and the diluting of Irishness was achieved through the ethnic mixing of troops. While MacMahon's accusations against the upperclasses and his suggestions for a socialist revolution might have appealed to a number of the men, his Irishness decisively alienates him from the bonding necessary to organize politically.

In *Return of the Brute*, class is differentiated in the bodies of Lieutenant (John?) Bull and Bill Gunn, and the relation of master to animal reflects the dominant and submissive status of one man's class and race to the other. Lieutenant Bull, an "officer that a good soldier likes and respects," was "ruthless and brutal in action, but behind the line he looked after his men with zeal, and protected their well-being with the same enthusiasm that a man would show towards expensive and cherished horses or hunting

[49] Roger Casement was executed for treason in August1916 for helping to smuggle guns into Ireland from Germany. His infamous "Black Diaries," allegedly detailing his homosexual desire for colonial "others," was used by the British to drum up negative public opinion for Casement during his trial, and have been

dogs" (38). Unsentimental, he has "no pity for the inefficient or the cowardly," and though Gunn had always "felt comforted by this officer's appearance in a trench," Lieutenant Bull's presence now is unsettling to him as he senses in himself "the growth of something that the ruthless Lieutenant Bull would smash with his stick without a thought, or with a bullet from the heavy revolver he carried on his hip" (38). Gunn, whose body is like a mastiff's, cowers in the darkness, fearfully looking for Lamont, whose feminine nature has recently exposed his own (38).

Unlike Lamont, the upperclass that Lieutenant Bull represents is a masterful one that sets the example for societal order. While the lieutenant inspects the blown parapet of the trench, he brushes the men aside with his "heavy body, without paying any more heed to them than if they were pieces of rubbish or indeed precious dogs," and they "leaned back out of his way in awed silence, thrilled by the nearness of his body, which was covered with a uniform different from theirs" (39). The social order that develops through military training is personified through the lieutenant's body, and the uniform he wears both excites and intimidates the men as they are literally in reach of the power he embodies and afraid of his ability to wield it. Gunn, above all, is aware of the lieutenant's significance. As the faithful mastiff, he would loyally heel to whatever orders Lieutenant Bull would give; but as societal "rubbish" also, he knows that the Lieutenant's authority easily gives him permission to dispose of Gunn and any other member of the lower ranks found wanting in some regard. Even Lamont is subject to the lieutenant's authority, for though he, too, is from the upperclass, his feminine nature makes him suspect both to his masculinity and class. Gunn's friendship with Lamont

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decried by Irish nationalists as British forgeries. The response by those who insist that the diaries are fakes resonates with the colonial self-hatred associated with homophobia.

thus emphasizes his working-class inadequacy further as he has chosen to align himself with an inferior product of the upperclasses instead of the beau ideal, Lieutenant Bull.

Similar to the physical representation of class between the lieutenant and Gunn, in *The German Prisoner*, Elston, a Manchester native, is shaped by class demarcations regarding the body that determine his character as well. Elston, "the Hungry Englishman," is a "kind of human rat" according to O'Garra (Hanley 9) and one whose "ferrity" he had found "repugnant" (10). Smaller than O'Garra, Elston needed to be "pulled . . . a mile" along the front by the Irishman after a shell attack had disoriented the men (18-22), prompting the battalion's sergeant's threats of "put[ing] a bullet in the first man who wavers" (19). As a small and weak man from Manchester, Elston embodies the contempt and distrust the government and military held for the working class soldier who, as a poor specimen of British masculinity, threatens both the cohesiveness and safety of his platoon and that of Britain's social order through his non-submission to corporeal discipline. Furthermore, men who "refused to, or were incapable of, fighting were not deemed to be worthy of active membership in the wider body-politic" as "civilian and martial employment were related" (Bourke 77). O'Garra's disdain for Englishmen, "especially the suck-holing type" like Elston (Hanley 10), is exacerbated by his own disenfranchisement as an Irishman. Physically stronger and more vigorous than Elston, O'Garra is nonetheless denied access to the "wider body-politic" due to his racial otherness. Immediately after surviving the shell attack and pulling Elston to safety, for instance, O'Garra grips him by the throat and declares that he has "a mind to choke [him]. . . To put [him] out of [his] misery" (21) and that "in the moment [O'Garra] first realized [Elston's] cowardice, [he] became unconscious of [his] own strength" (21-22).

Elston's body as a working class man thus serves as the boundary between both class and race, threatening imperial power on the one hand while preventing access to power on the other.

Although the social boundaries between O'Garra and Elston may initially seem insurmountable given their racial and physical differences, the brutal conditions brought on by war encourage bonding between the men that might not otherwise have been likely in their civilian life. For instance, notwithstanding O'Garra's disgust for Elston, "still he remembered that [Elston] was his bed-mate, his one companion in this huge mass of desperate life" (Hanley 10). Gunn and Lamont, likewise, given their class distinction, are "muckin-in chum[s]" (O'Flaherty 14), and even Ryder, the misanthrope, writes affectionately about his "mates" (MacGill 100-106). The contradictory feelings the men have towards one another are in large part due to the military's destabilization of individual identities in order to promote one centralized identity under military control:

> Male bonding was not an inevitable, organic sentiment of war: it was in the interests of military authorities to foster in servicemen a sense of group solidarity, a merging of the individual's identity with that of the battalion. The central features in the military encouragement of *esprit de corps* . . . include the use of uniforms, ritualized humiliation and rites of powerlessness. (Bourke 128)

Similar to Foucault's observation that discipline was crucial to French military regimentation of the soldier's body and his resultant docility, British military training also "invoked manly interaction through discipline: indeed, during officers' training, the lecture devoted to *esprit de corps* was entitled 'Discipline'" (Bourke 128). This *esprit de*

corps was first gained by tapping into men's narcissistic appreciation of the male body in its uniform (which aesthetically enhanced the male form) and then subsequently in the daily display of public nudity which revealed the male body and humiliated the "unfit" while simultaneously encouraging them to transform themselves into the ideal male body (128-129). As Bourke notes, whether bathing, digging trenches in the nude, or walking around naked while their clothes were being fumigated for lice, "dressed or undressed, the aesthetics of military life could rouse men to intense feelings of *esprit de corps*" (130-131).

While the displaying of men's bodies to one another may have been an important factor in male bonding, another significant consideration was the absence of women from men's daily lives. Aside from men missing heterosexual contact with women, "gender roles were more fluid in wartime as men were required to carry out many tasks that had formerly been the preserve of the opposite sex" such as cooking, washing and darning clothes, and nursing each other when sick, wounded or dying (133). Men also took on the roles of wives and female lovers:

> They held each other as they danced. They impersonated women at concerts and dances—and sometimes in their tents afterwards. One officer's servant (a 'batman') was described as a 'lady-like individual'. Another batman characterized himself as 'the Colonel's Slut' who was 'always on hand to tuck [the colonel] up at night. . . [and] in sleep, [men's] bodies easily 'spooned' together. (134-135).

Central to the fluidity of gender roles in the war are the nebulous boundaries between hetero and homosexuality. Although in her introduction Bourke states that "the belief

that the relationships forged in war challenged the primacy of heterosexual love and caused femininity to lose its 'potency," she is quick to point out that such a view is "not borne out here"; in fact, "the female image became increasingly, and more tenderly, potent for men as a result of their wartime experiences" (25). Nevertheless, the words of the soldiers themselves suggest that there was transference of sexual meaning along with that of gender identity, and perhaps any potency of the female image for the men was due to the recognition of femininity within them as the result of their gender role-playing. For instance, the "batman" of the above quote links his servitude to his being the "Colonel's Slut," imbuing sexual connotation with his position as servant whether or not he was sexually available for the colonel. Another man writes in a letter to his wife that he has to stop writing now as "my *wife* is in bed (if you can call it so. 1 blanket on the ground not bad eh) & wants me to keep her warm but it is only a Palestine wife. Another Sussex boy. & we are both Jacks so there is nothing doing..." (135). The soldiers' linking their intimacy with other men to marriage does acknowledge sexual meaning on their part even if "there is nothing doing" to physically consummate those intimate bonds. As Sedgwick notes with regard to the contradictory effects of male bonding within the British and American military, the taboo against men acting upon their homosexual desires is as powerful as the military's required *esprit de corps*:

> In these institutions, where both men's manipulability and their potential for violence are at the highest possible premium, the *pre*scription of the most intimate male bonding and the *pro*scription of (the remarkably cognate) "homosexuality" are both stronger than in civilian society—are, in fact, close to absolute. (186)

Whereas men may have adjusted to the absence of women by taking on gender roles associated with the feminine and relished the camaraderie of an all-male society, the prohibition against homosexual contact was at its peak even though the idealization of the male body, the promotion of male intimacy and the rejection of the feminine in context of race, class and physical otherness would have ostensibly encouraged homosexual relationships. The inevitable tensions that arose from these inherent contradictions of the *esprit de corps* were played out in the bodies of men who struggled with the boundaries between war-induced intimacy and homosexual desire.

What separates Harry Ryder most from the eleven men who form the "multi-hued, multi-mooded composite body" of his platoon (MacGill 100), is his awareness that he is "not like other men," and that the source of his fear must reside in his body (110). He decides that a self-inspection must take place in order to locate his fear's corporal nexus. He disrobes and

> bottom-naked on [his] hand [he turns] [him]self round and round, studying [his] body in whole and detail, from caput to crotch, hip to heel, the bulge of the belly, the hairy armpits, the veining of the legs, the blistered toes, the abject naked helplessness of [him]self. (110)

His self-inspection concludes that there is nothing "noble" within him, that he should hide himself in his khaki, and, for added measure, self-berates: "It is not in keeping with the tenets of military discipline to flaunt [his] poor nudity in the face of the world! In with you! Do up your buttons, tie your puttees, brace your knees, throw out your chest and be a soldier!" Ryder's incorporation of the military ideal for the male body has been effective enough for him to inflict martial discipline upon his own body, trading the

resignation he felt toward his docility prior to the war for a new disgust for both his unsoldier-like body and fear. By dressing down his own body much as an officer would the rank and file, Ryder protects the *esprit de corps* from corruption by extracting himself from it. But this is only illusory, for his self-censorship from the *esprit de corps* intensifies his already questioned masculinity, and thus, reinscribes him deeper into it by forcing him to perform heterosexual identity.

Although Ryder admits that women "don't appeal to [him]" when he is being coaxed by his mates to go on a double-date (77), and feels "frightened" because he knows "nothing about girls" (83) when he meets his intended date, a Wiff named May, his encounter with her results in a heterosexual epiphany. He exclaims to himself that he has "undergone a strange transformation," that something "awkward and raw had gone from [his] being," and that he has "changed, become a different man, a creature conscious of [his] own individuality" because he is "in love" (86). Shortly thereafter, he ships off for France and begins his correspondence with her, sharing his wartime experiences as much as the censors would permit. His foray into his new-found heterosexuality identity eventually leads him to one of the redlight districts in France, again at the coaxing of his mates. Though Ryder complains that the "attraction of sex makes itself manifest in word and action" for his mates, with him "it is a subject of thought hidden and secret" (242). He feels there is something "wrong, and foreign in it, something repulsive to [his] taste" (245) about procuring the services of a prostitute. But he rationalizes that since murder is wrong and that he, as a soldier, has killed a man, and that women "gentle creatures at home in England, were ready to go out into the public places and applaud those who had

acquired fame killing their fellow men," having sex with a woman could not be so evil (244-245). However, after Ryder has sexual intercourse with the French woman, he

> suddenly became conscious of all that had taken place, rose and staggered to the door. [He] went outside and made [his] way back to the billet feeling disgusted with [him]self and more unhappy than [he] had ever been. Something strong and sustaining seemed to have slipped out of [his] life . . . No mishap in future would be more than [he] deserved. [He] could face with perfect equanimity the blows of misfortune. Even a certain self pride and reckless indifference to danger was suddenly [his]. (246)

The immediacy of heterosexual physicality becomes for him a life-sapping experience, the resultant self-disgust conjuring a death-wish. Whereas the idea of heterosexual love is something that is tolerable, even desirable as it gives him an individuality that does not separate but includes him in the ranks of men, the physical manifestation of heterosexual intercourse is against his nature. While sex, for inherently heterosexual men, is something that is apparent in both word and deed, for Ryder, it is both hidden and secretive. This secret functions as a type of "closet" according to Sedgwick, a closet not "in which there is a homosexual man," but rather "a closet of, simply, the homosexual secret—the closet of imagining a homosexual secret" (205). Ryder's need to both exclude himself from the *esprit de corps*, because he does not represent it adequately, and also adhere to its dictates, because he subscribes to it, forces him to reveal the homosexual secret to himself. His disgust at committing the heterosexual act discloses the secret that was sustaining him—that as long as he could imagine he was in love with

a woman and did not have to consummate that love, he could fully participate in the *esprit de corps*. Now that the secret is revealed, this participation is impossible, and misfortune, even death, seems his only recourse to prevent the secret's public disclosure.

The homosexual secret is something that Gunn in *Return of the Brute* wishes suppressed as well, but his relationship with Lamont continually threatens its exposure. The military discipline that had shaped Gunn's effeminate Irish body into that of a masculine British soldier is eroded through his association with Lamont, whose "cowardice was sapping his sense of discipline; that extraordinary religion of the soldier which is proof against the greatest tortures; something that is brutally beautiful" to Gunn (O'Flaherty 20). Whereas Gunn could overcome his wife, who "was just like" Lamont, leaving her forever after "giving her a bloody good hiding" prior to enlisting (17), he is unable to resist Lamont's lure into an undisciplined, impulsive alliance with the feminine. The youth's persistent caveats in escaping the *esprit de corps* through self-mutilation are evidence of "curious feminine cunning" for Gunn, and it "unnerved him, and made him also feel the temptation to do something shameful and desperate" (21). He experiences some momentary relief, however, in "combating the seductive temptation of his comrade," when it is announced that the platoon will soon be going into battle, and he becomes "most excited in his ejaculations" about the imminent combat (40-41). The sexual content of the language used to describe his reaction reflects the feminine temptation of homosexual desire that is relieved through the masculine "ejaculations" permissible within the *esprit de corps*. His fear of doing something shameful or desperate, given his pull towards effeminacy, is temporarily suspended, as the anticipation of proving himself a man again through battle is moments away. Yet when

the battle fails to immediately materialize, he winds up committing a desperate act nonetheless.

Looking out across No Man's Land, Gunn first "allows his hatred for Corporal Williams to assert itself in action" (70), and "impelled by a savage and irresistible impulse, he leaned forward, rested his rifle against the sheet of zinc and fired several times at the hill in front" (71). The impotency of no fighting, combined with the rage he feels towards the Corporal who outwardly questions his masculinity, result in an action that could potentially draw fire upon his entrenched platoon. As a result, the Corporal and Sergeant Corcoran, "a lean, dandified fellow, with a Kaiser moustache and bright blue eyes like a woman" (75), proceed to persecute him by punching, kicking and shouting at him in order to "use Gunn as a butt for maintaining the iron discipline which is necessary to make soldiers suffer the unspeakable tortures and indignities of war with resignation" (75). The irony of the effeminate Irish sergeant working in tandem with an Englishman to enforce military discipline speaks to the contradictory nature of the *esprit de corps* in both encouraging a masculine ideal and nullifying the individual man by subsuming him via discipline's consequential docility. Though the sergeant may be dandified, his effeminacy does not exclude him from the "brutally beautiful" discipline that keeps masculinity in line. Gunn, the working-class Irishman, on the other hand, needs to be made the example of how the feminine, if left unchecked, can weaken the *esprit de corps* when men act individually instead of performing for the benefit for the whole corps. Gunn realizes how his actions were for naught in protecting Lamont from Corporal Williams' wrath when Lamont does not show any empathy towards him and the abuse he suffered from the non-commissioned officers. After he admits that he gets

himself "bawled off over" Lamont, and that all his trouble "happened over [Lamont] last night" (80),

> now Gunn hated the youth and was amazed at himself for having been such a fool as to defend him, work for him and suffer the mockery of the platoon on his account, for the past three months. This little fellow with the damned subtlety and insincerity of a woman! (80)

The discipline that Gunn suffers helps him see that his foray into the feminine through his friendship with Lamont ostracizes him from the platoon. Gunn's choosing Lamont over his platoon is akin to a man choosing a woman, a subtle and insincere one at that, over his mates. The *esprit de corps* thus requires from Gunn that he transfer his feelings for Lamont onto the body of the entire platoon.

Conversely, in as much as O'Garra and Elston are mutually dependent both as fellow soldiers and "bed-mates," the tensions resulting from their intimacy and concomitant desire are expressed through violent terms and actions. After their battalion is moved up to the frontline and the men are hunkered down in the trenches waiting for their orders to attack, they all knew that before long "the secret rage lurking in the ground beneath their feet would burst forth" (Hanley 18). As soon as the whistle blew that sounded the attack, O'Garra and Elston along with the others, were "over the top" of the trenches and into No Man's Land:

> And now every sound and every movement seemed to strike some responsive chord in the Irishman's nature. He hung on desperately to the Manchester man. For some reason or other he dreaded losing contact with

him. He could not understand this sudden desire for Elston's company. But the desire overwhelmed him. (18)

The "secret rage" of the battlefield and its accompanying violence are the mortar for O'Garra's overwhelming desire for Elston, a desire both instinctual and responsive to his nature. This secret rage, similar to Ryder's secret fantasies, provides the cover for the homosexual secret. The confines of the trenches and the immediacy of male bonding stoke the secret rage of homosexual desire where the only permissible physical contact in warfare other than the *esprit de corps* is in killing men. The boundaries between affection and desire and disaffection and brutality towards men thus become progressively indistinguishable for O'Garra and Elston as the war continues and provoke increasingly violent responses from them. Throughout the text, for example, both men use the term "bugger" (the British equivalent for the term "faggot"), to express their disdain for others: "That bugger in front wants to cheer up" (14); "Can't you see that bugger behind you" (19); and "Why not finish the bugger off, anyhow?" (25). Their conflation of "bugger" with soldiers and loathing signals their "imagining a homosexual secret" of trench warfare that they cannot fully articulate. Other men become the buggers, the carriers of this secret rage for them, while O'Garra's overwhelming desire for Elston remains a secret that he "could not understand." Yet as the horrors of war begin to unnerve the men and shell shock takes hold of them, the closet also begins to reveal itself to them, much to their displeasure.

Shell shock, as a variation of male hysteria, was officially recognized as a disorder beginning with The Great War, yet male hysteria in general was clinically identified as early as the seventeenth century and became associated to some extent in the

nineteenth with both "unmanly, effeminate, or homosexual" men (Showalter 64) and a disorder more attributable to the lower than upper classes (66-67).[50] English physician Thomas Laycock believed, for instance, that male hysteria was due to a "lack of virility" and he described his hysterical patients as "fat, pale-faced, effeminate looking men" with "flabby wasted testicles" (Showalter 64-65). Additionally, the nineteenth century French physician Jean-Martin Charcot, remarked in his observation that "poor and marginal males suffered from hysteria much more often than successful ones did," that hysteria hides "'in the working class and among manual artisans'" and that "'we must also search for it in the gutter, among the beggars, the vagabonds, and the dispossessed, in the poor houses and perhaps the jails and penitentiaries'" (Showalter 67). The locus for male hysteria thus became situated in dispossessed masculinity in that men perceived as "unmanly"--physically, emotionally, sexually, and hierarchically--were associated with the feminine ("hysteria" derives from the Greek word "hystera" meaning "uterus") and not qualified, therefore, to fully participate in conventional society.

The connotation of male hysteria with the feminine and "other" prevailed until the first decades of the twentieth century when the advent of World War I forced a more complex diagnosis for hysteria. While English military physician Charles S. Myers noticed that many British soldiers were exhibiting symptoms common to male hysteria such as loss of voice, paralyzed limbs, headaches, amnesia, insomnia, and overall general emotional distress, he was reluctant to diagnose British soldiers as "hysterical, and so he suggested that the symptoms might be caused by the physical or chemical effects of proximity to an exploding shell"—hence the term "shell shock" (Showalter 72). In 1916,

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[50] Some of the terms associated with male hysteria are "neurasthenia, hypochondria, phthiatism, neurospasia, eleorexia, koutorexie, Briquet's syndrome, shell shock, or post-traumatic stress disorder"

shell shock "accounted for 40 percent of casualties in combat zones," and if excluding "men sent home with wounds, [it] was responsible for one-third of all discharges from the army" (Bourke 109). Although shell shock affected men from all classes, military authorities and physicians were hesitant to accuse upper class men of hysteria/cowardice for obvious political reasons and, in result, distinguished between the types of neurasthenics based on the man's class:

> Thus, most sympathy was reserved to those suffering anxiety neuroses (the form predominantly experienced by officers) as opposed to hysteria (the form predominantly reserved for privates) . . . [believing that] Public school training and military discipline taught [officers] to suppress their instinct of fear . . . As Major-General Sir W. P. MacPherson and his team summarized it: 'Any soldier above the rank of corporal seemed possessed of too much dignity to become hysterical.' For military authorities, hysteria was more likely to conceal cowardice. (Bourke 112)

The belief that shell shock victims were among the "dregs of society" extended into the civilian population; certain English tabloid newspapers such as the *Evening Standard* even referred to these soldiers as "degenerates" (Showalter 73). Furthermore, it was thought by some Freudians that "war neurosis has a sexual origin, and that the latent homosexuality of fighting men was brought to the surface by the male environment" (73). British aversion to associate male hysteria with the English soldier and moreover, with England's elite class, reinforced the notion of Britain as a masculine nation while simultaneously reinscribing all the "others" who did not fit into its ideal as feminine. The

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(Showalter 66).

Irish soldiers, especially after 1916, were particularly punished for behavior "unbecoming" that expected of the British soldier. Although "268 men were executed for desertion [and] 18 more shot at dawn having been found guilty of cowardice" between August 1914 and March 1920 (Dungan 88), all Irish soldiers from 1916 onwards "convicted of cowardice or desertion did not escape execution" (92). Ultimately, the Irish and those considered "other" by the British, whether due to their lower class status, homosexuality or race/ethnicity, found themselves further removed from what little social power they had previous to the war as the war exacerbated their disenfranchisement through their "hysterical" reaction to its brutality.

