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Rebecca McGlynn Date

Communal Crisis: Home, Housing, and the Politics of Space in Irish Working-Class Literature

By

Rebecca McGlynn
Doctor of Philosophy

English

_____

Nathan Suhr-Sytsma
Advisor

_____

Geraldine Higgins
Committee Member

_____

Deepika Bahri
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____

Date

Communal Crisis: Home, Housing, and the Politics of Space in Irish Working-Class Literature

By:

Rebecca McGlynn
M.A, New York University, 2013
B.A., National University of Maynooth, 2011

Advisor: Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, Ph.D

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Communal Crisis: Home, Housing, and the Politics of Space in Irish Working-Class Literature
By Rebecca McGlynn

This dissertation, "Communal Crisis: Home, Housing, and the Politics of Space in Irish Working-Class Literature," explores the burgeoning canon of working-class Irish literature as it intersects with theories and questions on the meanings of "home" and "housing." Often relegated to the margins of the Irish literary canon, working-class literature offers some of the most radical destabilizations of twentieth-and-twenty-first-century social and political policy in Ireland, specifically policy focused on issues of housing and welfare. By recognizing the distinct ways in which explicitly working-class authors highlight the social otherness of their communities I explore why, specifically, representations of "home" and "housing" appear as the most consistently diverse facets of working-class literary activism. The dissertation focuses predominantly on novels, poetry, and drama from authors who explicitly identify as working-class.

While the work of constructing a working-class canon has already started critics have yet to study around the representation of "home" and "housing" in working-class Irish literature. "Home," on the one hand, refers to an ideological space or location primarily constructed through the literary imagination. "Housing," on the other hand, considers more specifically the physical type of abode in which the characters under examination reside, and the way the social and political scope of these spaces manifest in each authors' narrative techniques. Using these terms as lenses, "Communal Crisis" reads texts for moments of social and political resistance, rage, and grief, thus opening up new conversations about the agency and dignity of Ireland's working classes.

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Communal Crisis: Home, Housing, and the Politics of Space in Irish Working-Class Literature

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Introduction: At Home at the Writing Table

"Class is at the heart of Irish society, its apparatuses, privileges and anxieties, whatever the failure of academic scrutiny in this regard"
—Michael Pierse, *A History of Irish Working Class Writing*, 21

"'Do you have to bring class into everything?'
I sharply responded, 'As long as it exists I do'"
—Lynn Ruane, "The devastating impact of social class is not an abstract concept to hundreds of thousands on this island," *The Journal.ie*

In a recent interview with Finglas-based poet Rachael Hegarty we discussed how her sense of home nudges her towards the writing space. She elaborated as follows:

> I guess it's just the Irish thing of *dinnseanchas* that place names and all of those things… or even our names for different places like Finglas which is "clear stream" which (laughs) ironic given how manky the bleedin' Tolka looks these days. When you're home you have this territory of… it's like that poem "Flight Paths," "I'm back to the nestling place." The place that formed me and that kind of inspires you to go, I want to honor this place, I want to honor the people who live in this place. The people who made me for right or for wrong. And also because, you know, I want my place to be on the map. My people to be on the map, you know. I remember when we were in secondary school and we were looking at *The Plough and the Stars* and the first line was "Out beyond Finglas he was found." And I was like, "fuck, Finglas is in a book!" And that just made me sit up in me school desk. And the same time, as well, when I was at UMass, Boston, and I was reading Paula Meehan's poem "Finglas Lullaby" and I go, "god, people are writing about Finglas. I've been writing about Glenhill, my estate in Finglas, for years." It gave me a sense of pride and a sense of permission to be able to write like that. I think poetry and place, for me, are causation and correlation. My sense of home being Finglas makes me feel home at a writing table.