In *Fear!*, the story of a young soldier shot at dawn casts a pall upon the entire platoon, which is leaving the front lines after its recent foray in the trenches, and personifies Ryder's own internal narrative of fear. When MacMahon notices that Shorey stops to say a prayer at a particular location along the road, Shorey explains that his prayers are for a nineteen year old mate of his who was shot for desertion two years earlier. Shorey begins his story by pointing out that the lad was "a well-built boy, the very spit o' ye, Ryder" (MacGill 191), and that when a mine had exploded one day near their platoon, burying everyone but the boy, the youth ran off in a panic behind the lines. Captured a week later, "'is shoulder plates off, 'is hat badge gone," he was "taken afore the A.P.M., crimed and court-martialled" (192). The execution of the boy did not go as planned according to Shorey, as the firing squad, sickened by what they had to do, did not aim for the heart. Instead, the Provost Marshal "had to finish the job with his revolver" which in turn "broke the Prov. up," forcing him to convalesce in England "a bloomin' wreck . . . nine months in dock, 'e 'ad" (201).

MacMahon reacts the most angrily of all the men and growls that killing a man for fear is "wrong" (195). Sergeant Haddock, on the other hand, who has been listening in to the men's conversation, quips that his "ole woman can sit about a bit when she 'as nothin' to do, but if there's a job she's up and at it with the best of them. Fall in!" (195). The men's sympathetic response to the boy's plight and the Irishman's conclusion that the military is unjust necessitate the non-commissioned officer's dismissal of the story and their reaction to it. By comparing the men, particularly MacMahon, to his wife, the sergeant purposefully feminizes both the men and their reaction to the story. This feminization has the desired effect on the platoon as order is reestablished and any misgivings about the military are quelched. For Ryder, however, the story is internalized and he feels as if he were "the guilty man [him]self, that [he] was guilty of the failing for which [the boy] had died" (195). His apprehension leads him to

> suppose [that he] were tried for physical cowardice and moral cowardice, suppose [that he] had courage to give to the world [his] own feelings with regard to war, suppose—but, no, why think of [himself]! . . . The war, its terror and horror, multiplied themselves a thousandfold in [his] imagination. The mind became a diseased spot, and all faculties of brooding thought had set themselves there like germs on a sore, threatening to drag [his] body from the hinges of health and steep [his] soul in some incurable disorder. (195-196)

Though Shorey had made the initial connection between the boy and Ryder, presaging Ryder's internalization of the boy's plight with his own, it is the self-repression of war and its terror that is most troubling for him. Cowardice is not so much running away

from the war, but fearing to speak the truth about it. Ryder's mind and his imagination thus become the locus for the cankerous disease within him whether it is associated with cowardice or his hidden, sexual fantasies.

The activities of the preceding night are what resonate most for Ryder in thinking about the boy, especially his misgivings about the war and his participation in it. When his platoon sets out on a raid of a German trench in the middle of a gas attack, Ryder is blanketed in a fog. In the confusion of the smoke and darkness, he falls into the German trench, stumbles upon a cluster of Germans, and tosses a grenade at them. One survivor of the blasts lunges towards him, collapses, and Ryder is seized with "a wild madness" to "hack and kill" everyone in the trench (138). When another German rushes him, Ryder grabs him by the "soft throat" and is "filled with a mad delight" as he sees "the man's arms waving comically, the legs bending under him, his body sinking down, and his heavy mass wriggling grotesquely" as he chokes him (138):

> This man was now rising to his feet, but, filled with a burning feeling of malignancy, trembling with a wild and wicked joy, [Ryder] lunged the steel forward, and caught the man on the face, shoving the bayonet through his gas-mask and through his head. (139)

The delight and joy Ryder experiences in killing a man with his bare hands is imbued with a sadistic homosexual desire. Repulsed by heterosexual intimacy and afraid that his feminine nature may reveal his homosexual secret, the only permissible way in which he could enjoy physical contact with a man and remain part of the *esprit de corps* is through violence. The fog thus functions as a "closet" for him, hiding his identity and desire from other men while enabling him to partake in the physical intimacy of hand-to-hand

combat. The pleasure he experiences in manipulating another man's body through pain, culminating in the symbolic phallic release of his plunging a bayonet through the man's face, leaves him in a equally suggestive state: "the energy of a minute before was gone, leaving [him] weak and nerveless" as "all the stay of [his] spine had dissolved in the fog" (140). Yet as the fog and the intensity of the experience dissipate and he makes his way back to his platoon, Ryder imagines that an "invisible spectre" is stalking him, concluding that it is that of "a man who was alive a few minutes before, the man whose soft throat [he] held in [his] hand, the soldier whom [he] killed" (140).

The guilt Ryder feels from not simply killing the man, but taking pleasure in killing him, both accentuates his identification with the shell-shocked boy and predicates his own imminent death. The spectre again appears to him in a dream in the days before he dies. In his dream, a man in a "soft, caressing voice" asks him to "take his hand and follow" him into No Man's Land (294). Instead of coming upon putrid corpses, Ryder meets other "ethereal creatures," (some resembling Ryder's mates who had been killed) and they tell him that all men, regardless of their nationalities, "are brothers" (294). His guide then unveils his face to Ryder, showing him a deep scar on his cheek: "Fear compelled you to do this, Private Ryder, for you had not the courage to stand for opinions of your own!" (297). Like the fear he feels the shell-shocked boy shares with him in not speaking out against the war (and also that of his mother who never confronted his abusive father), Ryder's dishonesty regarding the war and the irreconcilability of his desires leads him to commit atrocities such as murdering one's "brothers." The German guide appears to vanish after confronting Ryder, but then quickly returns, and his face "swept back to [Ryder] again until its lips almost rested" on his, causing Ryder to yell

"with horror" because the face is "so weak, pinched and pitiful, with a chasm, abysmal [sic] in depth, sunk in the cheeks" (297). More than (literally) facing his own fears of not making public his opinions about the war are his fears of making public his homosexual desires. The suspended kiss between Ryder and the German spectre and his horrified reaction to the "chasm" in its cheeks, the damage of which he is responsible, are what trouble him the most. Ryder, above all, wants to love and be loved by other men in a non-violent, non-destructive manner, and war makes this impossible. After being awakened from this dream and plunged into battle, Ryder runs away from the barbarity in a panic after watching some of his mates die, and comes upon an abandoned, war-ravaged church. He regains his composure there, and when he looks at the damaged figure of Christ on the crucifix, he "cannot help thinking that He would receive [him] if [Ryder] went to Him," for of Christ, "Ryder is not afraid . . . Christ is merciful . . . He is Love" (301). Unlike the tortured German whom Ryder kills and whom he fears, Christ, the embodied symbol of brotherhood that was crucified, represents both masculine mercy and love to Ryder. It is with the hope of Christ's acceptance and love for him that Ryder returns to the trenches and is killed.

Just as shell-shock and the deflection of homosexual desire lead Ryder to his death, both infiltrate the trenches in *Return of the Brute*, destroying the *esprit de corps* by inciting Gunn to perform his identity as "other" within the platoon. The futility of the orders given to the platoon, such as taking over insignificant trench positions in the dark which results in unnecessary injury and death, exacerbates the overall frustration within the unit and the struggle Gunn has between his desire for Lamont and his desire to uphold

the *esprit de corps.* After Appleby drowns in a muck-filled shell-hole, Gunn is unnerved by Lamont's apathy when he is told of this death:

> While Lamont was panicstricken and acting like a frightened girl, Gunn had merely been irritated with the lad. He had felt superior to him, even though he was being used as a servant and corrupted by ideas of illegal means of escape. Now it was worse, when the lad had suddenly become callous with a strange look in his eyes. He was more like a woman. (Hanley 94-95)

While Lamont's systemic panic and girlish behavior may not be as threatening to Gunn even though the lad's unmasculine and improper class decorum influence Gunn's reaction to the war, the prospect of Lamont's effeminacy being uncontrolled by Gunn is what disturbs Gunn most. Gunn, unable to contain his wife's behavior without beating and then leaving her, fears his inability to control Lamont's feminine determination will somehow further damage his own masculinity and his position within the *esprit de corps.* Yet his feelings towards the boy and the war are anything but fixed and they easily change again shortly thereafter when Lamont simply asks Gunn "what's the matter, Bill?":

> The youth's voice was tender. Gunn looked at him. Seeing the boy's beautiful face, with despair in his young eyes and his pale lips drawn tightly together to repress the emotion caused by a sudden memory of his mother, Gunn nearly broke into tears. He wanted to say something kind to the lad, or to take him in his arms and run out of the trench, out of that damned, sodden, rotting place, to green earth and peace. (98)

The tenderness of Lamont's voice and his physical beauty provoke Gunn's tenderness and desire to either say "something kind" to him or to carry the youth (like a bride) out of the war into the greener pastures of peace. Gunn's equivalence between the two actions reflects his larger ambivalence towards Lamont and the war—speaking kindly to the youth entrenched in the misery of war and removing him from that misery are as problematic for Gunn as choosing to enact his homosexual desire with Lamont or homosocially bonding with his band of brothers. If Gunn initially appears to lean towards fleeing the war with his Ganymede, this decision, as all such decisions for him, is short-lived as his tenderness towards Lamont immediately evaporates when he learns that the boy did not put their rationed cheese in a tin where the rats could not get to it. Gunn "was now determined to conquer his feeling for the boy, to cease hating the Corporal, to become a good, obedient, thought-less soldier once more. He must root out the weakness inspired in him by Lamont" (99). The mercurial nature of Gunn's feelings towards Lamont and his platoon are embedded in his fragile war-torn psyche and encroaching shellshock, and his status as the Irish other further obscures his feelings. Desiring to love and protect Lamont ("stick to me, kid . . . And, by God! If anything happens to you . . .)" (110) and wanting to be accepted by the *esprit de corps* are incompatible, accentuating his outsider status because only he placed himself in such a dilemma. Ultimately, it is Lamont's action in willing himself to death that removes the responsibility for making a decision from Gunn, an action that provides Gunn with license to destroy the platoon.

While Gunn's ambivalence towards his masculine identity and sexuality may intensify his difference within the *esprit de corps*, his succumbing to shellshock is what eventually separates him both from the other men and from his humanity. Lamont's

descent into war-induced despair may make him more like "a woman" according to Gunn, but for Gunn himself and for other men, war removes their humanity entirely, returning them to their brutish origins. When Gunn envisions the Corporal transforming "into a hairy animal . . . a brute which he wanted to kill," he becomes "terrified," remembering the "dreadful consequences of such an act" as killing one's superior officer no matter how vile a character he may be (73). Yet both the edict against killing an officer and the consequences of following through with the action are part and parcel of a corrupt establishment Gunn believes engineers the impotent hypocrisy of warfare where killing is required as long as it is ordered and not turned against those who demand it:

> "Up there they've got it," he said, tapping his forehead. "They can do what they like with us. Chucking us out of our post last night, without giving a damn what happened to us. All day they have us mucking about. What for? Just for fun . . . They don't know. They don't care. They're full of rum. By Christ! Appleby and Friel don't care either. They're dead now, I wouldn't mind if they died fighting. But there hasn't been a shot fired. Not a bloody shot. (136)

The total authority the military hegemony wields castrates the enlisted man's ability to both protect himself and perform as a soldier. The vacuous and apathetic orders result in unnecessary deaths, deaths that the soldiers cannot predict or prevent because they have no say in battlefield strategy, let alone the strategy of their own survival. Moreover, unlike the fog that provides some measure of closet protection to Harry Ryder's homosexual secret, the constant movement of Gunn's platoon from the cover of the trench to open, impenetrable ground puts both lives and the homosexual secret in

jeopardy. Friel's death occurs when Lamont, exhausted from his futile digging into the "exposed ground, which offered only a few inches of cover," and terrified of being killed (118-119), throws himself against Friel and tries to crawl underneath him for cover (119). In moving Lamont away from him, Friel exposes himself to enemy fire and is killed (119). Lamont's action may have been the immediate cause for Friel's death, where in the open space of trench warfare the homosexual secret's attempts to hide inevitably lead to death, but for Gunn, the true impetus for Friel's death originates in the military hegemony itself. The irony of the *esprit de corps* fostering homosexuality yet forbidding it and demanding men kill but not permitting them to do so eventually destroys men through its hypocrisy. The shellshock that manifests itself as the result of the soldier's conundrum is only a harbinger of the destruction that will necessarily follow.

While Gunn's shellshock may fixate on the Corporal's constant harassment of him and Lamont, (writing their numbers down for the smallest infractions), it originates from the hopeless condition of trench warfare and his dehumanization as the disenfranchised and ethnic other. After all the men collapse in exhaustion from their abortive digging, Gunn's sight blurs and

> through the blur he saw the Corporal, not in his human shape, but transformed into a hairy brute. He wiped his eyes fiercely and looked again. He stopped breathing with terror. Instead of the Corporal he saw an uncouth animal, like a gorilla, crouching in sleep (147).

The antediluvian metamorphosis of the Corporal from a man into a gorilla quickly extends itself in Gunn's eyes to other men as well: "To his horror, he had a suspicion that if he looked anywhere but at his rotating thumbs he would see hordes of hairy brutes

wandering about, all watching him with bloodshot eyes as they wandered about, floundering in the mud" (148). Gunn's horror at the idea of not simply observing a man turn into a brute but having the brutes observe him is tempered only by his focusing on his opposable thumbs, a marker on the Darwinian evolutionary scale that separates man from beast. Yet the more desperately he tries to maintain his humanity in No Man's Land by focusing on this marker, the more the brutes keep "springing up all around him, moving about, making strange gestures with their paws, calling on him to join them" (148). What is most horrifying to Gunn is that his disevolution as a man originates in the trenches' primordial ooze, the call of the wild resounding in his Irish, working-class roots. After all, he is the only one in his unit who sees or identifies with the brutes, and the only one who recognizes the feminine nature at his core, a sure sign of his low-status on the Social Darwinist scale.

The conflation of the uncivilized with the feminine manifests itself in Gunn's perception that his "countenance" was "assuming the expression of a brute and his body . . . becoming possessed of superhuman strength" (148-149), spurring him to attempt to bludgeon the Corporal, a threat which polarizes his unit (156). Though filled with brute strength, Gunn emotionally implores the Corporal why "can't [he] give a bloke a chance?" (157) and to tell him what is it that the officer has "against him" (158). The Corporal, disarmed by Gunn's ardent candor, "faced Gunn now as man to man and was silent because he was an inferior man. It was a struggle between two brutes, and Gunn was the superior brute" (158). Rather than brute force determining who is the better man, feminine emotionality determines the superior brute, and the only response the Corporal has for Gunn is that he has nothing personally against him though he is "responsible for

disciple in this section" (158). The Corporal's harassment of Gunn is directed solely towards protecting the *esprit de corps*, and although Reilly, one of the only career soldiers in the platoon, warns him that Gunn should be sent back from the lines as he is "going mad" and is a danger to the unit (162-163), the Corporal responds that Gunn will not "escape [him] that way" (162-163). Gunn's feminine, undisciplined otherness needs to be either tamed or destroyed by the Corporal, and with Lamont's self-willed death, the mortal combat between Gunn and the Corporal is ensured. Gunn seizes his opportunity to attack the Corporal when they are alone together in No Man's Land, and they begin fighting "in silence, breathing heavily, tossing about on the ground, rolling over and over, butting with their heads, kicking and biting like animals" (185) until Gunn is able to pin the Corporal and strangle him. "Uttering queer sounds," Gunn begins to "mangle the body with his bare hands," then runs off towards the enemy and is machine-gunned to death (186-187).

Similarly in "The German Prisoner," while the *esprit de corps* with its emphasis on male bonding combined with O'Garra's Irishness and Elston's fragile physique challenge the boundaries marking gender and sexual desire, both men succumbing to shell shock not only reinforces their otherness but heightens their self-perception of that difference as well. Immediately after they are over the top of the trenches and into No Man's Land, a shell explodes near them, killing an officer whose head is blown into Elston's back. Elston, "drenched in blood," starts screaming "like a stuck pig" believing that he has been killed (Hanley 19). O'Garra reassures him that he has not been killed, and as they struggle forward, a fog descends on the battlefield making it "impossible to see, to hear, to feel," numbing "all the senses" (20). Both men become nervous about the

"bloody fog's thickening" and realize that they might have gone "too far" (21). O'Garra thinks to himself:

> Yes. There was the possibility of [going too far] . . . and then he must have dragged this English coward some distance too. Before they were aware of it, the fog had blotted everything out. They were now conscious only of each other's presence. This fog had separated them from all that madness, that surging desperate mass of matter; that eyeless monster; that screaming phalanx. The fog became so thick it was almost impossible for them to see each other. (21)

While Elston's shell shock, his English cowardliness, may have been the cause for their becoming lost, it also serves as the impetus for O'Garra's impending shell shock. The "madness" of war numbs the men of all sensation till they were "now conscious only of each other's presence." Shell shock separates the men from both rational thought and masculine identity by distorting the boundaries of heteroreality. Thus, like the secret rage, the fog similarly acts as a "closet" for confining the homosexual secret by shielding the men's shared consciousness from public disclosure. Yet as it is "impossible for them to see each other" at this point, it is only through their acclimation to the fog, to the closet, that they can begin to recognize themselves and the secret.

While Elston and O'Garra are suffering through their shell shock, a young German soldier emerges from out of the fog whose appearance triggers their violent recognition of the homosexual secret and their relationship to it. After recuperating from their moment of panic, they are surprised by the approach of the German soldier whose

hands are raised above his head in surrender and who refers to them as "Camerade. Camerade" (24):

> He was a youth, about eighteen years of age, tall, with a form as graceful as a young sapling, in spite of the ill-fitting uniform and unkempt appearance. His hair, which stuck out in great tufts from beneath his forage cap, was as fair as ripe corn. He had blue eyes, and finely moulded features. (24)

Although O'Garra and Elston look at the soldier and smile, he rightly suspects it is a "sinister" smile and he tries to move away (25). Elston springs upon him, tosses him into the bottom of a shell hole and spits into his face, blaming him for starting the war and for the fog (26). O'Garra, on the other hand, blames Elston, "the coward" he had to take care of, instead of the youth (26-27). As if in the spirit of compromise, they both choose to brutalize the prisoner, kicking his face in until "it resembled raw beef" (27), continuing until "no further sound came from that inert heap" (28). Afterwards, they reminisce about their early days in the war when they gang-raped an old woman (29).

Whereas O'Garra and Elston are only partially conscious of the homosexual secret prior to the German soldier's appearance, his presence as the embodiment of masculine beauty and the source for the war compel the men to exact some sort of truth from the situation through confession. The act of confession, according to Foucault, is the "procedures for telling the truth about sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret" (*History of Sexuality* 58). Furthermore, confession, "when it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative" is "wrung from a person by violence or threat," and thus "the most

defenseless tenderness and the bloodiest of powers have a similar need of confession" (59). Both the fog and the soldier's arrival with it are troublesome to the men who see the connection between the two but cannot articulate its significance and attempt to elicit it through violence. However, while their violence in gaining some sort of confession is focused on the prisoner, it instead results in O'Garra and Elston opening up to each other. They laughingly share the memory of their rape of the old woman and then decide they should urinate on the soldier together (Hanley 29). "Relieved" and "refreshed" after the act, they think about the fog:

> This desire, this hope that the fog would lift was something burning in the heart, a ceaseless yearning, the restlessness of waters washing against the floodgates of the soul. It fired their minds. It became something organic in the brain. Below them the figure stirred slightly. (30)

The torturing of the prisoner, destroying his physical beauty in the process, first evokes the memory of a sexually violent act and then prompts the men to further denigrate the prisoner. The men apparently discover through this "confession" that violence and degradation are standard components of warfare, especially when it produces sexually deviant behavior such as homosexual desire or raping elderly women. The confession further stimulates a "ceaseless yearning" in them for the fog to lift and take the homosexual secret with it as they have now decided that the soldier is "the cause of everything," all the "actions, rebuffs, threats, fatiques, cold nights, lice, toothaches, forced absence from women, nights in trenches up to your knees in mud . . . burial parties, mopping-up parties, dead horses, heaps of stale shite, heads, balls, brains, everywhere" (30-31). Physically below the men in the shell hole and figuratively at core

of the fog, they realize that the prisoner is symbolic of the homosexual secret that is responsible for everything in the war, even their own thoughts, feelings and actions.

As the fog intensifies and O'Garra and Elston's shell shock worsens, the No Man's Land between homosexual desire and homophobia collapses and the violence is ultimately played out on the battleground of their own bodies. Everything in their physical surroundings becomes "liquid with water, blood, tears, urine, and fog, evoking a dissolution of control and leaking across borders associated with a pronounced anxiety toward the feminine" (Rice 83). O'Garra, "seized by another fit of madness," starts chanting "FOG. FOG. FOG . . . In your eyes, in your mouth, on your chest, in your heart. FOG. FOG," which causes Elston to be "suddenly seized with panic by the terrific outburst" (32). Like "mad dogs," they attack the prisoner again:

> Elston, on making contact with the youth's soft skin, became almost demented. The velvety touch of the flesh infuriated him. Perhaps it was because Nature had hewn him differently. Had denied him the young German's grace of body, the fair hair, the fine clear eyes that seemed to reflect all the beauty and music and rhythm of the Rhine. Maddened him. (32)

Concomitant with Elston's sexual desire for the soldier is the knowledge that his own body, as a lower class Manchester man, is far from the masculine ideal. As such, his anger is exacerbated by both the desire he fights to suppress and the resentment he experiences in knowing that he cannot have such a beautiful body even in his own person. O'Garra immediately orders Elston to pull off the soldier's trousers and "in complete silence O'Garra pull[s] out his bayonet and [sticks] it up the youth's anus" (32-

33). Laughing at the soldier's screams, both men also stick "horse-hair up his penis" until O'Garra shouts "Kill the bugger": "Suddenly, as if instinctively, both men fell away from the prisoner, who rolled over, emitting a single sigh—Ah—" (33).

The conflation of homosexual desire with torture and death enables the men to intimately act upon that desire by fixating it and their rage upon the prisoner's anus and penis. Through violence, they protect themselves from being associated with homosexuality even when engaging in symbolic sodomy. Carolyn Dean in "The Great War, Pornography, and the Transformation of Modern Male Subjectivity," traces how sadomasochistic sexuality such as the rape of the prisoner became popularly depicted in pornography after World War I as war had become perceived as an "extension of sexuality and sexuality an extension of the violence intrinsic in warfare" (Dean 62). Although shortly after the war many critics and psychiatrists generated "myths about modern war, in which violence and the spiritual cleansing of the male body are oddly continuous: violence, paradoxically, purges the suffering intrinsic in violence" (62), by the 1920s, warfare's purpose was depicted in less idealistic terms. Instead, the violence perpetuated by man and on the male body

> no longer equate self-sacrifice with spiritual cleansing, but with spiritual degradation; the body has become enslaved by its own instincts, or, more specifically, by a compulsive death-drive. Men have learned to obey their instincts unencumbered by the dictates of moral will. The war's degradation of men's dignity is figured in the putatively emasculating and sexually pathological pleasure of humiliating and being humiliated, or

> exposing and being exposed. The war, in this view, had turned into a pretext for the satisfaction of other pleasures. (63)

For O'Garra and Elston, degradation and humiliation are the only responses to pleasure from which they derive satisfaction whether it is through gang raping an old woman or raping and murdering a young man together. Their status as "other," as having been classified as emasculated imitations of British manhood prior to the war, is only reinforced through the brutal conditions of warfare. As emasculated others, the homosexual secret that unites O'Garra and Elston is more cohesive than the *esprit de corps* could ever be for them since both men had always been ostracized from society. Thus when O'Garra shouts "Kill the Bugger," both he and Elston instinctually move away from the body as if they suspect that the prisoner is not the "bugger" to whom O'Garra refers.

Though the men's final response to the homosexual secret and its influence on them is to try to destroy it through killing themselves, such an individualized action ultimately proves futile as the homosexual secret is systemic to all borderlands and to the preservation of the hegemony. After the prisoner finally dies with the emission of his last orgiastic "Ah," his body's presence becomes a greater source of anxiety for the men. O'Garra suggests that they "bury this thing" because "everything [O'Garra] look[s] at becomes HIM. Everything Him" and that "if [they] don't destroy him, he'll destroy [them], even though he's dead" (35). The men stomp on the body together until it begins to disappear into the mud, yet instead of easing their distress it provokes "all [their] conglomerated hates, fears, despairs, hopes, horrors" (36). Realizing that "there's no way out" of the fog and the war, they decide to kill themselves. When the fog finally cleared

> the tortured features of O'Garra were to be seen. His eyes had been gouged out, whilst beneath his powerful frame lay the remains of Elston. For a moment only they were visible, then slowly the disappeared beneath the sea of mud which oozed over them like the restless tide of an everlasting night. (36)

The homosexual secret is at last recognized by O'Garra to be a part of everything--the war, Elston and himself--and even with his being blinded before death, he cannot erase his recognition of that insight or that both he and Elston are subsumed by what they attempted to destroy. The feminization of O'Garra's Irishness and Elston's class, the incongruity between the *esprit de corps* with the propagation of male corpses through warfare, and the depravity associated with shell shock all contribute to protecting and perpetuating the homosexual secret, as acknowledging it would immediately render one's masculinity suspect. For men like O'Garra and Elston, the homosexual secret "outs" their otherness through their discernment of it and thus, it becomes unnecessary for the hegemony to police society.

While the various borderlands of race, class, gender and sexuality that demarcate individual identity in *The German Prisoner* serve to stabilize one's place in society given those boundaries, their inherent ambiguities contrariwise distort the individual's self-perception and his relationship to both the boundaries and society. O'Garra's Irishness feminizes him on the one hand, but heightens his masculinity on the other in that his brutishness makes both women and men afraid of him. Similarly, Elston's small size coupled with his working class background emasculate him, yet his cruelty towards the German prisoner ostensibly reasserts his forfeited masculinity. Through the men's efforts

to mitigate their disenfranchised manhood in warfare, they discover that their otherness prevents such an undertaking from being realized. Instead, their identities, like the landscape of the battlefield, become a No Man's Land where nothing is won, but everything lost.

Whether dying in the trenches on the Western Front, the beaches of Gallipoli, or the banks of a billabong, Irish working-class men embodied societal anxiety over race, class, gender, and sexuality. By destroying themselves, the protagonists in MacGill's *Fear!*, O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute* and Hanley's *The German Prisoner* seemingly absolve society of responsibility for their disenfranchisement, choosing instead to be their own judge, jury and executioner. This self-destruction, however, is not one of displaced martyrdom. For Harry Ryder, Bill Gunn and Peter O'Garra, their deaths underscore the rage working-class Irish held towards society and the defiance that manifests itself in their fatal actions. Ultimately, the Great War literature of Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty and James Hanley summons these ghosts who still wander the billabongs of Irish history and memory to confront us with the question of when we will finally "come-a-waltzing" and not only acknowledge their stories, but also their lives.

Chapter Three: Up/Down the Republic! Ireland, Spain, and the Great War in Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*

Talk of Angels, the 1998 Miramax film of Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, takes its title from a line in the novel that introduces the protagonist, Mary Lavelle, to Agatha Conlon, a veteran "Miss" and a lesbian. As a thirty-eight year old Irish woman who had left home at twenty-one to teach English in Spain, Agatha is the most Spanish fluent and experienced governess there despite being "the worst-tempered woman in Spain" and "not like the rest [of them]" (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 84). Mary, the newest governess, admits that Agatha "sounds queer" according to what she is learning about her from the other misses, but with the exclaimed "Talk of Angels" as Agatha enters the café, Mary only thinks about "what beautiful eyes" she has (84). So why would the movie director choose to change the novel's title and its focus from the principal character to the salutatory notice of the lesbian character? What might Agatha Conlon's lesbian presence signify with regard to Ireland, Spain, the Great War, and the bildungsroman of a young Irish governess in 1922?

As many critics have noted, Kate O'Brien's love of Spain began with her own experience there as a "Miss" in 1922, and was the setting for at least three of her works: *Mary Lavelle* (1936), *Farewell, Spain* (1937) and *That Lady* (1946).[51] *Farewell, Spain*, a travelogue, is also an indictment of Franco's fascist takeover of the country, the publication of which resulted in O'Brien being banned from returning to Spain until she

[51] Kate O'Brien (1897-1974) grew up in Limerick, but after the death of her mother in 1902, she lived at a convent school until she entered University College, Dublin in 1916. In addition to briefly working as a "miss" in Spain, she lived and worked in England as a freelance journalist and as a teacher. Her works include eleven novels, *Without My Cloak* (1931), *The Ante-Room* (1934), *The Last of Summer* (1943), *As Music and Splendour* (1958) among them, a play, *Distinguished Villa* (1926), and two travelogues,

was given permission to travel there again in1957. "One amatory metaphor" in particular within this series of pastiches "both affirms [O'Brien's] equation of Spain with sexual passion and contrasts the familial and familiar affection she feels for Ireland" (Dalsimer 44):

> Fatal attraction between persons is an old poets' notion that some of us still like to believe is possible and occasional, though not probable—and Spain seems to me to be the *femme fatale* among countries . . . My love has been long and slow—lazy and selfish too, but I know that wherever I go henceforward and whatever I see I shall never again be able to love an earthly scene as I have loved the Spanish. Except some bits of Ireland, bits of home. But that is different. Though Ireland is as beautiful as any country on earth, I am native to her, and therefore cannot feel the novel thrill of her attraction. One does not mix up the love one feels for a parent with the infatuations of adult life. And with Spain I am once and for all infatuated. (O'Brien, *Farewell, Spain* 227)

Dalsimer compares O'Brien's "unusual fusion of the sexual and the national" with both Mary Lavelle's "experience at the bullfight and her passion for Juanito [the married son of the family with whom she is employed]" and O'Brien's "own passion for Spain and for the individuality and personal freedom she found there" (44), ignoring, as Donoghue points out, that it is Agatha who "brings Mary to the fight, Agatha whose passion for heroic bloody Spain Mary finds so disturbing and attractive" (Donoghue 43). Moreover, O'Brien's sexualized, homoerotic language seems to go unnoticed by Dalsimer, the

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Farewell, Spain (1937) and *My Ireland* (1962). For a more comprehensive study of O'Brien's life and work, see Dalsimer and Walshe.

passion and "the novel thrill" of what would be more appropriate to surmise as the "unusual fusion of the [homo]sexual and the national." After all, the [hetero]sexual fusion with the national can hardly be considered unusual—from the early modern writings regarding the acquisition of the Americas to the Victorian narratives on the partition of Africa, colonial and sexual conquest were often described interchangeably. What is unusual is that O'Brien equates her love for Spain to a distinctly lesbian and sexualized desire, a desire that makes her aware of her familiar attraction to Ireland, a desire that is both inevitable and tinged with fatality from its start, the talk of angels that seems to appear from out of nowhere.

Yet Dalsimer's omission of the lesbian context in *Mary Lavelle* is not the first time that such an oversight has occurred with this novel. When the book was published, the Irish Censorship Board expurgated it for its immorality in depicting the adulterous affair between Mary and Juanito, not for Agatha's confession to Mary that she "liked her the way a man would" (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 285). Though Tamsin Hargreaves notes that O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* was also banned when first published for its disclosure of another kind of "illicit and forbidden" love (xvii), the homosexual love between two men, it is curious that the lesbianism within Mary Lavelle did not attract the same notice of the censors. This erasure of both lesbian desire and Agatha's significance to the novel can be considered another example of the "absence of lesbian characters from Irish fiction in general," the possible result of the Free State's adoption of British legal codes under which "lesbians were not criminalized" (Weekes, "A Trackless Road" 123). Moreover this absence can also be traced in the larger "literary history of lesbianism" where one has to "confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting

over, an evaporation, or 'whiting out' of possibility" (Castle 28). What Terry Castle names as "The Apparitional Lesbian" syndrome within literature, where the best "way to exorcize the threat of female homosexuality" is to treat is as "ghostly," to "wave off, so to speak, the lesbian dimension" of the story (34), is very much what Agatha Conlon's position is in *Mary Lavelle*. "Waved off" by the censors, by literary critics and by the other governesses within the novel who do not consider her "like them," Agatha could have easily faded into the background if it were not for Mary's acknowledgement that Agatha's love for her "wasn't rot" (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 286). Agatha's threat in this novel is not simply her lesbianism, but showing Mary that there are options open to women other than marriage, "decanoni[zing]," literally, "the canonical structure of desire itself" (Castle 90) where the male homosocial bonds of the Church, the military and fascist dictatorships have no authority. Furthermore, through the counterplotting of both Agatha and Mary's sexual transgressions, the novel serves as a critique of Ireland and its role in the Great War, the Troubles, and its subsequent censorial government. Published in October 1936 (at the height of the Spanish Civil War) but set in 1922, the year Ireland became a Free State, O'Brien mirrors the coming to power of both De Valera's and Franco's governments, and the detrimental role the Catholic Church plays in each. Thus in considering the historical and social context at the time of the novel's publication, "talk of angels" speaks of the many devils—war, misogyny, fascism, the Church—that are denied power by women through the acclimatization of their own sexual autonomy.

The conflict between filial duty to one's father and the desire for self-destiny in *Mary Lavelle* is metonymic of Ireland's participation in the Great War and the choices one made to either support the British army or the Irish Republican army. After Mary

first arrives in Spain and settles into her position as governess for the Areavaga family, her impressions of her young charges stir her own family memories. She recalls that as soon as her eldest brother Jimmy had turned eighteen in June 1917, an "opportune time for a father to dispose of a son" (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 25), their father tried to force him to take a commission in the Munster Fusiliers. Jimmy refused to join up, left home for good, and joined the IRA instead, his participation in which led to his being jailed. When their father sneeringly "read aloud from the paper one morning that [Jimmy] was on a hunger strike," Mary was driven "into a raging protest" in his defense (25). Two years later meeting Jimmy "sometimes by stealth, cycling to villages and farms near Mellick on errands for him or his flying column," she had "often wondered what her father's reaction would have been were his house searched by Auxiliaries and his eldest daughter put in jail" (25). Both son's and daughter's disobedience to their father's will underscores the fraught tensions between the British government that considered the Irish as rebellious children, especially after the Easter Rising in 1916, and the Irish populace that grew less and less tolerant of the government's brutal tactics in suppressing insurrection. Mary's bemused speculation on what her father would think of the Black-and-tans, the auxiliary forces that had fought in the Great War and were stationed in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War (1918-1920), is tinged with the self-satisfaction in knowing that "the chickens would come home to roost." Their father, after all, wanted to bully his son into joining an army that would destroy his home, and through his bullying, provided the impetus for his daughter to be the means for that destruction. Much in the same way, Britain's heavy-handedness in executing participants in the Easter Rising actually increased support for the republican cause instead of quelling it. Thus, Mary's

initial memory in Spain and its association with defiance against both the Great War and the patriarchal Irish family is not only suggestive of post-traumatic stress syndrome (in her recollection of a painful "war" remembrance), but indicative of how women, in thinking about war, consider it in familial terms.

While filial obligation and support for the Great War may have been contentious issues within the Lavelle family and the Irish Free State, the war also represents the schism between female autonomy and male authority within Ireland. Mary first met her betrothed, John MacCurtain, a war veteran, at a dance in January 1919, though she had "only vague recollections" of that meeting as her thoughts were instead "often away in the hills with Jim's flying column" (28). Having joined up with the Munster Fusiliers in 1914 on the advice of his uncle and Irish Home Rule proponent John Redmond, John rose in the ranks from private to Major by war's end, earning a DSO and being twice wounded in the process (28). His post-war ambition was to inherit his uncle's £50,000 shipping business as he had "no intention of allowing the most beautiful girl ever created to live in penury" (28-29), a young woman whose eyes "had recognition in them now for him, and some for others" (29). Fearing that another man would marry Mary before he could inherit his fortune, he decided to propose to her shortly before her twenty-first birthday:

> Though he had timed things well and was so much in love that feeling did in fact fill his tentative with poetry—she somehow wounded him. He would never tell her that as long as they lived—not now. But her eyes when he had wanted to see heaven in them for a second, had curiously failed him. Could she—but what could she be afraid of? She had asked for time, until the next evening. He had hated that. He wanted all or

> nothing, rapture or refusal . . . However—that flaw, that reserve in her eyes, that begged and granted twenty-four hours—what were they all against the next night's gentle 'yes,' the bowed head, and the slim hand shaking as he held it to his lips? She was his. He would make her happy. He swore that glory to himself as he gathered her up. (30)

John may have survived the war, but he was still capable of being "wounded" in battling for a woman's heart. Mary's failure to appear the rapturous lover to John crushed his romantic notion of how his proposal should have been accepted. In a "take no prisoners" battle strategy, Mary temporarily outmaneuvered him, forcing a twenty-four hour reprieve from which she returned the bowed lover whose body and happiness are surrendered to his "glory."

Although John may have won this particular battle, Mary is far from "gallant little Belgium" that needed his assistance (28). Early in their relationship Mary told him that, having read the same books as her brothers, her childhood desire was "to go everywhere one day, know everything, try everything, be committed to nothing," to "be a free lance always, belong to no one place or family or person," and she questioned him if he thought it "odd that a little girl should have had the notion of perpetual self-government" (27). As a "free lance," an itinerant knight, Mary's battles are the ones she chooses, her political allegiances as well. After all, while John may have remembered their first dance in the winter of 1919, a time when many people were celebrating the end of war, Mary's thoughts were with her republican brother and his rebel exploits, the struggle for a nation's independence identical to her own. Mary's acceptance of John's proposal may have initially mitigated her desire for independence, but her visceral response to him

betrayed, at least to herself, that this relationship was not a viable one for her. For whenever John would embrace and kiss her "she found in fact no more than a passing discomfort and guilty sensation of relief as each kiss had ended" and "an inadmissible distaste" for the experience altogether (32). Mary's attempts at rationalizing her disgust forced her to suppress her reactions as "she was so much ashamed of [the kisses'] unnaturalness that they hardly ever moved into the foreground of her thoughts" (32).

Mary was rescued from this "unnaturalness" of heterosexual intimacy (at least with John), by Mother Liguori, a nun from her former convent school, who inquired whether Mary knew anyone who would like to become a governess in Spain. Mary "suffered a brief thrill of pleasure as sharp and strange as it was unreasonable" at the thought of this post and immediately told the nun that she would like to take it (34). Walking home "in an uneasy dream," Mary thought how wonderful it would be to

> be alone for a little space, a tiny hiatus between her life's two accepted phases. To cease being a daughter without immediately becoming a wife. To be a free lance, to belong to no one place or family or person—to achieve the silly longing of childhood, only for one year, before she flung it with all other childish things upon the scrap heap. Spain! (34)

Mary's seemingly quixotic dream for female autonomy, to exist in a space where she does not belong to her father or husband, is a thrilling one for her and one that is inextricably linked to her own sexual awakening. Liberated by a nun from the immediacy of marriage, "she looked out into the dusk at the barren fig-tree" and recalled that "figs grew and ripened in Spain" (34-35). The magic of twilight, like the "little space, a tiny hiatus" between being a daughter and wife, made it possible for her to see the barrenness of both

her sexuality and autonomy in Ireland, the growing and ripening of which could only happen away from that which defines her at home. This self-revelation gave her the strength to confront John with her plans to leave him for a year before she married him, "the first real battle of her life, and she waged and won it without ever knowing why she fought" (35).

Just as some young men had gone off to the Great War as a rite of passage into manhood, Irish women like Mary who went off to teach in Spain experienced a similar maturation process, learning how to function as part of a cohesive unit while simultaneously considering their jobs as a day-to-day battle for female autonomy. By the end of her first week as a "miss," Mary "learnt quite specifically that a miss is a person of great responsibility but of no authority" (72), much like the common enlisted man, and "had the feeling that roughly she knew her routine—and her place. No Man's Land, she might have called the latter, though without any bitterness. For she liked, as she had expected to, its neutrality, its twilight" (69). Mary's equation of the absence of men from her immediate surroundings with No Man's Land is not simply borrowing terminology from the Great War to describe the domestic, but alluding to how the relations between women and men are akin to trench warfare. Unlike the No Man's Land of the Great War battlefield, Mary's No Man's Land is a safe zone, a place of "neutrality," where she feels protected in the twilight between daughter and wife. The routine is what defines Mary in this space, not her gender, as the male absence frees her from being defined in relation to men. After all, while Señor Areavaga occasionally meets Mary and two priests tutor Mary's charges in Church history, doctrine and music, it is Señora Areavaga from whom she takes orders and it is her daughters whom she instructs.

Yet while Mary as a miss may feel different from other working women, she still feels a certain *esprit de corps* for her sister misses, a camaraderie similar to that which formed amongst those who did "their bit" in the Great War. The ironically named Café Aleman (the German Café)[52] is where the misses congregate on their days off to vent about everything from how their employers will "treat you like dirt if you don't stand up for yourself" (77), to the "stuck up" behavior of the Englishmen with whom they try to flirt (82), to the latest romantic scandals of the misses—a place where, according to one miss, "We of the underworld make a home from home of it" (79).[53] Referring to each other solely by their surnames, entrenched in the underworld of women whose desire for autonomy often isolated them from each other through rude behavior, Mary

> wondered if she would get used to these personal comments. She found the crudity of the misses' intercourse surprising; their rudeness to each other, their use of surnames *tout court*, their interest in the male sex, their prudery, their vindictive attitude towards their employers, and non-intelligent insolence towards the life that went on about them, their obvious poverty and social isolation, their distorted self-respect, their back-handed decency and *esprit de corps*—these distinctions of which this first afternoon's acquaintance gave her a considerable indication, made up a sad but novel picture. As a child she had with her brothers gone through a phase of Kipling-infatuation, and a line from that faraway reading came to her now as she sat in the Café Aleman: "from the legions of the lost

[52] Café Aleman is ironic not simply because of Germany's part in the Great War, but also due to Nazi Germany's support of Franco during the Spanish Civil War.
[53] The interaction between misses mirrors that of the female ambulance drivers in Evadne Price's (Helen Zenna Smith) *Not So Quiet...: Stepdaughters of War*.

> ones, from the cohorts of the damned,"—she smiled to think how such an allusion, suggested by them, would amaze the misses of Altorno. But Conlon would accept it, probably. (92)

The Kipling poem to which Mary compares the misses' plight, "Gentlemen Rankers," is a blistering commentary by a career soldier in Queen Victoria's army who bemoans the life and fate of his kind whose "measure of [their] torment is the measure of [their] youth."[54] Underlying *esprit de corps*, whether in a military or miss context, is obscurity—a "sad but novel picture" of a group of individuals thrown together out of circumstance, who may never have bonded if their situations were different. Furthermore, the inherent isolation of *esprit de cor*ps limits the group from seeing beyond their experience or "bitterly and without sentiments, in those in trouble" (94), thus preventing the group from recognizing any aspect of itself that might resonate with Kipling's poem. Only Conlon, who is far from sentimental and the most hardened of the misses, might accept Mary's comparison between the group and poem as suitable, for Conlon, as an ideal career soldier or career miss, knows her duty and will negotiate it and her relationships accordingly.

Just as Mary's familial conflict dramatizes Ireland's political and social turmoil, the Areavaga's family history also embodies Spain's relation with its people leading up to the Civil War. The comparison between Basque and Irish nationalism in the novel is a critique on how both the Spanish and Irish governments in 1936 failed to actualize the progressive vision they had for their countries in 1922, a vision that is mitigated by the Church's interference in political matters. The novel begins with a prologue in which the

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[54] Kipling, a jingoist writer for the British military during the Great War, was less enthusiastic towards the war with the death of his son [Jack], an officer in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, who was killed in battle.

narrator states that "there is a vast deal that a miss does not know" that "in 1922, for instance,—the year of our story—she did not know any more than anyone else that nine years later a revolution would practically wipe out her obsolete and ill-defined profession" (xxi). This revolution in 1931, which removed the Spanish royal family from power, was the preamble to the Spanish Civil War in July 1936—a war between the popularly elected Republican government and General Franco's fascist forces. The replacement of the Spanish royal family and all those individuals who benefited from royal patronage (including the Church) with a communist-inspired government destroyed the feudally run society and the debutante milieu that supported the miss trade.