The relationship between home and community informs Hegarty's poetic aesthetic. By acknowledging the place that formed her Hegarty can, quite literally, put her working-class community on the literary map; given the consistent academic inattention paid towards the

contributions of working-class writers, Hegarty aptly identifies the need to anchor her poetry in a specific *place* that can fully delineate the vibrancy of her socio-economic background. The foundation laid by writers such as Seán O'Casey, Brendan Behan, and, later, Paula Meehan confirmed for Hegarty that her stories about her home-place were not only worth telling, but that they were vital contributions to the literary canon. Additionally, by evoking the Irish tradition of *dinnseanchas* when discussing her own use of Finglas in her working-class poetry, Hegarty affirms the equal significance of each community that shapes the narratives of each respective place name in Ireland; the narratives of Droichead na Dothra (Ballsbridge) are no more important than those from Fionnghlas (Finglas) and vice versa.[1]

However, it is the powerful image of a young schoolgirl excitedly realizing that her language, her home, and her community were worthy of inclusion in a canonical work of literature that further emphasizes the vital necessity of intersectional representation in Ireland's literary community. My work takes this necessity as the basis of its critical framework. Often relegated to the margins of the Irish literary canon, working-class literature, I argue, not only offers some of the most radical destabilizations of twentieth-and-twenty-first-century social and political orthodoxies in Ireland — specifically when it comes to housing and social welfare — but also offers exciting new ways of thinking about genre boundaries in Ireland's literary output. Each of my chapters explores the intersection between theories of "home" and "housing" and subjective experiences of communal (dis)connection; when individual working-class homes are threatened it is not just the concern of the individual family, but, rather, a crisis for the wider working-class

[1] Finglas is a northwestern suburb of Dublin city that is known as a predominantly working-class community. Ballsbridge, by contrast, is located in south central Dublin city and is arguably one of the most affluent areas of Dublin city centre.

community and their sense of socio-political security. For each chapter I employ a different analytical framework while maintaining a chronological developmental arc in order to offer a varied approach that also takes into account the way in which political attitudes and social realities have changed in Ireland from the early twentieth-century to the current day. My structural choices have the added benefit of allowing me to trace how narrative conventions in working-class literature have changed from the mid-twentieth century to present-day Ireland. I focus predominantly on novels, poetry, and drama from authors who explicitly identify as working-class but I also look to authors—such as Maura Laverty—who do not write from a working-class background but demonstrate persistent attention to issues of class, housing, and community in their work.

Defining the term working-class in an Irish context presents difficulties. Studies of the history of the labor movement in Ireland — from figures such as Jim Larkin to strike actions and unionization efforts — have ballooned in recent decades to assume the inclusion of studies of the working-class as a historical phenomenon in and of itself. Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss offer a useful outline of "narrow" and "broad" labor history to differentiate between these areas, with a "narrow" study of labor history referring to the political and social impact of the labor movement, and "broad" referring to the relatively new study of the working-class as a distinct community in constant flux. My work necessarily acknowledges and refers to the historical context of "narrow" labor movement research, but it is the "broad" definition that more accurately represents my critical approach. Specifically, by focusing on how theories of sexuality, religion, and language effect our conceptions of working-class communities as distinct

entities with their own unique experiences of socio-cultural orthodoxies my project contributes to the ongoing expansion of critical material focused on "broad" theories of the working classes.

While this breakdown assists us in focusing on a specific section of an expansive academic area of study, it does not clarify precisely what the term working-class means. As Convery notes, the "existence of the working-class is, for the most part, taken for granted by labour historians. It is not explained what is meant by the working-class" (Convery in Pierse, *A History* 44). Do we simply follow the schema laid out in the British industrial context where we see a codified distinction between the economic and cultural capital of working-class and middle-class? Does this language apply to an Irish context? How might we theorize a different understanding? The manner in which I deploy the term working-class in this project takes as a given the Marxist interpretation of class in which members of this specific social class are considered primarily in relation to their economic production: "this means people who work for a wage, who have to sell their labour to survive and who do not own independent means of subsistence in the form of monetary capital or land or farm to extract rent from" (Convery in Pierse 50). For Marx, social class is predicated on socio-economic differences; it is not a static rank in society, rather it is a volatile social relationship subject to change and evolution. Theorists such as French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu have provided further clarification of Marx's initial conception of class struggle by classifying "social identity [as] defined and asserted through difference" (172). Similar to Marx, Bourdieu developed a theory of social class and difference by examining the structuring principles of power and agency. It is not enough to identify someone as belonging to the working classes by virtue of their access to property or educational resources, we must also attempt to account for the hierarchical power structures in place that perpetuate specific kinds of political

and social inequities. Only when we understand how social class continues to exist as a political phenomenon can we begin to understand how specific sections of our society fit the parameters of "working-class."