One of Mary's initial frustrations upon arriving at the Areavaga's is that she cannot understand the gardener's Spanish. Milagros, one of the daughters, tells her that what he is speaking is Basque, not Spanish, and that Pilár, her older sister, "has a bad habit of speaking Basque to the servants" (18). Pilár justifies this by responding that "it's the only way of making sure they understand" (18). Pilár's condescension towards the Basque was not uncommon for the Spanish upper-class at that time. The Basque, a people of Northern Spain who had been conquered by the Spanish in 1100 and had been struggling for their independence ever since, were intensifying their independence efforts in 1922 based on large part on Ireland's success with Britain. Mary notes, upon over-hearing a Basque nationalist's speech in the marketplace, for instance, that "she heard the names 'Arthur Griffiths' and 'Patrick Pearse'" being invoked (128). Much as the Anglo-Irish Big House occupants patronized their Irish Catholic servants, the Spanish landowners considered the Basque as an insubordinately childish people who needed to be dealt with by a firm hand. While Juanito's aristocratic wife, Luisa, may have

"admired the Irish-Spanish hero, de Valera, thought the civil war in Ireland tragic but inevitable, and the Treaty compromise a grave mistake" (152), her ability to recognize the parallels between Irish and Basque nationalism is ineffectual. Mary surprises Luisa by questioning whether she "then sympathize[s] with the nationalist ambitions of the Catalans and the Basques?" (152) to which Luisa shrewdly responds:

> Your question is difficult. The kings of Castille have been kings of all the Spains for a very long time. Myself I cling to the long tradition, but Juanito says my clinging is of no importance! . . . He says that some sort of federated autonomies will have to be conceded. And Juanito belongs to the future. He is assuredly, as his family say, 'one of Spain's great men.' (152)

Both Luisa and Pilár, who are thoroughly fixed in the old order of the Spanish patronage tradition, cannot afford to see that tradition jeopardized by the one or two other "Spains" that sustain their world. Basque independence would necessitate a restructuring of Spanish society that would threaten the old world order, replacing it with one that is of the future where men like Juanito, "one of Spain's great men," will be in control. Yet Luisa knows that even if there is some sort of concession in the future Juanito envisions, not much will change for great men like Juanito for great families like theirs will still remain in power.

Although Juanito may be considered a great man of Spain's future, his political convictions are deeply rooted in a patriarchal past. His family has been one of the most respected families in Altorno since the nineteenth century, accumulating their fortune through ship building. Don Juan, his grandfather, "christian, cultured, somewhat

Jansensistic, but profoundly a Spaniard," was "convinced to the last drop of his blood of the absolute dominion of personality over system" (50). The spartan hardness of Jansenist Catholicism and the lack of empathy it had for the downtrodden was not something that Juanito's father, Don Pedro, inherited. Instead, Don Pedro regarded "the existent Catholic Church with profound suspicion, but he accorded to its ideal and to much of its tradition an unwithholdable inbred devotion" (61). This "inbred devotion" prevented him from becoming a communist, but nevertheless he was "sick of the self-deceptiveness and inertia of Liberalism in Spain" (61) where talk of change did nothing to actually change societal injustices. However, Don Pedro was thwarted in his ambition to effect change by his wife, whose world was founded upon "the immovable rock" of "the Church, the King and the Family" (58). She considered his desire to "overthrow the structure onto which all whom she loved and believed in had fought their way so courageously, was to be cheated by him in his first vows" (58-59). Thus, being the devoted Catholic and husband, he put his own political ambitions aside and instead placed them onto his son Juanito, who he predicted was "going to be one of Spain's great men" (63).

While he may be a politician in Madrid and "a burning reformer, witty, courageous and humane, communistically inspired as his father had never been," Juanito is nonetheless "married to a Spanish aristocrat and unable to escape his personal faith in the Catholic Church" (63). Catholicism and marriage for both father and son have been convenient excuses for their inability to truly follow through on their political beliefs. They are as much invested in the institutions that they believe need reforming as much as their wives believe in them, though unlike their wives who are responsible for

maintaining societal values in the home, they, as men, have the luxury of tinkering with those same values. Additionally, in Juanito's "communistically inspired" vision for Spain's future

> He simply saw that Spain's aching need was for the ruthless establishment in every cranny of the peninsula of justice, order, health and knowledge. Knowledge above all. And the only relatively quick way to such a goal was by and antiseptic scouring out of all precedent establishments, and the enforcing of the main principles and practices of Communism. (160)

If Juanito truly believed in the principles and practices of communism to reestablish a just Spain, then his position as a young, wealthy lawyer and politician would be forfeited as redistribution of wealth and power is a cornerstone of communism. But this is not the case. Communism to Juanito is a malleable phenomenon, for he believes that within fifty years, "and within a hundred, if Spanish individualism could at all be trusted, it would be gone leaving knowledge, the only true good, behind it" (161). Injustice may be sterilized by communism in his antiseptic vision for the future, but within 150 years Spanish individualism would prevail. Just what individuals would inherit the new Spanish earth is unclear. Before Mary leaves Spain, Juanito drives her to the north of Altorno and declares that "this is [his] own country . . . This is the good Basque country of my people" (302). Whatever communistically inspired vision Juanito may have for Spain, it ultimately resides in his patriarchal control—*he* will have the vision and the power to bring justice to *his* country and *his* people regardless of what the people may want.

The history of Ireland, Spain and their Civil Wars not only converge with the comparison of Irish and Basque nationalism, but in the depiction of Catholicism within

the novel. It did not take fifty years for communism to infiltrate Spain, however, for the 1931 revolution brought a communist inspired Republic to power and with it, Catholic horror at the prospect of a God-less and non-hierarchical state. In addition to Basque and Irish nationalism that O'Brien parallels in the novel, Catholicism and its function in society converge in the shared history of Spain and Ireland and each country's response to their Civil Wars. The Jansenistic Catholicism of the Areavagas is not unknown to Mary, who, being "the well-trained Irish-Catholic, . . . somewhat Jansenistically instructed, is easily made to understand that human nature, left to itself, can be not merely incredibly sinful but incredibly foolish" (181). While this harshness of moral judgment may have been endemic in Irish and Spanish daily life,[55] the Church's influence imbedded itself within the governing bodies as well. Regarding the Irish Church in 1936, the increasing authority it wielded within the Free State government culminated in 1937 with De Valera's constitution giving it voting rights. In Spain, on the other hand, the socialist and communistic inflected Republican government disestablished the Church by 1933 as Spain was no longer a Catholic monarchy but a secular Republic. The Church in both countries was appalled by the Spanish Republic's refusal to stop the burning and looting of Church property and the killing of priests and nuns. Not only was Republicanism associated with communism and thus, ungodliness, in Spain, but Republicanism in Ireland increasingly became associated with it as well when "significant elements of the IRA began to advocate radical solutions to social and

[55] Jansenism, a morally stringent form of Catholicism that originated in the Low Countries in seventeenth century, was more popular in France than it was in Ireland where Irish clerics were more generally "attracted to Jesuit-style humanism." See S. J. Connolly, *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998, for a brief overview of the controversy surrounding Jansenism and its influence in Ireland.

economic problems" (Murray 310). Radically left IRA members such as Peadar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and Frank Ryan (opposed to the treaty with Britain that divided Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Free State) split with the more moderate and Church-supporting IRA members in 1934 and organized the Republican Congress, which was comprised of "disaffected Socialist Republicans" and members of the Irish Communist Party (336). Inspired by James Connolly's belief that "a free Ireland could not be conceived which had a subject working-class; nor could a subject Ireland be conceived with a free working-class," the Congress's manifesto "declared that a Republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots Capitalism on its way" (336). When the Spanish Civil War began in 1936, the Republican Congress interpreted the war as "a struggle between a democratically elected, lawfully established Republican regime and an international fascist conspiracy to overthrow it" (346). Catholic clergy, on the other hand, in the words of Bishop Doorly of Elphin, "knew that it was not a war between royalists and republicans, or between rich and poor, but 'between Christ and anti-Christ'" (347). Those who supported Franco in Ireland, "the episcopal body, many priests, Fine Gael, the Blueshirts [the Irish Fascist Party led by General O'Duffy]," actively rallied the Irish people to support Franco's forces (340). Using tales of Spanish Republican atrocities against nuns and clergy,[56] the Church held a nationwide collection one Sunday in October 1936 which raised $40,000 to "benefit the Franco side" (Keough 127). Although Ireland was the only European country to send both fascist and republican support to Spain (O'Duffy led the Fascist

[56] These tales are reminiscent of those propagated during World War I regarding German atrocities against the Belgians, such as the report of the rapes and crucifixions of nuns by Republicans. Patrick Murray notes that one of the participants in an anti-Spanish Republican, Church-organized rally records that Monsignor

Irish Brigade and Frank Ryan headed the Irish Battalion of the International Brigade), the official Irish government's position, following the Vatican's lead in not immediately acknowledging Franco's government, strengthened De Valera's "non-interventionalist position by introducing legislation making it a criminal offence to go to Spain without governmental permission" (Murray 351). Despite De Valera's neutral stance towards the Spanish Civil War, the debate on the Church's prerogative in Irish daily life versus communism's encroachment on that right continued in Ireland well after the Spanish Republican forces were finally defeated by Franco in 1938.

By conflating this history of Ireland in the Great War and Troubles and that of Spain and its Civil War into the confines of home, O'Brien removes the debate of history and politics from the public sphere to that of the very domestic personal sphere. A doctor's household in Mellick, Ireland, and a Big House in Altorno, Spain, suffer their historic progeny through the lives of their daughters and sons. Yet instead of battlefields or parliamentary floors, the issues are contested, quite literally, through their children's sexuality and the Catholicism that defines it. In response to certain critical allegations that O'Brien was overly invested in foregrounding Catholicism in her novels, Eibhear Walshe notes that her investment in Catholicism is the case of "subversion from within" and that is "the real radicalism underlying O'Brien's fiction" (Walshe 9). For by "locating her novels within the culture that sought to marginalise her, intellectulising her religious and moral dissent, respecting and at the same time opposing the true nature of the Catholic paternalism that attempted to outlaw her," O'Brien reinscribes a history of Ireland and Spain that is compatible with her hopes for intellectually free and open

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Sexton told the rally that 'in Barcelona, controlled by the Red leader Caballero, they dragged out 24 Sisters of the Poor, stripped them naked and crucified them'" (346).

societies for both countries (Walsh 8). While the illicit love affair between Mary and Juanito (along with their respective republicanism and communism) may rankle the tenets of the Catholic Church, it is Conlon and her devotion to the Church that is the most subversive element of the novel. Conlon, the apparitional lesbian of *Mary Lavelle*, serves as the conduit through which Mary connects with her sexuality, presenting her with possibilities for autonomy beyond what the Church or Ireland offered women. Moreover, it is through Conlon's narrative that Ireland's past, and its immediate future in 1936, are embodied—a sapphism that has no name.

As Margaret Higonnet has commented upon regarding the pattern of female characters in civil war literature rejecting the status quo, Agatha, and Mary as well, in their particular reversals in sexual and gender roles, critique both the Irish and Spanish hegemony and the countries' reliance on the Church's authority. Although Agatha may initially appear to be the banal hungry and disheveled lesbian, typical of lesbian literary representations during the 1920s and 1930s, she is "no stereotype" (Donoghue 42):

> She was a very hungry-looking woman. She wore a shiny, threadbare navy blue suit and a white linen blouse demurely closed at the neck by a silver Tara brooch. Hatless, she was now engaged in folding up the small black mantilla she had taken from her head as she came in. Her straight brown hair was knotted untidily on the nape of her neck. She had a pale, fanatical face, nobly planned but faltering below the large eccentric nose to a too mobile, too bitter mouth. "What beautiful eyes!" Mary thought. They were deep blue and full of light, with black brows arching delicately. (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 85)

Agatha wears both the Tara brooch (that she pins "demurely") and the mantilla (that she folds carefully), traditional symbols of Ireland and Spain's matriarchal legacies. The juxtaposition between Agatha's hungry, untidy appearance and her attentive donning of two countries' cultural markers is as contradictory as her feelings towards those countries. Agatha does not like Spain, for instance (119), and considers Kildalgan, her hometown in Ireland, "a deadly little town" although "very pretty" (208). Moreover, with both parents dead, two brothers killed in the Great War, her one surviving brother in New Zealand, and her sister married to "a frightful man" in Ireland, Agatha has no desire to return to home (207-208). Too inconstant to be a fixed stereotype, Agatha negotiates between assimilating into the perfect emigrant who "talks like a native" (84) and has a passion for the bullfight, and a misanthrope who loathes life "anywhere" (207). Yet Mary, unlike the other misses who are repelled by Agatha's peevishness, disregards Agatha's "fanatical face" and "too bitter mouth" and is drawn to her blue eyes that she considers "beautiful" and "full of light." Mary's ability to look beyond the apparition of the stereotypical lesbian and see something beautiful within Agatha is what brings Mary to her and to the truth of what Agatha holds—that one can still be of one culture and not be a part of it. In the end all that matters is autonomy.

While Agatha's beauty is questionable to everyone but Mary, Mary's beauty is the only thing upon which all the misses can agree, an androgynous one that attracts both women and men to her, and one that resonates with the taint of war. When Don Pablo first greets Mary, he is disarmed by how "mythical, innocent and shameless" her beauty is (66). Her short, curly brown hair "clung to her head like a Greek boy's" and "her blue eyes, boyish too, androgynous, were wide and shy" (66-67). Everything about her is

"most virginal and pagan" to him, the embodiment of "the old eternal poetic myth of girlhood" (67). Juanito, as well, is entranced by her "Greek-headed" profile (146), and falls in love with her "virgin, pagan face," the face of "untaken Aphrodite" and a "beauty as little to be known or held as the rakish Cyprian's, as unlikely to be satisfied or satisfactory in the bread-and-butter world" (167). Situating the virginal Mary Lavelle in an androgynous space that pre-dates Christianity permits both married men the laxity to fantasize about Mary without challenging the tenets of their faith—she is not quite a "real" woman, nor a Christian one. Secondly, the early Christian concept of the figure of Mary derived in large part from the ancient worship of Aphrodite,[57] the goddess of love, instead of Hera, goddess of marriage (and Zeus' wife), who would perhaps be a more appropriate parallel for Christianity's "Queen of Heaven." Yet O'Brien's emphasis on Aphrodite as the analogy for Mary is very deliberate and comments upon how Mary will not be a prize to be won or fought for by anyone, not even by her Great War veteran fiancé John who "swore that glory" of capturing her happiness "for himself" (30). Agatha's quip to Mary, informing her that no matter how beautiful she is she will receive no proposals from Spanish gentility even if she were "Helen of Troy herself" (88), invokes the myth of "The Judgment of Paris," though issues no war as the result. For as the embodiment of the goddess of love, and not seeking anyone's vote on whether or not she is beautiful,[58] Mary will decide whom she will love and when, be it Paris, John, or Juanito.

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[57] See Walker for a history of the Christian figure of Mary and its association with pagan female deities (602-613).

[58] Unlike Aphrodite who is a participant in the high-stakes beauty contest, Mary is not only unconcerned with her own attractiveness but chastises the other misses for suggesting that Pilár Arevaga's average beauty would be "no competition" for her exceptional one (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 87-89).

Although the Great War did not start with the abduction of a Helen-like woman whose beauty, like Mary's, "passed all earthly rumour" (28), much of the visual propaganda of "gallant little" Belgium's plight and that of women in general often depicted them as sexually brutalized victims at the hands of Germans and Huns, female victims who needed to be saved by honorable men like John. As Debra Rae Cohen notes, British Great War recruiting posters such as the well-known "WOMEN OF BRITAIN SAY—GO!" both urge "women to play an active public role by recruiting their menfolk" (Cohen 5) while simultaneously making "use of the image of women as victims made current by [the state's] own oppressive acts" (103).[59] Furthermore, the Irish nationalist vision of Kathleen Ni Houlihan (Mother Ireland) as one of its propagandistic images for recruiting men for the cause of Irish Independence or the reports by pro-Franco supporters of nun-rapes by Spain's Republican troops use the image of female vulnerability as the rallying-point for homosocial bonding and aggression. O'Brien's insistence in creating Mary as the classic archetypal figure of beauty who denies that beauty disrupts the male "homosocial visuality that situates the female observer outside of its circle" (Gallagher 18). If men desire to marry, commit adultery or make war, it is not women's beauty or vulnerability that should be their impetus or excuse according to O'Brien.

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[59] Debra Rae Cohen's refers to Jane Marcus' observations in "Asylums of Antaeus" that the War Office's propaganda was an attempt to eradicate pre-war and pro-suffrage imagery of women as "the powerful single woman at work or as the champion of her sex" in order to reposition the only acceptable female image "by a nation at war, the nurse, the mother, the worker" (66-67).

Much as Picasso would associate the image of the bull with war (particularly the Spanish Civil War), in his 1937 painting "Guernica,"[60] O'Brien's depiction of bull-fighting and its effect on Agatha and Mary is part of the continuum of how women are not only the observers and victims of warfare, but the homosocial focus of it as well. From ancient incarnations of patriarchal god figures in the form of the bull, to the Cretian Minotaur, to the current Spanish corrida, bull-slaying and its association with warfare and heterosexuality has been a part of Western consciousness for thousands of years.[61] With regard to Irish mythological history, the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (*The Cattle-raid of Cooley*) is the misogynist story of Queen Medb's quest to capture back the Brown Bull of Cuailnge, the resultant massive slaughter of this quest being attributed, in large part, to Medb's leaving in the heat of battle because she begins to menstruate.[62] Although the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* may have held cultural resonance with O'Brien when she was writing *Mary Lavelle*, bullfighting, as depicted in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), is directly associated with man's attempt to regain his youth and masculinity lost in the Great War and the need to curb female promiscuity that further threatened his fragile virility. Yet the corrida in *Mary Lavelle* counters the misogynist association of war and a castrating female sexuality with a women's sexuality that is powerful and autonomous.

Whereas both Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* and Mary may confront the corrida for their first times under the tutelage of experienced patrons, the novices'

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[60] Picasso was commissioned to paint "Guernica" as part of the World's Fair exhibition in 1937. Taking its title from the Basque country that was firebombed as a training raid for Hitler's forces (and as a favor from Hitler to Franco), the images of a bull goring a horse and a woman screaming in terror figure prominently in the piece.

[61] See Walker for an overview of the bull's symbolic function in rituals dating from pre-Christian through medieval times (125-127).

responses to the spectacle are quite different. Brett, a former VAD nurse and a sexually experienced woman, is brought to the bullfight by Jake Barnes, a now impotent, American war veteran who was once a lover of hers. Brett's first response upon seeing Pedro Romero, the young, handsome matador, is one of sexual desire: "Oh, isn't he lovely . . . And those green trousers" (Hemingway 220). What entices Brett most is what is hidden beneath "those green trousers," a virility that Jake no longer possesses himself due to being "hurt in the war" (99). Nevertheless, it is Jake's step-by-step explanation to everything that is happening in the ring that makes it possible for Brett to see "why she liked Romero's cape-work and why she did not like the others" (222):

> Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like cork-screws, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero's bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time (222).

Jake's tutelage imbues him with a potency that is physically impossible for him to achieve. By helping Brett to see beyond Pedro's trousers to his purity of courage and skill that exhibited "real emotion," Jake not only gives agency to Pedro's performance in the corrida, but also homosocially aligns himself with Pedro's imminent sexual relationship with Brett. Jake essentially tells Brett why she should desire Pedro and in so doing,

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[62] Fergus concludes that since the men "followed the rump of a misguiding woman . . . it is the usual thing for a herd led by a mare to be strayed and destroyed" (*Táin* 251).

trumps both Brett's autonomy in the making the decision to become Pedro's lover and Pedro's ability to prove himself a worthy lover on his own.

Unlike Brett's experience at the corrida, Mary's is one that affirms her autonomy, particularly because of Agatha's ability to teach without enforcing her opinions. When Mary is invited to go to the corrida by Agatha, who had "never in [her] life asked anyone to go with [her] to a fight" (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 119), Agatha is pleasantly surprised that she accepts her invitation. Agatha's passion for the corrida is only rivaled by her unrequited love for Mary, much like Jake Barnes's love for Brett. However, Agatha does not seek to control Mary's experience and interpretation of the corrida for her own self-interest. Agatha, above all, is an observer who admires courage in any form it takes, and considers the corrida as the symbolic embodiment of it:

> I like courage anyway. I haven't any myself—no one has who remains a miss for life. And I like brutality better than sentiment. I like the look of the thing, and all the rules and ceremonies. And I'm a fair judge of it by now. Death interests me too—going so near it. I do quite frankly admire good matadors. (209)

From Agatha's idealized position as a distant observer, she envisions herself as an impartial spectator who is able to judge things brutally, if necessary, rather than sentimentally. Yet she is not as distant from things as she would have herself believe, whether it is the corrida, her status as a miss or death itself. Her attraction to the corrida quite possibly originates in her own name, from the fictional St. Agatha, a virgin who was purportedly tortured and put to death for rejecting the sexual advances of a Sicilian ruler in AD 251. Scourged, flesh burned with hot pokers and torn with hooks, St.

Agatha's torture parallels that of the bull at the hands of the picador and matador. The significance of Agatha's name combined with years observing the corrida provide her with the confidence to tell Mary that "it's a pity [she] saw that performance first . . . because [she] couldn't possibly appreciate it, and it's unlikely that a bull will ever be killed so beautifully again in [their] lifetime" (117).

Mary does, however, recognize the caliber of the performance, precisely because Agatha has allowed her the opportunity to see and judge for herself without being accountable to the sway of her companion or the crowd. Mary observes how "the crowd, unfairly as she often thought, took good or bad or indifferent, as they judged, quite ruthlessly, and meted out reactions without a second thought" (118). Similar to the description of Pedro's matador skill in *The Sun Also Rises*, Pronceda's cape-working is admired for its perfection:

> The matador drew his enemy to his breast, and past it, on the gentle lure; brought him back along his thigh as if for sheer love; let him go and drew him home again. He took the bull's blood on his coat, but never looked up out of his zone of silence to advertise the decoration. Again and again in classic passes he allowed the horn to skim him, then drawing back from the great, weary but still alert antagonist, he profiled and went over the horn, as gently as an angel might, to kill. (114)

Mary's recognition of Pronceda's skill at killing "as if for sheer love" and of his role as angel of death in the corrida conflates love, religion and death and resonates with Agatha's response to Mary's initial assertion that she felt bullfighting to be a sin. Agatha, a devout Catholic, replies that she will continue to attend the corrida until the

Church decrees it a sin to do so (44). Judging for oneself what is right or wrong without the Church's pronouncement, especially in the symbolically-charged space of the corrida, is important to Agatha because it permits her to develop her own moral compass, an opportunity that she passes onto Mary by inviting her to the corrida. However, because the corrida is steeped in sexual and moral complexities that reflect the larger world, and because the Church has strong convictions on what constitutes appropriate sexuality in particular, Agatha's ability for moral discernment outside the corrida is compromised.

Mary, on the other hand, applies Agatha's lessons on interpreting the corrida to interpreting life outside of it. After Agatha confesses her attraction to Mary and believes that "it's a sin to feel this way" because the Church considers lesbianism "a very ancient and terrible vice," Mary quickly retorts with "oh, everything's a sin!" (285). Just as the crowd could judge so indiscriminately the matador's skill, the Church's ability to judge morality and sexuality is equally flawed in Mary's estimation. "Everything is a sin" to it, but it does not condemn everything; killing is prohibited by the Ten Commandments, yet the Church did support Franco's forces during the Spanish Civil War. Agatha's expression of love thus "wasn't rot" to Mary (286) because of the lessons she learned from the corrida, love, like killing, is not easily determined and oftentimes better individually judged than made as a sweeping indictment. Moreover, Agatha's declaration of lesbian love makes it possible for Mary to interpret her own supposedly illicit relationship with Juanito as representative of her sexual autonomy and maturity. Following this realization, Mary's " voice and manner with Agatha had automatically become easier and more sisterly, not so much because Agatha fantasically and perversely loved *her* but because, like her, she was fantasically and perversely in love" (296). The

perversion of Agatha's love, according to Mary, is not in society's condemnation of homosexuality but in that her love is not reciprocated by Mary; likewise, Mary's love for Juanito is perverse because it is a love that cannot exist openly in a society that denounces adultery. By choosing to love outside patriarchal cultural norms, outside the confines of the male-centered corrida, both women achieve an autonomy that defies male authority.

While on the one hand the corrida may represent the contentious sexual relations between genders and women's potential for sexual autonomy, it also symbolizes war and the polarity between the male and female experience of it. Quite literally, the corrida and war are spaces where "homosocial visuality. . . situates the female observer outside of its circle" (Gallagher 18) and thus prevent women from any direct agency in either participating in the experience or interpreting it. The system of homosocial visuality in the corrida the male matador and bull are the focus; in war, attention is on the male combatants. All the drama, danger, glory are male-centered and shared among men. Yet in the stands at the corrida and or in war as nurses, ambulance drivers, factory workers, mothers/sisters/daughters/wives, women do participate, suffer and need to bear witness to the event themselves without men interpreting their experiences for them. After all, as traumatized VAD Brett observes, "these bull-fights are hell on one" and make her feel "limp as a rag" (Hemingway 223) just as the Great War had impacted her. Thus, Mary's induction by Agatha into interpreting the corrida is not simply about developing a lesbian gaze and claiming sexual autonomy, but also in how to use that gaze in order to disrupt the homosocial visuality of war (whether the Great War, Anglo-Irish or Irish/Spanish Civil Wars) by speaking to a woman's truth of her experience. Echoing the widespread

post-Great War sentiment, Mary is determined that she "must try to remember . . . mustn't forget" her experience at the corrida (O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 117), an experience that will not be narrowly interpreted and defined by the general (male) public and an experience that contains a truth even if it is not an acceptable one to the hegemony. This becomes apparent to her after she receives a matador's processional cape as a parting gift from Spain. Mary makes the association between the disclosure of public memory and the truth of war and heterosexual relationships when

> she remembered her first bullfight and Pronceda going in to kill. She held her heart now as quiet to remember that as if again he took the journey. The moment of truth, it was called. Yes, like it or not, it was that. . . There were truths that were indefensible, truths that changed and broke things, that exacted injustice and pain and savagery, truths that were sins and cruelties—but yet were true and had a value there was no use in defending. (344)

The corrida is cruel, but so were the Great War, Anglo-Irish, Irish/Spanish Civil wars. Families are destroyed by war, whether it is Mary's own family trying to negotiate allegiances to king or republic in Ireland, or Juanito's family which will eventually face its own crisis in supporting either the fascist or republican agenda in Spain. Romantic standards for heterosexual relationships that existed prior to the Great War are no longer possible (or desirable) to uphold, and Mary will return from doing her bit in Spain to tell her Great War veteran fiancé a "brutal story" to end their engagement (344). Most importantly, by telling her story herself, Mary challenges the system of homosocial visuality and its power in preventing women from telling the truth of their experiences.

Mary Lavelle is a bildungsroman of female sexual and political autonomy that represents what may have been possible for Irish women to achieve in 1922 but what became highly unlikely to transpire in 1937 with the passing of the Irish Constitution relegating women to the home and hearth. By tracing Mary's development with analogies to the Great War and paralleling the civil war histories of Ireland and Spain, O'Brien posits how war and patriarchal authority converge and threaten women's lives and autonomy. With the inclusion of the lesbian character Agatha, however, O'Brien suggests that Irish women do not have to follow the proscribed constitutional guidelines to define their lives. Agatha's independence (albeit one that looks to the Church for direction at times) provides Mary with an example and encourages her to determine her life in her own way, without buckling under the fear of patriarchal disapproval. Ultimately in *Mary Lavelle*, it is Mary's assertion of her sexual autonomy that is the most heretical to the De Valeran government's concept of proper Irish womanhood, an act that goes against both the tenets of the Church and the state, an act that emanates from the talk of angels.

Chapter Four: Medea Ireland: War and Motherhood in Kathleen Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* and Rosamond Jacob's *The Troubled House*

In the 2002 Abbey Theatre production of *Medea*, directed by Deborah Warner and starring Fiona Shaw, Medea, devastated by Jason's betrayal, lectures women about men's duplicity in love and marriage. She argues that once a woman has given herself to man, he "lords it over" her (Euripides 7), and the reward for her domesticity is the promise of "a quiet life":

> They'll grab the spears. They'll take the strain.
>
> I'd three times sooner go to war
>
> Than suffer childbirth once. (9)

While the domestic/civic objectives of ancient Greek men and women may differ, the comparison of war and motherhood has become an ubiquitous one over the centuries—*Medea* continues to be performed, articulating "twentieth century [and now twenty-first century] points of view" (McLeish and Raphael xv). The recent Abbey Theatre production, while continuing to implicate mothers for war, also coded the universal theme with a decidedly Irish inflection. Although there may have been no calculated decision on the director's part to cast Medea with an Irish actor and Jason with an English one (Jonathan Cake), Fiona Shaw notes that "cultural debris is bound to cling to the play" (Personal Interview, Feb. 16, 2004).[63] An Irish Medea wishing to go to war instead of bearing children, especially those fathered by an Englishman, echoes the spirit

[63] Shaw also notes that in the Dublin performances the chorus was comprised of older women who did more keening throughout the play, whereas in the American performances younger women made up the chorus and reacted to Medea's fury with frenzied jigging. Furthermore, in both the Dublin and American productions, Celia Faherty sang lines from the chorus in *Sean-nós*, "Old Style"--a song that is traditionally performed acappela and in Irish. Another difference between the Dublin production and subsequent ones was that Medea occasionally spoke in Irish to the Nurse (Siobhán McCarthy), a device that worked well in

of Mother Ireland who would rather fight her oppressor than beget its prodigy. The horrors that transpire in *Medea* are due in large part to "when a mortal and an immortal attempt to live in a common world, as if each had the same purposes and could use similar means to further them" (McLeish and Raphael xiii-xiv). Post-Great War/Anglo-Irish War society and its impact on Irish women's lives is at odds with this myth of the self-sacrificing Mother Ireland and her demand for sacrifice from her children.

Twenty years before Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw's Irish Medea, Roísín Cowman linked the cultural icons together in her poem "Medea Ireland" (1982). While the play's (Irish) Medea mates and breeds with her (English) oppressor, the poem's Medea mates with Catholicism, embodying the social ramifications of the Free State's theocracy in Ireland:

> Snake mother at the psyche's core,
> she uncoiled for him;
> and by what power could she then
> mate and breed
> with one, who shook the island
> with hell-thunderings from his book?
> and with his lore of God's love
> dying between thief and thief
> and God's love living in a triple leaf
> spread madness with his seed?
> The rime of death on children's bodies still

Dublin but was not as successful with the London audience that found the change in language disruptive (Personal Interview, 16 February 2004).

delays his pursuit of her flight through time.

(133-134)

The conflation of the shamrock with the Catholic Trinity to represent the "lore of God's love" results in the "madness" that spreads itself across Ireland—the madness of patriarchal "hell-thunderings" with its rhetoric of sin and damnation and the madness of a Medea/Mother Ireland that succumbs to its power only to breed children destined to die from such a union. With the Church/State's focus upon its responsibility over its children's recent deaths, just forty-five years (from the implementation of 1937 Irish Constitution to 1982) in a timeframe that spans millenia, Medea/Mother Ireland is momentarily able to evade capture. Cowman's poem, like Warner and Shaw's play, equates oppression with a male authority that uses the feminine entity (whether as a cultural icon or as a wife) to subdue and conquer herself through her children. In the cases of both the poem and the play, the rejection of motherhood through infanticide signals a hegemonic fear from the patriarchal standpoint (manifest in the 1937 Constitution) that without male intervention everything an Irish mother/Mother Ireland is supposed to represent will be destroyed by the madwoman who promotes it.

Helen Zwicker, in "Between Mater and Matter: Radical Novels by Republican Women," surmises that the figure of Mother Ireland, long embodied in the Republican struggle for independence, became "naturalized and codified in De Valera's 1937 Constitution" at the point in Irish history "when nation begat nation-state" (248). In declaring that "'by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved,'" article 41 of the Irish Constitution relegated the very definition of woman

> by producing women as subjects of the state through their role as mothers, . . . restrict[ed] the range of both gendered subjectivity (all women are mothers) and national subjectivity (mothering is basic to Ireland's "common good"). Put simply, the trope of Mother Ireland gets recast in the concrete, material bodies of women produced as mothers, who move in domesticated spaces in order to direct their energies toward the nation-state. (248-249)

The effect upon Irish women's lives was paradoxical: on the one hand women were to be revered for their generative capacity and on the other chastened for living lives outside state-issued parameters. For Irish women during the 1930s, the political ideology of Eamon de Valera's Irish Free State essentially replaced one "Master narrative, British Imperial history, with another totalizing plot, that of a hyper-masculine Irish nationalism" (St. Peter 154). In addition to the Irish Constitution's denunciation of working mothers and its prohibition of divorce (Cahalan, *Modern Irish Literature* 212-229), the years leading up to the constitution witnessed the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), the illegalization of contraceptives (1935), and with the Conditions of Employment Bill in 1935, a "maximum proportion of women workers in industry" was made law (Foster 546).[64] Republican women felt betrayed by De Valera, believing that he went against the ideals expressed in the Easter Proclamation's guarantee that "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and opportunities" would be given to all Irish citizens (Foster 598). Dorothy Macardle, a close friend to De Valera, protested in a letter to him that the "language of

[64] Margot Backus points out that within such a national and exclusive framework where there is a "denial of difference" (Walshe qtd. in Backus 175), novels such as Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* and Molly Keane's *Two Days in Aragon* can be read "precisely as post-treaty recurrences of the suppressed Anglo-

certain clauses [within the constitution] suggests that the state may interfere to a great extent in determining what opportunities should be open or closed to women; there is no chance whatever to counterbalance that suggestion or to safeguard women's rights in that respect" (Kiberd 404-405). Despite Macardle's protests and those of other prominent Republican women like Constance Markievicz and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington who had actively participated in the revolution, De Valera refused to amend the document and acknowledge women's contribution to Ireland's independence. Instead, women, and Mother Ireland herself, were relegated to child-bearing while the men took up the spears and the strain of creating the new Irish nation-state.

These inherent contradictions between state-generated myth and women's actual lives have played themselves out in the literature, especially civil war literature, written by Irish women over the past century. Anne Fogarty, in "'The Horror of the Unlived Life': Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction," notes how the images of Ireland

> as a hapless abandoned maiden, a homeless crone, an exacting, tutelary spirit who needs to be propititated, and as a melancholic mother who demands unceasing sacrifice and devotion from her children and is herself defined by an unswerving propensity to self-immolation generated by nationalist literature continue to inflect the ways in which femininity is construed in the country today and endows women writers in particular with a problematic and constraining legacy. (87)

Irish feminism that [Éibhear] Walshe identifies with [Constance] Markievicz's armed resistance against British rule and [Eva] Gore-Booth's trade unionism and lesbianism" (174-175).

While focusing upon the women writers of the latter half of the twentieth century, Fogarty raises the question of how an Irish woman who supported the Republic during the war years negotiates between feeling betrayed by the government and rejecting its imposition of motherhood upon her, a motherhood that subsumes the woman's identity into a state-induced myth, is answered in part by novelists Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob.[65] The mothers in Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* (1930) and Jacob's *The Troubled House: A Novel of Dublin in Twenties* (1937) side with their rebel sons during the Troubles (Anglo-Irish War, 1918-1921) inside and outside the home. Damian Doyle points out in *A Bio-Critical Study of Rosamond Jacob and Her Contemporaries*, that while Jacob, in the years leading up to the formation of the Free State, was a staunch nationalist,

> her travels and involvement with international groups such as WILPF [Women's International League of Peace and Freedom], FOSU [Friends of the Soviet Union] and the Threefold Movement provided her with an international perspective that, coupled with the continued erosion of

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[65] Kathleen Coyle (1886-1952), was brought up in Derry and Donegal, and lived in Paris before settling with her husband Charles Maher in New York. Her autobiography, *The Magical Realm*, reads much like an innocuous version of a Molly Keane Big House novel and depicts her childhood in Northern Ireland. A prolific writer, her novels include *Shule Agra* (1927), *Liv* (1929), *A Flock of Birds* (1930), *Josephine* (1942), and *Brittany Summer* (1940).

Rosamond Jacob (1888-1960), Irish Quaker, feminist, republican, animal rights activist, was very much involved in the political and social issues of her day, developing close friendships with many Irish activists, most notably with feminist and republican Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, and Frank Ryan, leader of the Irish contingent of the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. Jacob never privileged one of her causes over the others, believing all were interrelated and equally important towards creating a better world. One example of this from her diaries (and one which greatly endeared Jacob to the writer of this dissertation) was Jacob's paw-ning of stray animals at her various republican and feminist meetings. Whatever stray or distressed animal Jacob would find in Dublin's streets, she believed that it was politically (and humanely) necessary for activists to actualize their convictions by caring for society's downtrodden, especially animals, who had no rights under law. Jacob's novels include *Callaghan* (1920), *The Troubled House* (1937), *The Rebel's Wife* (1957), and *The Raven's Glen* (1960). For a more comprehensive overview of her life, see Doyle.

> women's power in the Irish Free State during the 1920s and early 1930s, began to undermine her strong "nationalist" position. Jacob understood that the Free State was moving away from, rather than closer to, a democratic state. Her dismay included, among other things, the State's collusion with the Catholic Church, the introduction of state censorship in film and print, and the banning of divorce and contraceptives. (58)[66]

As Margaret Higonnet observes, war, particularly civil war which takes place in one's (home)land, has "more potential than other [types of] wars to transform women's expectations" ("Civil Wars and Sexual Territories" 80). It is to the figure of Medea Ireland then, not Mother Ireland, that these women turn for guidance, and to the self-regenerative power of her rage.

Both stunning novels begin with the mothers finding themselves caught in the midst of family turmoil that carries with it deadly repercussions from the state. *A Flock of Birds*' Catherine Munster has just come from court where the judge has sentenced her son Christy to death for murdering a government official. Margaret Cullen, in Jacob's *The Troubled House*, has returned home from a three year visit to Australia (where she had been taking care of her ill sister's family) only to learn that her husband Jim had thrown their middle son Liam out of the house for his involvement in the IRA. Home is anything but sweet for these two women, and is inextricably linked with patriarchal control, whether it is by one's husband, by the state or by both. The Irish State, by their accounts, is a very bad husband indeed.

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[66] See Doyle, particularly chapter two, "Rebel with a Cause: The Life and Literary Works of Rosamond Jacob" (17-77).

Published in 1930 and set in May 1919, Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* critiques the Irish Free State government by having Irish women attack the mythologized martyrdom of Irish men during the Great War and Anglo-Irish War and the purported war heroes who would become leaders of the new Ireland. After the initial shock of learning that her son Christy is going to be executed for committing an IRA-sanctioned murder, Catherine Munster thinks about her other son, Valentine, a lawyer and a Great War veteran, and his choice of Teddy Redmond for Christy's counsel. Although Valentine could not take the case because he was Christy's brother, Catherine thought that Redmond "had nearly made a mess of it" because he "had been slow, heavy as a piece of lead" (6). Coyle's naming this ineffectual lawyer "Redmond" and associating him with a Great War veteran is a strong allusion to John Redmond, leader of the Irish Home Rule Party, and his enthusiast recruitment of Irishmen to do their bit to help Britain in the Great War. The irony of John Redmond's inability to win the people over to his conciliatory position with Britain is manifest in Teddy Redmond's leaden performance at defending an Irish Republican Army soldier, though Catherine admits that "perhaps he had shot home as well as anybody" could have in his position (Coyle 6). The fact that anybody, any man could do no better is at the heart of the matter for Catherine. The "shooting home" initiated during Easter Week 1916, that continued through the Anglo-Irish war years into the mid-twenties during the formation of the Free State government, reflects how easily men depend upon war, so much so that they always find a way to bring it home.

While Christy may have been convicted during the Anglo-Irish war years, it was the Great War that initially destroyed Catherine's "home front" and sparked the

divisiveness between her children. As she recalls, "war, civil or otherwise, was never mentioned when they were all together. To have mentioned it would have been a species of arson in that atmosphere" (27). Valentine's enlistment with the British forces, Kathleen's participation in "war-work" in Paris (53), and Christy's involvement with the IRA made peaceful discussion on the subject impossible. In the previous year, before the war ended, her sons had momentarily "wiped out their anger" with each other by "sawing the cherry-tree" (33). Catherine recollects that she "saw the saw, running smooth as silver, between them, and the red blood running out of the cherry-tree," and notes that cherry logs ultimately "don't burn well" (33). While former WWI veterans and Republican soldiers may have worked together to form the Free State in the post-war years, that government, like the cherry logs, was not strong enough to make a home or country function well. The acrimony between the Irish who fought with the British and those who fought for the Republic during the Easter Rising and after was still bitter in the 1920s. Irish Great War veterans considered the Rising a betrayal of their courage, as the myth of overwhelming Irish support for the rebellion erased all memory of their sacrifice, and Republicans considered the Great War veterans as traitors to Ireland.[67] As a war veteran, Valentine has no trouble remembering the war and the wounds suffered two years earlier that brought him home. In the Irish anti-WWI atmosphere of denial in 1919, there were only a select few with whom he could speak about it. When Kathleen's lover André Grenier, a French fighter pilot, meets her family, "he and Valentine began talking war experiences at once, and with an ease on Valentine's part that revealed to [Catherine] that it was not unusual for him to speak on the war" (72). His selective sharing of his

[67] See Chapter II of the dissertation for more information on Irish National Amnesia.

wartime experience is not simply following the general behavior of Great War veterans who felt that only those who also fought would understand them, but also indicative of how an Irishman could speak of WWI without creating "a species of arson" in his own home. Yet without Christy's IRA involvement as a measure and as a lightening rod, Valentine's war experience might nevertheless have remained unacknowledged to Catherine, for unlike her despair over Christy's impending execution, Catherine did not suffer the same pangs when Valentine went to war—she had no doubt that he would survive. Her friend Jenny Lysaght, on the other hand, always felt that her son "Terry would never come back" (77). With that admission on Jenny's part, both women "looked at each other with the comprehension of women who have had the same pains, the same agonies, who were the same age, and who knew everything" (77). Whether their sons were fighting in Flanders or in Ireland, whether the war was "civil or otherwise," its effect upon the home and upon women in particular was inescapable and indicative of what would come about with the formation of the Free State.

Regardless of which war and position Irishmen chose to support during the nascent Free State years, warmongering and politics are one in the same for Catherine, who views the ineffectual, pro-WWI stance of a Redmondite with the same disgust she has for a hawkish, pro-IRA demagogue. In response to the successful lobbying in Christy's defense, the government-sponsored *Times* prints an editorial supportive of him which in turn provokes the opposition newspaper into suggesting that Christy was not really an IRA operative but a spy for the British. Christy's supporters are incensed by this move on the opposition's part, for it will surely mean Christy's execution in order to demonstrate his Republican loyalty. With Valentine and Christy's fiancée, Catherine

visits the editor of the newspaper to try to convince him to retract the story. She decides that the scholarly looking man who greets them is

> an idealogue and had ruled her son. And instantly he became only an instrument to her. It was not he. It was the idea. Men were born to the idea as they are born to life. This man's faith was a race-faith, and ineradicable. (94)

Fixed in the idea of what should be, the idealogue that Catherine faces embodies only what he believes in, nothing more nor less, and that was what Christy heeded when he participated in the murder. That fact that Christy's life would certainly end with the publication of the article was insignificant to the man as he tries to convince Catherine that individual sacrifice for the Republican cause "is stronger than mortal love, stronger than mortal life" and a "vital question of policy" (96). Catherine, repelled by his devaluing of human life in favor of "policy," stared at him and "saw banners behind him, flags of all creeds, crosses of all the faiths. Liberties. Defeats" (96). No matter what war, what cause or what individuals championed them, the outcome would be the same and the liberties and defeats, stalemate. This would be the case even for the idealogue himself, for in Catherine's mind

> she had a queer premonition that one day his own life would be taken. He would fall on a roadside, the bullets whizzing like pebbles. Grey, and without shields. Emperors and captains . . . In days of war. In days of war. (98)

Even the "emperors and captains" die indiscriminate to the bullets that fly in either direction for whatever cause during war. The policies of idealogues, warmongers and

hero-makers supercede the value of life and have transgressed the home front as Catherine has witnessed within her own family: Valentine, a WWI veteran, returned wounded to a country where he cannot openly speak of his experience; Christy, a soldier for Republicanism, needs to die so that the cause can benefit from his sacrifice. According to Coyle, Ireland in 1930 has become a repository for martyred memory and for the heroes who reinvent themselves to sustain it.