For instance, Bourdieu's theory of "habitus" captures the complex fluidity of class definition by attempting to account for the way social spaces occupied by any given individual simultaneously shapes and reflects their internalized behaviors and perceptions: "Habitus is thus more than accumulated experience; it is a complex social process in which individual and collective ever-structuring dispositions develop in practice to justify individuals' perspectives, values, actions, and social positions" (Costa 4). Merleau-Ponty's notion of "primacy of perception" helps to clarify Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" by calling attention to the "centrality of perception to our sense of being" which, as Fowler points out, forms how we perceive our individual classed positions:

> Simply, that perception is rooted in our practical form of life, in the forms of comportment and demeanor which embody values that are a fundamental aspect of our perception of the world of objects, of people, and of culture generally […] Our way of being, our comportment discloses a particular world that is manifest in perception and for the poor their situation means that the smallest aspects of existence are constituted from amidst a primal encounter with hardship and the humiliation that it generally involves. This opens working people to the world in a certain way, makes them sensitive to the world in certain ways, conditions their receptivity to certain aspects of reality (Fowler 52)

In other words, habitus refers to socialized norms that inform how we interact with our political, social, and cultural environment; it is the way "society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities, and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinant ways" (Wacquant, 2005: 316, cited in Navarro, 2006: 16). Behavioral practices, political responses, cultural taste, can all vary between different types of habitus and each is

communally developed and shaped. Bourdieu's theory of habitus assumes a structuralist approach to literature whereby attention remains focused on the larger external political structures, which inform individual ideas and works of literature. Similar to Bourdieu, scholars such as Liam Cullinane and Marilyn Silverman, have started the process of theorizing the Irish working-class above and beyond a Marxist framework through studies of the language used to represent and categorize the experience of differently classed Irish communities. Their research demonstrates a "local culturally defined notion of 'class'" that takes into consideration everything from the language used to describe different types of laborers to the complex way in which local geography dictates definitions of class (Pierse 48-9). Cullinane and Silverman's approach also recalls van der Linden and van Voss's concept of "broad" labor history whereby we must recognize that working-class communities are in constant flux and, thus, we must attend to the distinct nuances of their place-based experiences of socio-political and cultural change. Additionally, Cullinane and Silverman's research confirms that we cannot fix the definition of working-class in Ireland in quite the same way as the British context and, as such, Nicola Wilson's term "working classes" proves far more useful in thinking about the fluidity of this community (Wilson 4).

In addition to Marx's labor-based conception of class, it is the context-specific methodology employed by Bourdieu, Cullinane, and Silverman to quantify class differences through social perceptions that informs how I use the term "working-class" in my project. I do not treat it as a historically distinct or static category but, instead, I contribute to a "broad" definition of the Irish working-class by acknowledging the sociological, historical, and political context within which my chosen authors were writing. As such, each author identifies with or understands the term

working-class slightly differently. For Paul Smith and Maura Laverty writing in the mid-twentieth-century the term working-class operates within a more clear-cut differentiation between what Marx would term the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Their respective novels contain an obvious binary between characters who are clearly impoverished and have no access to educational resources and characters who own their own property and control all access to labor and production. But, for Paula Meehan and Karl Parkinson, the term working-class in a twenty-first century context becomes much more flexible. Their literature not only reflects significant advancements in social welfare policies — namely, access to educational and housing resources — but it also reflects the ongoing political prejudice attached to specific spaces associated with Ireland's working classes. Where Smith and Laverty contended with prejudicial assumptions centered on the residents of dilapidated tenement buildings in inner-city Dublin, Meehan and Parkinson contend with ongoing prejudicial assumptions centered on the perceived delinquency of the residents in North Dublin's high-rise building estates.