Along with war and its upheaval on the home front, both women's recognition of their children's sexual lives forces them to come to terms with their own sexuality and the repressive nature of the Free State's laws governing the body and female sexual autonomy. Part and parcel of acknowledging familial sexuality is its association with what Margot Backus terms "domestic secrets." These secrets, particularly within Anglo-Irish literature, "were conventionally projected outside the family via the gothic family romance," serving "to bind children to the colonial structure via family bonds of secrecy and loyalty" and are ultimately used as "anticolonial weapons" (175). While neither Coyle nor Jacob are Anglo-Irish writers in the long-standing association with the term ("Anglo-Irish" has been analogous with the Protestant Ascendancy and is now used to describe Irish writers who write in English), their novels nonetheless employ domestic secrets in much the same way, using these secrets more as "anti-Free State weapons." The novels I discuss here are similar to Anglo-Irish novels where the "resurfacing of domestic secrets such as sexual abuse, incest, and homosexuality, as well as a myriad of secret impulses, perceptions, political affiliations, and histories" parallel and intersect the gothic family romance with the larger society (Backus 175). The domestic secrets that the mothers share with their children in Coyle and Jacob's novels undermine paternal

authority both in the family and the Free State and are the foundation for familial/civil unrest.

As the eldest son who would inherit Gorabbey, the Munster estate, Valentine's indiscriminate sexuality worries Catherine because of the threat of cross-class disclosure of domestic secrets along with miscegenation corrupting the family line. She had initially "suffered agonies" when she had learned of Valentine "going to the bawdy house," but now with Christy's impending death, it did not matter to her if Valentine "frequented brothels or kept a girl in Windyharbour" (Coyle 6). It does, however, bother her when Valentine decides not to stay at the hotel after one exhausting day of lobbying, but to go straight-away to Windyharbour without first taking a bath. The fact that Valentine leaves unbathed is upsetting to Catherine not because she equates uncleanliness with sexual impurity, but that with "the girl she imagined that he hid nothing, kept nothing in . . . if he could go to her without a bath" (106). The domestic secrecy that is integral to maintaining Anglo-Irish family order (in that both Catherine and Valentine pretend that his sexuality is nonexistent) is broken in his relationship with the woman who could truly comfort and "release the anguish in him" (106). Additionally, this relationship destroys "the tribal days" of creating clans because Valentine uses contraceptives, something that Catherine considers "vulgar" (though she sees the wisdom of it) because it forces "consciousness where not consciousness ought to be" (106). Yet when Valentine informs Catherine that he "must marry" the woman, not because he has gotten her pregnant but because he does not think "anything more genuine will ever come into [his] life" (145-146), she is very conscious of reproduction: "An unknown girl was going into [Gorabbey's] possession; to be her son's bride and breed another generation; to bring

strong, thoughtless blood into the race that treasured the Black Poems" (146). The weak, thought-filled blood of Catherine's family has reached an impasse in its generative capacity much as Ireland has by the 1930s. Valentine, a Great War veteran, can see this "unknown girl" as the only thing "genuine" in his life—someone without a family past or connections. Christy, who will soon be executed, will be unable to marry his fiancée Cecily—a young women from an acceptable, well-connected family. With the Free State's banning of contraceptives in 1929, Coyle seems to be suggesting through Catherine that any possibility of eugenic (tribal) selection has been erased and that the Irish populace is bound to be a thriving albeit ignorant one through its unregulated breeding.

Like Valentine, Kathleen too shares in domestic secrets with her mother, but her secrets are much more accessible to Catherine and reflective of Catherine's own desires. A doctor once informed Catherine that "mothers very rarely pay enough attention to the sexual development of their sons" because "it is left to the fathers" (16). With daughters, Catherine notes, there is a difference: "One knew all about them. One was able to say: Don't mind when you are moody, Kathy, it is a sign that something is coming" (16). The secrecy between mothers and daughters resides both in the shared psychological space and in the mysterious rhythms of the female body that are unknown to men. Women's moods are not simply hormone-induced but premonitory as well. While Kathleen may be "closed as a Carmellite in her intellectual world" from Catherine (28), who cannot understand her esteem for Joyce her mother cannot understand (17), Catherine nonetheless has a "queer, utterly new, uncontrollable pride in her" in the way in which she was coping with Christy's situation, intuiting that "the girl would be truly beautiful in

her maturity" and would have "the strength that ripens only in the middle years" (28). Catherine then wonders "suddenly about Kathleen's unknown love affairs" (28), as if both a mother's pride in her daughter and the acknowledgement that the daughter will some day be her age triggers her own sexual awakening. With Kathleen spending most of the Great War years in Paris among intellectuals, Catherine's ability to secretly know about her daughter's sexual life is far more limited than is her acquaintance with Valentine's. Still, when Kathleen receives a letter at the hotel, Catherine "felt joined to Kathleen subterraneously, hiddenly and in an indefinable way over the letter, and for the first time she connected Kathleen's war-work with her life" (53). Kathleen's war-work conflates with her love affairs and with the secret knowledge shared between mother and daughter. Whether spying on the Germans, writing for newspapers, driving ambulances, working in canteens or hospitals, Kathleen is an autonomous woman in Catherine's eyes, both professionally and sexually. Furthermore, when Catherine finally meets her daughter's lover and sees how closely they resemble each other, she becomes "clairvoyantly conscious of the passion between them" and that in each of them shone "a dark glow that was made almost incestuous by their resemblance" (72). This incestuousness extends to how Catherine identifies with Kathleen and shares in the secret sexual knowledge with her. Above all, "there was something wrong about it, something dark—and holy" (72).

Gay Wachman in *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties* argues that incest and other forms of the sexually forbidden such as adultery and homosexuality were often used by female writers in their texts as cross-metaphors for the horror of war. Referring to Sylvia Townsend Warner's "A Love Match," a short story about a shell-

shocked Great War veteran's incestuous relationship with his sister, Wachman contends that Townsend Warner's depiction of incest demonstrates that it is "war, not incest, that is a monstrous invader of lives" (151) as war permeates all facets of society and destroys everything in its wake. Incest (in the story) manifests as the result of WWI; incest is also a stand-in for Townsend Warner's lesbian partnership with Valentine Ackland as "what couple could be more above reproach than a pair of literary ladies or 'a disabled major and his devoted maiden sister'" living closeted lives in small, English villages (149). In regard to *A Flock of Birds*, Catherine's conflation of Kathleen's adulterous relationship with incest and her war-work offers a similar critique. It is both the Great War and the Anglo-Irish War that are disrupting lives, making the conventional impossible to maintain. The Great War may bring the two lovers together, but the Anglo-Irish War parts them since the war's effect upon her family prompts Kathleen to send André back to his wife.

Although Catherine may identify in many ways with Kathleen and her impractical love for André, it is through Christy that she comes to reconcile her unrequited love for her cousin Mitchell with an awareness of her own autonomy. Throughout her life Mitchell "had been in the background," so it was "natural that he should send a telegram" when he learned of Christy's sentence (23). At the age of nineteen Mitchell had married a young woman whose family was relocating to China and he went there with them. Thinking that Mitchell would eventually come back for her even though he was already married, Catherine refused Luke's marriage proposals five times before accepting him on the sixth. For the first few years of her marriage, she felt that she was betraying Mitchell when she was sexually intimate with Luke, and that "Valentine and Kathleen had been

born from this reserve, the fire all on Luke's side" (102). When she realizes finally that "she had loved her husband" and that Christy had been conceived in that consciousness, it was then "that she had begun to live as a woman, to know motherhood" (102). Catherine's awareness as a woman derives from her taking responsibility for her own feelings and not relying on those of men. Whether Mitchell would ever return for her or that Luke loved her is immaterial; when she decided that she loved Luke was the point at which she knew that she was a woman instead of an infatuated girl. Christy's conception and birth were intrinsic to her self-growth but not the reason for it. As Catherine thinks of this moment in her life and of Christy in prison, she silently tells him that

> You do not know . . . how much of your life has been my life. He had come in her highest tide, a flood. The breaking of the waters. Beautiful as poetry in the old testament. No false shames, no virginal horrors, but a ripe woman knowing the reason and purpose of life and standing up to her share in it. (103)

The fact that Christy is now about to die has more resonance with her, therefore, than just a mother's sorrow over the imminent loss of her child. Christy's death will mark the passing of her birth and maturity into womanhood, and the years in which Christy and she "shared life in the same places" in Gorabbey, her childhood home that she inherited when he was a baby (58-59). Thus in bracing herself for Christy's execution and the resultant agony she will experience, Catherine has necessarily decided to leave Gorabbey forever as the life they symbiotically shared and its signification for her autonomy will cease to hold the same value any longer.

Although Catherine may identify with the Virgin Mary and the anguish she experienced awaiting the execution of her son, it is Medea who Catherine recalls, an Irish mother and who refuses to sacrifice herself for society. Hearing the judge's decision that Christy is to be hanged, Catherine finds herself standing in front of Felicity's hat-shop. She remembered that upon visiting the shop with her daughter once before, she thought that "Kathleen's hat stretched over the wooden nose of a mannequin . . . resembled a profile out of a Greek chorus" (Coyle 6). For Catherine, the felicity and tragedy of her son's circumstance conflate at that moment and she recognizes that she "had never felt less emotional in her life" (6). The juxtaposition of the domestic, female space (women's hats in a display window) with the public, male space (the state's imminent execution of her son) makes itself difficult for her to know what to feel. What she does muster to understand is that she, as the martyr's mother, will be pressured to embrace the sacrifice of her son for "his ideas" of a free Ireland (7). Just as Medea would sooner go to war than bear children, Catherine scoffs at the idea that women are inherently inclined to sacrifice and believe women "hated sacrifice as they hate child-birth but they had to face it" (9). Instead, she blames men for the romantic notion of it all:

> But that was all nonsense, the sort of nonsense that labelled women with a love of sacrifice. She did not love sacrifice. A waste in the name of heaven was no less waste. It was that she resented, his waste. To him it was a heroic purpose. Heroism or martyrdom was the fashion. What fools they were these young men, these weavers of wreaths! Other brows bore the thorns . . . Women had to think it all out for a very long time

> afterwards. It was useless to blame women for their calculation, for their powers of saying thus and thus over and over. (18)

To Catherine, heroism and martyrdom are in fashion for men in much the same way that the hats in the Felicity Shop are for women, although women must exchange their hats for crowns of thorns when the men decide it is time for them to be fashionable. Unlike the passive suffering of the Virgin Mary over Christ's death, a mother figure that Irish women have long been taught to emulate, Catherine is disinclined to accept either the standards of Ancient Greek hero worship or those of Christian martyrdom over her Christy's impending death. Moreover, the jingoism of war, be it the Great War's looming mother who demands her children to "do their bit" for her sake[68] or Kathleen Ni Houlihan's call to Irish patriots to take up arms for Ireland's honor, is simply waste of life to her, and it is a falsehood to suggest that women adulate such sacrifice. Yet however much Catherine would like to forego the label of mother and all the cultural debris that clings to it, it is the only means by which people can relate to her and she to them.

As the appeal process over Christy's conviction begins and public protest mounts against the verdict, Catherine is constantly questioned as to whether she is his mother by warders, newspaper editors and politicians who need to know how they should respond to her. However for Catherine, it is her identification with other mothers that has the most significance for her as she feels that only they could truly understand her predicament. After leaving the gaol, Catherine is approached by an elderly woman who makes her way

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[68] Jane Marcus in "Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War" discusses how "the phallic mother" in Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet. . .*, representing "the Home Front, the Mother Country, the one who gives birth and also kills" (146-150), reflects the greater societal issues surrounding motherhood and how its function in promoting war.

from the crowd of protesters to exclaim "You are his mother!" and "May God help you!" (60). Catherine's immediate reaction is to push the woman away, but seeing her eyes wet with tears, "it came quite clear to Catherine that she was face to face with her equal. Her spirit stood upright within her and gave mute secret greeting to this old unknown woman who knew her suffering; who understood" (60). For both the old woman and Catherine, the suffering is a "mute secret" that cuts across age and class categories for those women who know that motherly suffering and sacrifice are terribly ordinary, not the badge of honor they are propagandized to be. Moreover, even the passive torment of the Virgin Mary becomes tangible to Catherine when she looks beyond the fetishized suffering to connect with her as a mother. As the hope for an appeal disappears and Christy's execution draws near, Catherine feels compelled to enter a Catholic Church, although she is Anglican, and pray. She is "conscious of the large crucifix and kept her eyes away from it" and

> in avoiding it her gaze went full into a painting of Mary before the embalmed body of her son. She was transfixed and stirred, devastated by understanding. It was so much older than she, this happening, this—leaving of the mother. They took him down from the cross and Mary hid many things in her heart. How many mothers had hidden things in their hearts! Men died and women stayed on after them to learn the full meaning, the bitter, unsatisfying taste of life . . . the life they had created. (109)

Catherine avoids the crucifix not simply because it represented another mother's executed son, but because it signifies the waste of woman-created life. After all, it was

"the abandonment of the Father in the Garden of Olives" (85) that leaves Mary to learn the bitterness of sacrifice. Just as Catherine identified with the older, working-class woman through motherhood, she disregards her religious upbringing to find solace in Catholic iconography as a mother rather than as a man who would believe that there is meaning, not waste, in sacrifice. By transferring her focus onto the mother rather than onto the son, eliding the Christ out of Christianity, Catherine prefigures an "Outsiders' Society" much in the same vein as what Virginia Woolf suggests in *Three Guineas* where women could prevent war by assuming "an attitude of complete indifference" to the heroics and martrydom of men.[69] It is with this realization that Catherine looks to Medea for a possible solution to the anguish of motherhood.

According to Catherine, "women could escape motherhood, and Medea-like get things their own way," but this could happen "only for a time" (110) as is made evident to her after her encounter with a present-day Medea. On one of her last prison visits to Christy, Catherine witnesses an old man being accosted by the warder who demands to see the contents of his red handkerchief bundle. Aside from the package containing a "woman's cotton chemise and a pair of flannelette knickers, and a pair of fawn, cheap stockings," there was a "tiny bunch of late nasturtiums, yellow and red as flames"—"She loves them" the old man explains (126). Catherine replies that "they are lovely," and as the old man makes his way down the prison corridor, the warder pipes, "Murdered her infant" (126). Catherine's response is to "close her eyes against him" while "a sigh escaped her, a flame as the flowers had been" (126). While the declaration of a mother

[69] As one of her war-prevention suggestions to the daughters of educated men, Woolf instructs them not to "incite their brothers to fight, or to dissuade them, but to maintain an attitude of complete indifference" so as to not even acknowledge that there is such a thing as war, patriotism or instinctual "manly satisfaction" in fighting, thereby deflating the male egotistical impetus for conducting warfare (106-107).

murdering her child may have been meant to shock Catherine, it is the warder himself who angers her by both his insensitivity and his ignorance. The seeming incongruity of women's undergarments, flowers and a child-killing mother within the gray prison walls is not at all foreign to Catherine who harbors the nasturtium-like flame within her and a kindred desire with Medea. Why should the mother, after all, be punished for murdering her child when the state has no compunction against murdering another mother's child? Man's hypocrisy becomes embodied in the warder who protects and upholds state dictates at the expense of "faith, hope and charity, and acts of contrition" or "an act of love" as the old man's bundle had been before its defilement by the warder (125). Catherine's disgust with the state, with politics, with heroics and martyrdom, and with the absurd waste of life—both her son's life and the life she might have had with Mitchell, culminate in her decision to leave Ireland after Christy's execution. While Medea may leave Colchis and become "a stranger" in Greece for Jason's sake, Catherine will travel to a place that is "desolate and high . . . a perfect tomb of wars, wars of two thousand years ago," and become "a ghost there," a ghost of "all the mothers whose sons had been taken" (158). Instead of taking on the role of stranger to be with a man, Catherine leaves her identity as widow and mother behind in Ireland to become a communal apparition of universal motherhood; and instead of murdering her children as revenge for patriarchal betrayal, she leaves behind the patriarchal entirely. Two thousand years of wars since the epitome of Western martyrdom died on a cross have left countless mothers grieving, countless versions of La Pieta whose bane has been the state's control of motherhood.

Like Coyle's *A Flock of Birds*, Rosamond Jacob's *The Troubled House* questions how mothers, as patriarchal strangers, fit into both a male-dominated home and a country

undergoing civil war. In *The Troubled House*, Margaret Cullen returns home, Ulysses-like, to reclaim her position within the family after a three-year domestic mission to help her ill sister's household, a "women-centered focus" that, as Damian Doyle points out, "enables [Margaret's] niece to complete university" and is "juxtaposed with her immediate enclosure in the problems of the patriarchal family upon her return" (155-156). *The Troubled House* begins with Margaret self-questioning whether she should expect "any friendship" from her three sons on her return (10), discussing motherhood and the civil war with Miss Josie Carroll, a Dublin artist with whom she has become acquainted aboard ship and who we later learn lives in lesbian partnership with artist Nix Ogilvie. Margaret tells her that her eldest son, Theo, a secretary to a Sinn Fein club (13), was named after Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of the heroes of the 1798 rebellion (10), and that Liam, her middle son, who "ran off and spent five days spying and carrying messages for the Volunteers" during Easter Week (13), would probably be her favorite son if she had to choose because he was considered so "bad" compared to his brothers (11). Josie surmises that it probably did the family some good for her to have been away from them, believing that "nearly every mother either weakens or worries her children when they're beginning to grow up" (11). As Margot Backus points out, from Josie's standpoint as a lesbian, her comments to Margaret are those of "an intelligent outsider who is not herself entangled within the bounds of heteronormative reproduction" (208). Josie's approval of Theo and Liam's republicanism coupled with her disapproval of the abusive manner in which Jim Cullen, their father, suppresses Liam's Easter Rising activities, implies a "common opposition to patriarchal authority among lesbians and republicans" (209), especially when Josie remarks that "judging by the look" of Jim when

she had seen him on the Dublin streets, she "shouldn't care to have him angry with me, if he was my father" (Jacob 14).

Josie's position as an "intelligent outsider" to both the patriarchal confines of family and state dovetails her assessment of Theo and Liam's maturation in context of their republicanism and Margaret's absence from the family into an allegory for the Free State's coming-of-age. Ireland, like an adolescent boy pummeling his way into adulthood, was fighting its way into nationhood in the 1920s, asserting a masculine identity in spite of the mantle of femininity placed on it as a colonized country.

While the figure of Mother Ireland was central to republican recruitment efforts leading up to the Easter Rising, and the support of nationalist women's groups such as Cumann na mBan (the women's auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers) and Inghinidhe na h-Eireann (Daughters of Ireland) was invaluable to the cause, the Free State quickly grew out of its need for any assistance from women save for in domestic areas. Margaret's question about whether to expect friendship from her sons can be thus read as a rhetorical one put by Jacob before the De Valeran Free State of the 1930s: Can Mother Ireland and women who supported the nation's sons expect any friendship from the government they helped create? For Jacob, who was an early supporter of De Valera and joined his Fianna Fáil party after resigning from Sinn Féin in 1926, primarily over its failure to consider women as equal citizens in the new government (Doyle 46), De Valera's promotion of the Catholic, heternormative agenda was abhorrent and, as for many republican women who had supported the revolution, a betrayal. Jacob considered

> the Eucharistic Congress of 193[2] as the turning point in Irish politics and a major setback for Irish women. Her fears were confirmed in 1937, when

> the Catholic Church was literally enshrined into the Irish constitution. This act placed Irish women at the center of the heterosexual family, reconsigning those who had fought for independence to their domestic roles, while at the same time barring them access to the resources of power in the Free State. . . Jacob understood and critiqued the alignment of the Church with male control of the state, a situation in Ireland which continues to postpone the decolonization of its people. (Doyle 137-138)

Thus in *The Troubled House*, Jacob's depiction of the camaraderie forged between Margaret and her sons and Josie and Nix suggests that by rejecting the patriarchal in favor of cross-generational, cross-gender alliances, a Free State more representative of its name could have been created instead of the De Valeran forged one.

Margaret's marriage, like Ireland's identification with Mother Ireland in the 1930s, is tenuous at best, functioning as an obligatory alliance to do what is best for the children. The impetus for Margaret's return home is to be with her sons, after all, rather than reuniting with her husband, though her "inward mentor" reminds her that he will need her more as he ages, knowing that "no one else can take [her] place with him" (9). Prior to leaving home, she was "finding him a little bit tiresome, sometimes," and from his letters to her while she was away, letters filled with school reports and health updates, lacking in any "real information" about her sons (12), she recognizes that "Jim hasn't changed in three years" (9). Furthermore, learning from Theo that Jim had recently banished Liam from the home for his IRA involvement and also stopped paying for his college tuition only reinforces Margaret's disapproval of Jim (18-19) and reminds her of the benefits of having her "own money"—Liam could then "go back to college to-

morrow, if he likes" (20). Though she may be a married woman, the financial independence she has makes it possible for her to maintain some balance with the patriarchal decisions that Jim wields, even countering those decisions to favor his rebellious son. Jim's recognition of Margaret's ability for subterfuge against him is alluded to in his comment to Theo that "'There can't be much doubt of your paternity, my lad," adding "a slight emphasis on the 'your,'" after Margaret's observation that since she's been away, Theo has grown to resemble his father (22). The questioning of Liam's paternity aligns Margaret with illegitimacy, implying that only that which resembles the father is without suspicion, and therefore, only the female could bring sedition into the home.[70] Moreover, though Jim is pleased that Margaret has returned, exclaiming, "Ah, Theo, we have a home again at last!," he does make it a point to tell her that the cook-general has made "everything ready in [Margaret's] room" for her (22). The compartmentalization of the household, whereby the husband and wife have separate rooms and the troublesome son is no longer present, suggests a further decentralization of paternal authority in that both the mother and son have a certain degree of autonomy and might possibly undermine that authority more. Yet for Jim, the reaffirmation of his paternity to Theo and the expression of his relief to him that the household is now a home again solely because the mother has rejoined it supercedes his worries over domestic sedition. For the sake of his obedient sons Theo and Roddy and the family's reputation (since above all Jim "didn't want it to get around everywhere that he had a row in the family") (19), and of Margaret's desire to "throw away all care" when she has "dinner

[70] Backus notes that Jim's reference to his sons' paternity brings up issues of "intergenerational violence, doubles, ghosts, and illegitimacy," reflecting "a series of standard [Anglo-Irish] gothic tropes" (209).

with [her] husband and children in [her] own home again" (24), the two will maintain marital decorum in exchange for a ostensive familial peace.