Thus, my project understands the term working-class in a manifold sense reflecting the fluidity inherent in current theories of class differentiation. At its core my use of the term working-class refers to a specific "othered" community in Ireland who have limited financial resources, limited access to educational or professional opportunities, and who face persistent social judgement based on their appearance, their accent, their address, or their thinking. In a much larger sense, this project explores how the term working-class itself, mired as it is in socio-historical preconceptions, cannot accommodate the literature currently being produced by authors from low-income backgrounds in Ireland. It is both too restrictive and too intangible. Rather, we need to begin to create new terminology to reflect the complex strata of class

differences in Ireland and the corresponding narrative perspectives these strata continue to produce.

By using a structuralist approach to my use of the term working-class — informed by the work of Bourdieu, Cullinane, Silverman, der Linden, and van Voss respectively — I am not only acknowledging the ongoing evolution of what it means to be working-class in Ireland, but I am creating space for a concomitant consideration of the physical spaces occupied by working-class communities. Without considering their physical positioning, and the socio-political apparatuses that place them there, we cannot fully understand or represent their socially classed position. Additionally, by focusing on how evolving ideas of "home" and "housing" have impacted the development of working-class communities this project extends the conversations started by critics such as Michael Pierse (Queens University Belfast). Pierse's *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin after O'Casey*, published in 2011, initiated the vital labor of constructing a working-class canon and currently serves as the foremost source of critical discussions of the relationship between class and Irish literature. My dissertation takes as a given Pierse's central premise that the "literature of working-class Dublin places that community in conflict with dominant cultural norms, expressing its alienation within the capitalist state through symbolism, form, and the unearthing of submerged narratives from Irish history" (191). Each of my chapters further develops Pierse's initial critical project by exploring hitherto unearthed narratives and narratives strategies in Ireland's working-class literary canon. More than that, my inclusion of original interview materials in chapter four returns this conversation to the authors who have helped shape our critical conceptions of working-class literature.

Much like Nicola Wilson in *Home in British Working Class Fiction* my use of the terms "home" and "housing" refer to separate elements of my examination. Housing considers not simply the physical type of abode in which the characters under examination reside, but also considers the social and political scope of these spaces. It will examine the manner in which these spaces came to exist, the socio-political motives behind their construction, and the social and cultural reception and evolution of these spaces as manifested in the authors' narrative techniques. Housing includes the rooms within the walls of the house, and the spaces into which these rooms spill over, including garden spaces, alleyways, communal housing estate spaces, and public buildings serving residential areas (libraries, dole offices, newsagents, etc.). The sociological and political context of housing will be necessary to situate my readings of the idea of home and the domestic interior in the literature examined in this project. They are necessarily interconnected. According to Wilson's research, the "term 'housing' […] is often associated with building programmes and state policy and is […] 'loaded with negative associations lack(ing) the cultural capital associated with the word *property* or the comforting (and perhaps illusory) parameters of *home*.' It has particular historical association with the working class" (Wilson, 10). The term home, on the other hand, will refer to an ideological space or location primarily constructed through the literary imagination. While it is based on a material reality (housing), it can represent an immaterial experience of feeling in the working classes: "whereas the house is generally perceived to be a physical built dwelling for people in a fixed location, the home, although it may possess the material characteristics of a built dwelling, implies a space, a feeling, and idea not necessarily located in a fixed place" (Briganti and Mezei in Wilson, 10).

In choosing to focus on the representation of home and housing in working-class literature I am able to uncover the vital structuring power of stable community ties in the development of working-class identities. In other words, a strong sense of community, established by consistent access to equitable housing, coheres a strong sense of kinship and its attendant sense of visibility within a broader social structure. The working-class narratives I explore in this project show us how representations of the home-space depends upon community inclusion and vice versa. Threaten one and the other crumbles. McMillan, Chavis et al's theorization of the four elements needed to establish a "sense of community" — membership (feeling of belonging), influence (making a difference to a group), reinforcement (integration), and shared emotional connection — further confirm the relationship between the immaterial conceptions of "home" and the immaterial reality of communal belonging. While it may possess material characteristics (a shared grocery store, a shared playing green, shared elevators etc.), it implies a feeling, an emotion, and a purpose that cannot be quantified neatly along physical boundaries.