Although, as earlier noted, the image of Mother Ireland leading up to the Easter Rising was that of Kathleen Ní Houlihan rousing her children to fight on her behalf, with the formation of the Free State and De Valera's adherence to Church ideology that relegated women to the home, Mother Ireland became domesticated. Women who wanted to do what was best for post-colonial Ireland would put down their ambition for public service and instead take up the role as wife and mother. As Fogarty observes, the 1937 constitution "severely delimits and restricts [women's] ambit. The veneration of women in their role as mothers ironically has the effect of diminishing their power; well-intentioned paternalism paves the way for social oppression" (87). The incongruity between maternal veneration and its concomitant oppression is recognized by Margaret as problematic and something that she wishes to eschew. While she may have initially wanted to keep up the appearance of a dutiful wife and mother upon her return home, when her sister-in-law Nora exclaims that "it's a hard thing to be a mother in Ireland now," Margaret replies that "mothers must take their chance like other people" and pinches Liam's ear (Jacob 29). In Margaret's opinion there should be no distinction made between mothers, their sons or their husbands; the fate of Ireland during the Troubles and the formation of the Free State in the 1920s and 1930s *must* include mothers as equal shareholders in the process of nation-state building. It is with this recognition that she begins to see herself as an autonomous political/social entity and, according to Backus, refines "her own political position, which takes place as she negotiates between Theo's (evolving) pacificism and Liam's militancy" (210).

The homecoming dinner for Margaret thus functions as a bureaucratic caucus where family politics represent a microcosm of the differing positions lobbied in Ireland during the 1920s and 30s with the figure of Mother Ireland waiting in the background. Furthermore, it provides the literary forum through which Jacob could express her political stance. Jim, who "spoke from the same old Home Rule Party standpoint as ever," is arguing with Theo whose political ideas "were sweeping and crude enough, but they had a hopeful idealism very becoming at his age, and also, [Margaret] thought, a touch of originality," while Liam, who is eager to dispute his father, observes his mother's "silent signs, and, with a little shrug of his shoulders, shut his eyes in token that he consented to hold his peace" (Jacob 29). The Jim of old and Theo, the Jim of the post-Redmond generation, take no note of Margaret whereas Liam, one of Ireland's sons who answers Kathleen Ni Houlihan's call, regards his mother with conspiratorial respect. It is only when she is near Liam that "Jim watched [her] with unobtrusive vigilance" ; she "could not make the slightest movement connected with Liam without his notice" (29). Like Mother Ireland, Margaret's association with rebelliousness is troublesome to Jim and his conservative politics; and like Margaret, Jacob distrusts the conciliatory gestures Redmond (and all those who support him) made towards the British government. On August 4, 1914, Jacob notes in her diary that

> Redmond committed his crowning act of treason, offering the volunteers, as if he was a king and a general combined, to the British government to defend this unfortunate country for the empire against the Germans, if Asquith would withdraw all the British troops from here. The offer was,

> of course, accepted without any intention of observing the condition. (MS 32,582 (27))

Just as Redmond believed he had the rule over Ireland's home in 1914 and British confidence in his abilities to maintain it (according to Jacob), the rebellion in 1916 and afterwards dissolved his authority with the Irish—something that Jim would like to avoid happening in his own home. Moreover, Margaret's exclusion from the political conversation and Jim's surveillance of her suggests the underlying distrust the father has for both the home and homeland's mothers. This distrust is alluded to in Nora's gender-driven need to distract Margaret from the men's discussion by talking to her "of women's matters—that is to say, of [their] relations and their affairs," a "prudent" move on her part, but "it had its disadvantages, for [Margaret] wanted badly to hear what Jim and Theo were saying" (29). Margaret, however, sees it as her right to participate in this discussion—after all, it is her home as well, a home made complete (according to Jim) by her presence, and these men are her family. Her interest in hearing what Jim and Theo are saying in particular, to understand what the Redmondite old guard and the Sinn Féin revisionist have in store for Ireland's future concerns her as well. Just what sort of Ireland will be constructed after the Troubles, and will women be permitted to take place in the process or resign themselves, like Nora, to a De Valera-advocated home sphere where only talk of "relations and their affairs" are accepted?

In negotiating familial politics Margaret may be attempting to refine her larger views, yet notwithstanding this process, she comes home with very firm opinions about Ireland, the Great War and the relation between the two, connections that Jacob herself had expressed in her diaries. For instance, although Margaret admires Theo's pacifist

conviction, she is "not quite pacifist enough to agree" with him (37), believing that passive resistance would not work in Ireland because

> there would be a great proportion of the people that would rather obey the British and be comfortable than stand up to them and have their living destroyed. A few thousand young men can carry on a rebellion with arms, but passive resistance, as you describe it, could only be effectively done by unbroken millions. (36)

Their conversation evolves to echoing the caustic views Great War supporters had of peace activists during the war. Those men who refused to fight during the war were often referred to as "slackers," seen as cowards, and aligned with the feminine—"I think I'm practically the only [pacifist Republican] man" in Dublin recalls Theo (36). Margaret does not consider Theo a "slacker" as do Liam and most of his Sinn Féin peers because he does not believe in fighting, and tells him that he's "not really slacking so long as [he] keep[s] thinking and trying to see what [he] ought to do" (37). Margaret does, however, accuse her husband Jim of slacking with regard to the Anglo-Irish War, considering how he felt about the Great War. Jim tells her that he abhors Liam's "carrying on a peculiarly cruel and dastardly form of civil war" where he lurks "about in civilian clothes, waiting for a chance to assassinate men who at least fight openly and in uniform" (39). Margaret counters him with "when the Belgians did that, you never blamed them—you were all indignation at the treatment they got from the Germans" (39).[71]

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[71] Another reference to the beleaguered Belgians occurs when Theo escapes from prison and heads for the Irish West Coast to work for the White Cross. He sends letters home to his family that mention examples of British atrocities against the populace that resonate with those alleged atrocities committed by the Germans against Belgians during the war: "And the case of the man who was found one morning pinned to a gate by a bayonet, dead, having been stuck there by Black-and-tans in the middle of the night and left to die at his leisure" (Jacob 231). Jacob, in her diaries, also refers to learning about "war horrors" (Oct. 22, 1915),

Her invocation of the Great War and the Redmondite call for Ireland to assist "gallant little Belgium" illustrates both the parallels between the Great War and Anglo-Irish War and the hypocrisy of those like her husband who could support the one and not the other. Though Jim claims that the two wars were not analogous as "there was no organization of armed civilians" in Belgium, Margaret does not see the difference:

> We've never had a chance to form an army that the British would recognize. If our men wore uniforms, they wouldn't be treated as belligerents; in fact, wearing their uniform is a capital offence by British law, and you know it. It's absurd to blame them for fighting in the only way that gives them the ghost of a chance. (40)

The Great War and the Anglo-Irish War are civil wars in her opinion; sans the uniform, the players are still the same—armed civilians, "rebels—that is, people who really have something to fight for" (40), and a better armed occupying force. Just as Higonnet notes that in civil war literature "female figures serve to criticize established political ideology" (81-82), Margaret's role in the novel is that of critic of domestic policies, one that embodies Jacob's own thoughts about war and masculine hegemonic incompetence.

Regarding the Great War specifically, Jacob states that "all the Great powers were to blame, Germany not the least, that it is an eloquent testimony to the utter failure of any system of religion or morals to civilise the human race and a melancholy example of masculine government" (Jacob qtd. in Doyle 29-30). While the failure of religion and ethics contribute to the manufacture of war in Jacob's view, they are ultimately the

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going into detail about an alleged incident in which a British company ordered the Australian unit that it was relieving to return back to the front after surveying the superior strength of the Turkish line. When the Australian unit refused to return, the British fired upon them, forcing the survivors of the assault to reposition themselves on the line (Jan. 5, 1916).

products of a "masculine" hegemony that cannot muster what should make society civil—namely a moral code that abhors violence. Margaret similarly views Jim's politics and role as the familial patriarch as destructive, especially when interacting with his sons. The Great War and Anglo-Irish War are therefore as linked to each other as her family's war where husband and son, brother against brother, struggle for power within the country/home.

Another function of the Great War within the family is providing the language necessary to negotiate the emotional no man's land between persons. When Margaret first visits Liam after her homecoming, she is surprised by the display of patriotic British paraphernalia in all the rooms of his landlady's home. Newspaper pictures of King George and Queen Mary's coronation, a portrait of Lord Kitchener, a picture of "a trenchful of Germans begging the British for mercy," and one of "Haig down in the room behind the shop" are interspersed with "photos of soldiers stuck up around the place too" (43). Liam assures Margaret that these items are "camouflage," attempting to allay any fears a mother may have over a son who is active in guerilla warfare. Jim, too, invokes the Great War after learning that Roddy believes that his taunting Theo over his pacifism may have contributed to Theo's participation in an army barracks raid. "So that's the way you did your bit in the great war?" Jim condescendingly questions, berating Roddy's narcissism to think that his brother would do something so dangerous over a childish taunt (167). Roddy's desire to follow Liam's example and join the IRA is also addressed in Great War terms by Margaret whose advice echoes that of worried mothers of adolescent sons who feared that they would be left out of the action due to their age: "I suppose you're afraid the fighting will be over before you get any of it, but you may be

sure it won't end in perfection; there'll always be plenty of dangerous exciting work for you to do" (68). While the Great War may have been an international one, the Cullens' evocation of the war within their family dialogue when discussing emotionally charged subjects concerning the Anglo-Irish and Irish Civil wars reiterates the centrality of World War I to the Irish home front. The Great War cannot be separated from these wars and its effects within the home and the homeland. Even the speculation of peace within Ireland and the Cullen home is met with a Great War analogy. When Liam responds to Margaret that after peace is declared he does not desire to return to the College of Science or life as it was prior to the Easter Rising, he equates his hesitation with the integration of Great War soldiers into civilian life: "I see now how queer the men that were in the European war must have felt when they had to go back to their jobs" (235). Liam's integration back into the family and into patriarchal Ireland is as fraught in his eyes as the experience of veterans readjusting to civilian society.

Much as Margaret's collusion with Liam bespeaks both her political bent and rebelliousness against patriarchal authority, Liam's penchant for cross-dressing as part of his undercover IRA activities reinforces his maternal alliance and the gender subversiveness inherent in insurgency. Liam not only drops any association with his patronymic when in drag, but consciously chooses to align himself with his mother–"Miss Margerison" (son of Margaret) the maid announces when he pays a surprise visit on his family (234). Proud of his slim waist that does not "need corsets" because he has, in his words, a "lovely boyish figure" (237), Liam revels in his gender masquerade and the persona that seems innate to him. When he secretly arrives at the safe house dressed as Miss Margerison following Theo's prison escape, he asks his mother,

"How do you like your new daughter? Weren't you always wishing for one?" (220). Margaret responds that she would like to "have her to keep," surveying Liam's feminine guise:

> His face, with the fair wig and the rakish little hat, had a queer funny charm, though the paint was too thick on his cheeks and the powder on his nose—what had been on the rest of his face had got rubbed off on Theo. He wore his clothes naturally, and the feet and ankles he displayed were wonderfully presentable. (220)

She notes that while his make-up skills may be a tad overdone, his choice of clothing and the way he carried himself as a woman are both natural to him and possessed of a "queer funny charm." Liam embodies the son and the daughter of Margaret's desires: a revolutionary with the heart and soul of a woman and a great sense of style to boot. Even her youngest son Roddy, who has witnessed Liam disguised on many occasions on the streets and trams of Dublin, intuits an illicit link between mother and son when Liam is in drag:

> He had a black coat . . . with strips hanging off it, you know, and a blue hat all on one side, and grand silk stockings. I tell you I got a shock that time. At first I thought it must be a secret sister of ours that you've been hiding somewhere. And when he saw me and started giving me the glad eye, I had to get up and go down inside the tram for fear I'd burst. (198)

Roddy initially thinks that Liam/Miss Margerison is the product of a love affair of Margaret's—not of his father's. Illegitimacy and subterfuge are inextricably linked to the feminine even in the mind of a fourteen-year-old boy, and Liam, as a challenger to

patriarchal authority inside and outside the home, flaunts his gender/political transgression with irreverence.

For his father, however, "the sight of [Liam] giggling in those girl's clothes disgusts" him to the utmost (239). After all, the knowledge that his son lurked about in women's clothing "waiting for a chance to assassinate men who at least fight openly and in uniform" is quite repellent to a patriarch like Jim who believes in the decorum of conventional warfare.[72] The irony of Jim's words and their significance regarding gender is brought home when Jim, in trying to prevent an ambush of a black-and-tan lorry, is shot by Liam who is unaware that the man he attacked is his father. When Liam visits his dying father to apologize for shooting him, Jim acknowledges that Liam did not try to kill him intentionally: "How could you know? You'd have fired a bit lower, I should think, if you had" (248).[73] Jim's sardonic implication that Liam would have shot at his genitals if he had known who he was suggests that both the closeted aspects of guerilla ambush and the openness of uniformed warfare manifest gender distress. In Jim's mind if Liam had recognized him in his "uniform" of father, then he would have necessarily castrated him to avenge the paternal suppression of his filial masculinity in much the same way Miss Margerison would use her feminine wiles to lure an unsuspecting black-and-tan to his death and reclaim her compromised masculinity. Moreover, as Doyle notes, patricide is

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[72] While Doyle asserts that there is "no evidence that IRA men ever went about disguised as women (it was more often in working-class apparel)," he considers that Liam's cross-dressing may be "an ironic device by Jacob" to reflect Liam's fear of Nix as "a bisexual woman who makes her own choices in life, controls the relationships she is in, and one who is connected to European, as well as Irish, traditions" (175).

[73] Jim's statement echoes a burlesque song, "Frankie & Johnny," made popular by Mae West in the 1920s. In this song Frankie learns that Johnny had been cheating on her with another woman and she shoots him for his betrayal. As Johnny dies, he pleads: "Turn me over, Frankie. Turn me over slow. Turn me over, Frankie. Why did you shoot so low?" Her response: "You was my man, and you done me wrong." Betrayal, revenge, and the offending party's genitals as the site of contention (whether as spurned lover or Oedipal son) are amalgamated in both the song and the novel.

a recurrent subject in early twentieth-century Irish literature, often reflecting the gender distress of the (post)colonial Irish man. Thus for Jim Cullen,

> his "feminization" is found in his inability to negotiate with the authorities in attempting to have Theo released. Liam's elimination of the subjugated (and therefore feminized) father clears the deck of the weak and ineffectual and makes way for a more assertive and aggressive subject capable of overthrowing English colonial rule. (167)

Interestingly, while both father and son may abhor the subjugated disposition within the other, neither recognizes it out of the context of the home—Jim does not immediately know that Miss Margerison is Liam when s/he comes to visit the family, and Liam does not know it is his father whom he shoots. It is in disrupting the father/son binary through patricide that the feminization of both men is exorcised, but only temporarily and only in male hegemonic confines. For just as the father/son binary is limited by the patriarchal norm, so too is the male/female binary, and in the evolving post-colonial Ireland that Jacob is witnessing, these binaries are fundamental to maintaining a system that privileges one half of the binary over the other at the expense of all those who, like Jacob, refuse to be relegated to such a narrowly defined existence. It is through her depiction of the lesbian relationship between artists Josie Carroll and Narcissa (Nix) Ogilvie (and the affinity between the two women and the Cullen family) that Jacob posits a system independent of the atavistic binaries and authority of patriarchal Ireland.

Margaret and her sons' association with Josie and Nix removes the family further from the patriarchal norm and deeper into political and gender subversiveness,

additionally challenging the construct of Mother Ireland. Much as Higonnet suggests that gender and sexual roles reverse in civil war literature and, as Backus notes, Josie and Nix's status as outsiders to heteronormative reproduction allows them to critique hegemonic structures more readily, the women's influence upon the Cullen household is mitigated by the war and their art. As Doyle notes, Josie and Nix's

> centrality in the novel provides an alternative to the notion of Irishness on many fronts: their sexuality confronts the heterosexuality that surrounds them; their paintings—of female and male nudes that have been exhibited in Dublin Galleries—deconstruct the strict sexual mores of Ireland; and their independent lifestyles force [Margaret] to reassess her own life, which is spent mediating between father and sons. (170)

While Josie's paintings are mostly water-colored landscapes and nudes, Nix's are "rough—nearly violent" (52) "Cubist renderings of naked models" (60) that cause many people, as Theo notes, to "talk in a muffled way about her being 'very peculiar'" (53). Nix's peculiarity is not simply her predilection for painting male nudes with a violent beauty, but her manner of looking at people with an "almost disconcerting lack of diffidence or reserve" as if they were pictures (56). Margaret, for instance, had "never before [seen] a woman look at a man" the way Nix looks at Theo, and at first thinks that it is due to his attractiveness and masculinity (57). She changes her mind, however, when she views Josie's nude of Nix with Silken Thomas,[74] her cat, concluding that "it seemed to [her] that while [Nix] had been concerned with the man's body, she was here looking

[74] "Silken Thomas" is the diminutive for Thomas, Lord Offaley, who, in 1534, led the first Irish rebellion against England which resulted in Thomas's lands being confiscated and in his execution, along with the executions of all his male clan members. For more information, see Foster, *The Oxford History of Ireland*, (103-106).

at the cat's soul, or at least thinking of it" (64). Nix's queer eye for the straight guy has led many men, Theo included, to fall in love with her, a love that remains unreciprocated on her part. Instead of being prey to heterosexual desire, Nix becomes the cat-like hunter who toys with men who are not "selfish and casual in sex matters like herself" (107). Nix uses her lesbian sexuality to subvert the power dynamic between men and women, creating a gynosocial structure through which she weaves her life. While Josie is more compassionate than Nix, she too is complicit in this, for instead of being jealous of her lover's affairs, Josie considers Nix's sexual peccadilloes as gynosocial prerogative much as the masculine hegemony would consider using women for sex as its right. Josie warns Margaret, after all, that if she "could manage to keep [her] Theo away from my Nix, it would be a good thing for him" as Nix "can love a woman, but I doubt if she could ever love a man; she can't seem to get past the outside with them" (107).[75] The beauty that Nix paints in her violent depiction of the nude males is the same beauty that she is drawn to in her male lovers—a terrible beauty born of her desire to revolutionize the heterosexist standards that objectify women in art and in love. And as Josie notes regarding Nix's ability to love, while Theo may interest her sexually, it is his mother who intrigues her.

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[75] In 1923 Jacob penned the unfinished prototype to *The Troubled House* entitled *Nix and Theo*. In this story, Nix Ogilvie (described as cat-like) seduces Theo Cullen, a younger art student, after his recuperation from being tortured by the Black-and-tans while in prison. Although she is sexually playful and intimate with Theo, Nix wonders throughout their love-making what it would be like to have sex with his younger brother, Liam. In Jacob's diary, she hints that she created this story as a challenge by one of her friends to write a sexual novel in the manner of D.H. Lawrence. Doyle surmises that Josephine Webb and her flatmate (both artists) with whom Jacob stayed when she visited Dublin prior to moving there permanently in 1920 were the prototypes for Josephine and Nix (172). I suggest that Countess Constance Markievicz and Helena Moloney are also potential prototypes for these characters as the two women also lived in domestic partnership, were artists and were visited by Jacob on a number of occasions in 1911-1912. Of Helena Moloney Jacob writes in her diary on August 4, 1911 that she "is extremely good company and very hard to shock. She seems to regard men, as men, more as the relaxation of an idle hour than in any more serious light, does not appear to believe much in the love of a lifetime, but rather in one minor flame after another. She prefers women and madam [Markievicz] prefers men." *Nix and Theo*, along with Jacob's diaries, is located in the *Rosamond Jacob Papers*, National Library of Ireland, MS 32,582.

Despite Margaret's disapproval of Nix's callousness towards Theo, she cannot help but like Nix and be attracted to her and her subversion of patriarchal authority. Nix's direct, immodest behavior, her "certain modernness of manner" as Margaret sums it, is what initially strikes Margaret's curiosity (62). Then, upon viewing Josie's painting of her, Margaret determines that although Nix's face "was not beautiful" her "naked form, portrayed here, gave me a shock of admiration as strong as I had felt at the sight of her diver" (63-64). Both Nix's manner and physical beauty are as unconventional as Nix's cubist painting of the nude male diver that Margaret had admired so and is as shocking to Margaret as her physical attraction to Nix. Nix's desire to paint her, "if you'd let me," further fuels Margaret's take on modernist art and female self-creation, and she responds to this request with "would I come out all squares and triangles?" (65). Unlike the Irish Censorship Board's need to "anathematize everything from jazz to modern fiction" (Foster 534-535), Margaret embraces the idea of modernist art and identifies it as a distinctly female, lesbian creation, an imagining of the world beyond the male construct. To "come out all squares and triangles" is a hope of hers to be seen not as Margaret Cullen, dutiful wife of an Irish lawyer and mother of his three sons, but as a woman interpreted through the lesbian gaze beyond heteronormative reproduction, beyond the conventions of Irish womanhood itself.

However, Margaret is not wholly easy with divesting herself of the life she has known, just yet. Nix's ill-treatment of Theo prods her protective mothering instincts and she confronts the young woman regarding her (mis)behavior. When Nix responds that she would have a difficult time living up to Margaret's expectations as a daughter-in-law, Margaret inquires "why are you fond of me in this queer way?" (184). Aside from

Margaret's intelligence, Nix likes her "voice, and the way [she] moves," concluding that she "could live with [her]" (184), and that she would like "to know a daughter of [hers]" (185). This convergence of Irish womanhood, that of the pre-and-post-WWI generations and their somewhat differing views, evokes Erin's daughters' struggle to get on with the De Valerarian construct of Mother Ireland. Nix's wish to paint Margaret's portrait in Cubist fashion is just one mode through which she sees the mother figure in her "queer way." The queering of Margaret, of Mother Ireland, by the new generation of Irish women artists who envision a country where they do not need to gain access to her via her sons, symbolically removes the strictures placed upon women with the 1937 Constitution. Instead of wanting to know Mother Ireland's sons, Nix and the post-WWI generation of women want to know her daughters, to live with an Irish icon that moves, breathes and thinks like they do, and to have access to an Ireland that is not cloistered from them by the state or the pulpit. Although Margaret may have been angry at Nix regarding Theo, she softens towards her after Nix's "acknowledgement of [Margaret's] power over her" (185), and realizes that "it was a good thing, at least, that Theo had chosen to break his heart over a real, vivid personality and not over an empty fool" (186). Just as Nix desires a mother figure emblematic of intelligence and forward-thinking, Margaret (as Mother Ireland) wants her daughters to respect her power and to be intelligent and powerful in their own right, not empty fools whose autonomy is given over to men and the state.

Patriarchal control, gender and insurgency collide in Josie and Nix's studio and are finally resolved by the end of the novel when Margaret is established as head of the Cullen household. A black-and-tan raid upon the women's flat in search of Liam (who

had been hiding there during his recuperation from pneumonia) culminates in the vandalism of all the women's artwork. Unlike the standard Black-and-tan raid where family valuables and money are taken along with their intended victim, the raiding party only destroys the paintings. Even if Liam had been captured and taken into custody, Josie notes that "they'd have broken [the paintings] up just the same" (161). She intuits that while Liam may have been their ultimate goal, their destruction of the women's modernist/feminist identity was equally important in demonstrating the state's authority. After all, what could be more threatening in the state's eyes than lesbian modernist artists colluding with IRA insurgents whose mission is to destabilize the existing patriarchal authority? Furthermore, Liam's escape from the women's household is made possible by his donning of Nix's clothes (aided by his mother), transforming himself, as it were, into a rebel in women's clothing, which would only solidify the state's misgivings of both women and insurgency. Yet in Jacob's re-envisioning the birth of Free State Ireland, it is the women who prevail as its founders, not the IRA gunmen or the post-Redmondite statesmen, and Margaret reclaims both her home and country as the result.

After her husband's death, Margaret feels that she "did not mourn Jim as [she] would have if [their] marriage had been perfect, but he was [her] dearest, closest, equal friend, who had shared [her] life for a quarter of a century, and losing him [she] felt half [herself]" (158). Much like the death of the sacrificial king for the betterment of his people, Jim's death by Liam's hand restores peace within the family, but not without Margaret's intercession to make it so. She first acknowledges to herself the good within their marriage and the importance Jim had in her life, and then comforts her sons, particularly Liam, who is struggling with guilt over his patricide. By recognizing Jim in

this way Margaret is transitioning the family from one that saw its father as benevolent dictator to one that sees its mother as stateswoman. Ireland's transition, on the other hand, was much more problematic. Instead of acknowledging the contributions of its preceding colonial government and learning from its mistakes in wielding authority, the De Valera administration became more patriarchal, more controlling than the former power in many ways, especially in its censorship of the arts, prohibition of birth control and divorce, and its overall suppression of women. The De Valera government would have responded to Nix and other Irish women like her as "unsexed monster[s]" and "unnatural wom[en]" because of their desire for autonomy (270) whereas Margaret sees Nix as "a new sort of woman, that's all. There will probably be more like her, as time goes on" (271). In ending her novel with thoughts of this "new sort" of Irish woman and by having Margaret ascend to the head of the Cullen household, Jacob was postulating an Ireland and Mother Ireland that refuse to be defined by patriarchal prerogative and choose to take up the spear and strain of self and nation-state creation on their own.

While much of the Irish literature written in the early half of the twentieth-century portrayed mothers and their exemplar, Mother Ireland, as selflessly devoted to their families and the state, novelists Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob contest the notion of maternal sacrifice as something desired and worthy of emulation. For both Coyle and Jacob, Irish mothers challenging the state and the status quo reflect Irish women's rage against state-induced violence, particularly that which was the result of the Great War, Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars. These wars, according to Coyle and Jacob's perspective, not only shattered relations within the Irish family and Ireland itself, but ushered in a suppressive regime that sought to reestablish the Irish family and familial nation

according to the most patriarchal of models—that defined by the Catholic Church. By replacing the obligingly sacrificial figure of Mother Ireland with that of Medea Ireland, a figure whose indignation over her betrayal by her husband/state sparks her murderous retribution, Coyle and Jacob thus represent the ire many Irish women felt towards the Free State government of the 1930s. Unlike the patriarchal construction of Medea, however, as a woman who destroys her children to take revenge upon her husband, these Irish mothers move beyond such a simplistic quid pro quo for retribution. Instead of ending the novels with both mother protagonists restoring a patriarchal familial model in their households, Coyle and Jacob have their characters reject any such construction—Catherine Munster decides to leave Ireland for good and Margaret Cullen becomes the family matriarch, but not according to the Mother Ireland standards set by the Irish nation-state. Ultimately, *A Flock of Birds* and *The Troubled House* instruct Irish women on how to subvert the state and its wars by rejecting—Medea-like—legislated motherhood and a government that considers women's reproductive capacity as their only viable contribution to the nation.

Afterword

In an English Great War jingoist postcard entitled "The Irish Soldier's Dream,"[76] a wounded Irish soldier awakens and tells his nurse that he thought he had died and witnessed "Saint Pether," whose eyes "just looked thro' and thro' ye like the way my baynit wint thro' Fritz," confront the Kaiser on his burning of "Louvain and kill[ing] a lot of wimen and childher in Belgium." The Kaiser's pride over committing such atrocities and his assumption that he is bound for heaven is met by St. Peter informing him that his "lift goes down" to hell. What is interesting about this postcard is that it has little to do with what an Irish soldier dreams and says more about English colonial reinscription of the Irish as a superstitious and brutish people who can be compelled, with English supervision, to support the proper side. Not only does the Irish soldier speak in a stage-Irish brogue, but his Catholic belief in saints is tinged with his nonchalant account of running his bayonet through a German soldier—an ignorant savage whose story is a

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[76] "Faix, Nurse, I drimpt I was dead and in a swate little office, and there was Saint Pether writin' in a moighty big book. He had a long beard and eyes like dimints, and they just looked thro' and thro' ye like the way my baynit wint thro' Fritz (bad cess to him for landing me one on the head). And there was a Gineral talking to him as bold as brass, and he niver took off his hilmet to the Holy Saint, thinking he was only the Hall Porther, which showed his ignerence. But I knowed Saint Pether the minit I sees him, having a little photo of him at home, over the oven.

"And who are ye," says the Holy Saint, "And what can I do for ye?"

"I'm the Kaiser," says he, "Imperor of Jarmany, War Lord of Eurip," says he, "Top Dog of the Wor-r-ld," says he. "Why ain't the Guard turned out, and where's the band? Ain't heaven full of German soldiers?"

"Well," says the Saint quite politely, turning over some pages of his ledger, "there is a sprinklin' there. Excuse me ignerence," says he, "but be ye the gintleman who burnt down Louvain and killed a lot of wimen and childher in Belgium?"

"I am," says he, twistin' his moustaches, "But don't mintion such trifles, I could tell ye of hundreds of victries like that if ye cared to listen for an hour or two."

"Don't throuble yerself," said the Saint, "I've got 'em all down on the dockit. Luther has near kilt himself, keeping yer ledger posted," says he. Y'er Friends is expecting of ye. They'll be moighty glad to see ye, and if ye don't get a war-r-um reception," says he, "my name's not Pether," says he.

"Thanks," said the Kaiser, looking pleased. "I thought ye were a man of sinse, tho' no Jarman, and whin does the lift go up?"

"Oh," says Saint Pether, thoughtful like, and suckin' the ind of his goold pen, whilst his eyes blazed loike rubies, "Ye've made a thrifiling mistake, my man—Your lift goes down!" (by J.M., E. Mack. King Henry's Rd. Hampstead, London)

simple, insouciant one in which war trauma is resolved in a dream with the Kaiser destined for hell. While war propagandists and the British public on the whole may have wanted to believe that this Great War response was typical for the Irish soldier, for Irish war veterans and writers Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty and James Hanley, the "Irish Soldier's Dream" is far from their experience. An Irishman jovially dreaming that the Kaiser is hell-bound, or that Germans in general are to blame for the war is as much absent from their work as any admiration for Britain's band of brothers. Unlike their public school British counterparts such as Sassoon, Owen and Graves who hated the war but cherished the camaraderie brought on by it, the war stories these Irish writers tell are filled with their rage over English racism and classism, and often *esprit de corps* demonstrates itself through Irish soldiers' self-directed violence in their efforts to destroy any trace of their feminized status as a colonial "other." That "The Irish Soldier's Dream" portrays the Irish soldier telling his story to a nurse (instead of keeping a stiff upper lip about it or sharing it only with other men as a true Englishman would do) further magnifies Irish complicity with the atavistic and feminine. Yet ironically, for all the ease by which the Irish soldier tells his dream and for the imagined collusion between Irish men and women, there has not been a plethora of Irish Great War writing or critical response to it as has been the case with British war writing. If the Irish soldier, as a colonial Dora, has his war dream manufactured by an imperial analyst, and if the nurse is a silent repository for such narratives, does the Irish soldier have his own story? Does the nurse? And if they do have their own unexpurgated war stories, where does his end and hers begin?

This dissertation offers a starting point to consider the Great War stories written by Irish men that have been long-forgotten or dismissed, and the home front stories by Irish women that provide a counter narrative to the war. While Irish men and women may have shared a common cultural history, their stories are as different from each other as they are from their British peers'. *Troubled Houses: Irish Women Writing the Great War* marks where Irish men's experience with the war ends and where Irish women's begins; in the process, it discovers that the juncture for both is same place—the home.

Irish Men and Women Writing the Great War

The Great War writing of Irish men and Irish women dovetail where their colonial past is concerned but diverge where their post-colonial present (in the 1920s and 30s) situates them. As a subjugated people to a foreign, colonial authority, both Irish men and women knew first-hand the secondary class status associated with alterity yet confront it differently in their writing. Irish male writers, struggling with their internalized misogyny over having been associated with the feminine for centuries, assert their questionable masculinity with brute force—destroying anything considered weak or feminine, ultimately annihilating themselves in the process. Irish female writers, conversely, refuse to internalize misogynistic constructs of the feminine and instead challenge the male hegemony that generates misogyny in order to shore up its arguable power. What this dissertation suggests is that the gendered responses that typify the war writing of Irish men and women are due both to the elevation of male prerogative at the expense of female autonomy in post-colonial Ireland, and to gendered differences in defining war itself. While the war stories by Irish men focus on their experiences at the front and see their misery as being provoked by an oppressive, external force, the stories

by Irish women revolve around the home front, and the enemy they confront is simultaneously within and outside the home. Not only have Irish women, like Irish men, suffered under colonial rule, but they have also experienced betrayal at the hands Irishmen who curtailed women's rights in post-colonial Ireland. The Great War, Anglo-Irish War and Irish Civil War are thus one in the same for Irish women writers and are rewritten as metaphoric possibilities for envisioning a (gender)war-free Ireland.

The most contentious space where Irish male and female writers differ in their home front writing is in their portrayal of sexuality. For Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty and James Hanley, heterosexually intimate relationships are as problematic for their male characters as the homosexually suggestive ones. In the first place, to be an Irish soldier fighting alongside English ones against a supposedly common enemy was fraught with conflicting emotions, especially after the Easter Rising in 1916. The Irish soldier was considered a potential traitor and aligned with feminine duplicity by the British; the Irish soldier was also supporting the efforts of his colonial oppressor who had turned its guns on the Irish people. Secondly, the social instability that war creates affected gender expectations on a large scale during the Great War, and as a result, some of the middle-class standards (such as women being socially passive and only doing work suitable to their sex) were challenged. With the Irish soldier's loyalty continuously questioned as well as his gender identity (was he more like the pre-WWI definition of colonialized masculinity as passive femininity or more akin to the brazen, war-manufactured one?), determining where he was situated politically as well as socially was problematic for both the Irish soldier and the military authority. This emotional quagmire for the Irish soldier is thus played out in Irish male Great War writing in the intimate

relationships the soldiers undertake. In MacGill's *Fear!*, Harry's inability to consummate a "normal" heterosexual relationship ends with his homosexually suggestive impaling of a German soldier's face with a bayonet. For O'Flaherty's wife-beating protagonist Bill Gunn in *Return of the Brute*, his nursemaid care-taking of a young, effeminate soldier results in his brutal murder of their abusive officer. In Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, O'Garra's recalled participation in the gang-rape of an elderly woman fuels the tortuous rape and brutalization of a beautiful, young German soldier. By the conclusion of all three texts, the protagonists are killed by their "own" choice (having "succumbed" to shellshock), and thus reaffirm the British stereotype of the Irish male as brutish, weak and unmasculine.

The portrayal of sexuality in the home front writing of Irish women, on the other hand, is one of empowerment and resistance against oppressive forces within and outside the home. For Irish women writing at a point in Ireland's history where divorce was prohibited, children of "mixed" marriages (Protestant/Catholic) needed to be raised Catholic, and contraceptives were made illegal, any depiction of sexuality outside the bounds of marriage that did not condemn such behavior would have been considered morally corrupt. The threat of Ireland's theocracy censoring their writing did not prevent Kate O'Brien, Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob from writing truths about Irish women's sexuality that did not adhere to the official state mandated one. Of the three home front texts by the aforementioned writers, only O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle* was censored for depicting adultery, although Coyle's *A Flock of Birds* contains an adulterous affair as well and a mother who begrudgingly admits the value of contraceptives in preventing pregnancy and disease. Furthermore, all three war texts have female

characters who engage in premarital sex that does not lead to marriage—Mary, in O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, has her adulterous affair with Juanito and leaves him as well as her fiancé, John; Kathleen, in Coyle's *A Flock of Birds*, does not marry her lover, André, even though he leaves his wife to be with her; and Nix, in Jacob's *The Troubled House*, has multiple male lovers with no intention of marrying any of them. By depicting Irish women being sexually autonomous and going unpunished for it, these Irish women writers were directly challenging the moral values and constitutional dictates issued by Ireland's theocracy.

Perhaps the most threatening to Ireland's patriarchal values regarding women's sexuality is the suggestion that lesbianism is a viable option for women. Unlike queer male characters who are killed off in Irish male writers' war texts, lesbian characters in Irish female writers' work are strong, independent women who forge their own way in society. Despite Agatha Conlon's admission, in O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, that she suffers from the ancient "vice" of lesbianism, she does not become embittered or commit suicide to escape from the alleged shame of her predilections, but rather continues living her life in the autonomous manner she had been before Mary's arrival in Spain. Likewise, Nix's lesbian partnership with Josie in Jacob's *The Troubled House* is the touchstone for Nix in negotiating her heterosexual liaisons, and is admired by Margaret for the freedom and empowerment it affords both women. While it was not unusual in Ireland for women to forgo sexual relations with men (think of the many women who chose to enter the convent instead—faith motivated, of course), what would have been unfathomable to the Irish theocrats of the 1930s is the notion of an Irish woman rejecting the state-endorsed cult of Irish motherhood in favor of living in sin with another woman. The contented

lives of O'Brien and Jacob's lesbian characters accordingly suggest that Irish women do not need to breed in order to feel valued and that women can actually thrive when they are not forced to marry.

The association of Irish women's bodies and Ireland as sites of war and resistance is an apt one in considering the irony that Irish women's war writing is filled with more optimism for the future than Irish men's writing, though women's rights were being taken away to benefit men's in the 1930s Free State. The Great War, Anglo-Irish and Irish Civil wars blended into one another in Irish women's minds as family trauma concerning these events played themselves out in the homes and in particular, in women's sexually intimate relationships. Moreover, what constituted the home and proper Irish womanhood was being legislated during this time in Ireland as well. The fact that male characters in Irish men's war writing eventually turn the state's violence and oppression upon themselves and that the female characters in Irish women's home front writing consistently resist such state-induced brutality indicates how rife Ireland was for a Catholic theocracy, where the demand for individual self-sacrifice and female subservience was fundamental to its tenets.

Irish Women Writers and War

While Kate O'Brien, Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob make specific references and allusions to the Great War, Anglo-Irish and Irish Civil wars in their writing, their characters are far less concerned about what is happening on the battlefields, back-roads or barracks and more anxious about how the war permeates the home front. Even though in each of the stories the characters speak about war tragedies such as the invasion of Belgium, black-and-tan and/or IRA raids, and loved-ones' deaths

in battle, the focus is on how these war incidents directly affect the characters' personal, daily lives. Catherine, in Coyle's *A Flock of Birds*, for instance, notes the strained relations she now has with a friend because the friend's son died in the Great War whereas her son survived, and Agatha, in O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, mentions that one of the reasons why she can never go back to Ireland is that there would be no male family member who could take her in since her two brothers died in the war. The consequence of war upon the home front, in these seemingly insignificant ways, magnifies the absurdity of measuring war's cost in terms of human life and lost resources. Rosamond Jacob, in *The Troubled House,* shows just how limited and gender-specific such accounting is when the British forces open fire on fans at a football stadium (Croake Park) in retaliation for IRA killings of British undercover agents. In Jim Cullen's mind such retaliation, while terrible, is somewhat akin to a military quid-pro-quo—the IRA ambushed British agents in their own homes, so it is understandable that the British would need to respond in kind. Margaret Cullen, however, sees how Liam's shell-shocked horror over his participation in the IRA killings jeopardizes his health and affects the lives and safety of all those who are trying to help him. It is these incalculable war casualties that women witness and the casualties that Irish women writers consider essential to acknowledge in any contemplation of war.

The disparateness of woman's alterity, especially regarding war, is another aspect that is explored by Irish women writers in their work. Although British women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Sylvia Townsend Warner were also writing about the war from a woman's perspective, their perspective was coming, nonetheless, from the standpoint of imperial privilege as Jane Garrity has observed. Irish women,

conversely, were writing from a place of double otherness as their gender and colonial status made them more conscious of their subordinate social position and the ways in which their allegiances might be compromised as a result of it. To be a woman and opposed to war in all its manifestations was one thing; to be an Irish woman who also opposed war but supported the concept of an independent Ireland was another. Both Mary, in *Mary Lavelle*, and Margaret, in *The Troubled House*, assist their brother and son respectively in their IRA activities because they believe in Irish independence; however, they also defy male authority, associating it with war-mongering and societal oppression in general. Their conflicting responses to war typify the conflicting feelings Irish women had towards the Free State, particularly during the late 1920s and 1930s when women's rights were being transgressed. Irish women had participated in the formation of the Free State and shared the republican doctrine of equality among everyone in society only to be denied their full rights as Irish citizens. This betrayal by Irish men is evident in all three texts in the mirroring of the rebellious sons and the women who support them with the patriarchs of the family/state, a literary reflection of how hypocritical Ireland's patriot-sons had become by the 1930s.

Ultimately, by casting familial defiance in the larger context of war and statehood, Irish women writers were pointing to the artificial notion of separate spheres for men and women. War and nation-building may appear to be male territory, but their consequences are always felt in the recesses of the home, and as such, women should have as much of a say in such matters as men. Furthermore, Irish women writers' conflation of the Great War, Anglo-Irish and Irish Civil wars bespeaks their resistance to the patriarchal

prerogative of naming, denying men the power to signify any war, whatever it is called, in order to emphasize war's universality and its infinite wake.

Implications for Further Research

Kate O'Brien, Kathleen Coyle and Rosamond Jacob are just three of the Irish women writers who were writing home front novels during the 1930s. Elizabeth Bowen, Margaret Barrington, Pamela Hinkson, and Molly Keane (M. J. Farrell) were four others who were also taking on the subject of the war(s) in their writing.[77] Further study of these writers and their works would be helpful in considering the breadth of Irish women's writing during this period, the war(s) effect on shaping their texts, and what socio-political stands, if any, the writers are making. From my preliminary reading of these additional home front novels, it is apparent that the themes that are evident in O'Brien, Coyle and Jacob's novels—such as female characters bonding with rebellious male ones, illicit sexuality (adultery, homosexuality, female promiscuity) leading to female autonomy, and the conflation of the wars into a continuum where home is central—are also present in these works. What these home front novels by Irish women suggest is that despite the censoring and green-washing of public opinion by Ireland's theocracy, there was much more dissent by women (at least artistically) against the Free State government during the 1930s than was officially noted.

Another aspect that deserves further investigation is the role that class plays in any analysis of both Irish men and women's war-writing. Jane Marcus has pointed out that the working-class status of the male writers I discussed, particularly James Hanley, Patrick MacGill, and Sean O'Casey, and their portrayal of working-class soldiers may

have contributed to the their texts being reviled or largely ignored. O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars," for instance, perhaps encouraged the violent reception the play received not solely because it was an affront to the memory of the Easter Rising rebels, but that it also dared to depict the working-class and their story in the first place. Conversely, the female writers who were the subject of this project were all from the middle-class and their characters were largely from the middle-to-upper-classes as well. By delving into the function of class in Irish depictions of the Great War (and of war in general) in future research, scholars may gain a more trenchant understanding of class and its intersection with race, sexuality and gender.

In "An Irish Soldier's Dream" there is a heaven filled with good British soldiers (and a smattering of Germans) and a hell occupied by the Kaiser and his military. And in between heaven and hell is the No Man's Land where an Irish soldier tells his story and a nurse listens. *Troubled Houses: Irish Women Writing the Great War* is the beginnings of "a moighty big book" that notes the war stories of Irish men and Irish women, a book that Saint Peter might confuse for his own.

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[77] The authors and their works are: Margaret Barrington *My Cousin Justin* (1939); Elizabeth Bowen *The Last September* (1929); Pamela Hinkson *The Ladies Road* (1932); and Molly Keane (M. J. Farrell) *Mad Puppetstown* (1931), *The Rising Tide* (1937), and *Two Days in Aragon* (1941).

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