It is this dynamic I unpack further in the coming chapters – how can literature of the working classes help us to think about the relationship between space and power in the context of a hierarchical social system? How can a fixed physical space affect the emotional and embodied experience of home for the working classes? How can a focus on the relationship between "home," "housing," and "community" allow us to trace the evolution of working-class characters in the Irish literary canon? The parameters of housing in the texts under consideration will necessarily impact and shape the conception of home and community for the working classes represented in the novels, poems, and dramas I have selected. Using these terms as lenses, I read texts for moments of social and political resistance, rage, and grief thus opening up new

conversations about the agency and dignity of Ireland's working class communities. For instance, the frustration and apathy experienced by Karl Parkinson's protagonist in his 2016 debut novel, *The Blocks*, manifests in Parkinson's experiments with a non-linear timeline and his conception of "UnTime;" Parkinson is able to demonstrate the manner in which affect—specifically, resentment—can shape a readers awareness of the socialized prejudices experienced by working-class communities. He uses negative affective connotations to upend mainstream narratives about low-income families by tying the actions of his working-class characters to their "habitus." Parkinson prioritizes the lived realities of working-class communities rather than pandering to clichéd stereotypes.

Chapter One: "Home, Community, and the (Un)Ideal Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of the Working-Class Woman in Irish Literature" explores how the physical parameters of the twentieth-century tenement building and the twenty-first century high-rise housing estate informs the literary evolution of the working-class female figure. I trace the relationship between representations of motherhood, sexuality, and domesticity and the spaces occupied by working-class characters in the literature of Maura Laverty, Paul Smith, Paula Meehan, and Karl Parkinson. In doing so I demonstrate how the economic restrictions implicit in tenement/high-rise housing creates the space for radical re-imaginings of social norms and produces iconoclastic literature. For instance, I explore a concept I refer to as "communal motherhood" to show how the intimate space of an overcrowded, dilapidated tenement building forces the characters in the novels of Laverty and Smith to find alternate, shared methods of caring for their large families while simultaneously critiquing the religious orthodoxies that enforce strict birth-control bans in mid-twentieth century Ireland. Their message is clear: social norms affect

differently classed communities in vastly different, often devastating, ways and our literature must reflect these differences in a nuanced and responsible way. As such, the figure of the working-class female character can function as a barometer of the changing attitudes towards the status of working-class communities in Ireland. The second section of chapter one demonstrates that such attitudes have not necessarily changed for the better. The literature of Paula Meehan and Karl Parkinson reveals that these communities, with a focus on the specific tribulations faced by their female characters, continue to fight against widespread social prejudice and educational inequities, both rooted in a continued denial of basic housing rights for many working-class communities.

Chapter Two: "Communal 'Domicide': Hope, History, and Housing in the Estates of Ballymun and Divis" overtly develops the threads of socio-economic and political critique woven throughout chapter one by using the socio-anthropological theory of "domicide" (the murder of home), to explore the political violence committed against the displaced communities of Ballymun and Divis as represented in Dermot Bolger's *Ballymun* trilogy and the work of Christina Reid and Marie Jones.[2] By placing the dramatic work of all three authors within the framework of a theory perviously only used within the socio-anthropological field I am able to signpost the innate interdisciplinary nature of studying working-class literature. As chapter two demonstrates, we cannot consider the narrative and staging choices made by these working-class

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[2] Ballymun is a northern suburb of Dublin city and is infamous for its high-rise housing (36 tower blocks in all) that were erected in the 1960s to accommodate large sections of inner-city, working-class Dublin residents who were forcibly evicted from unstable or dilapidated tenement buildings.

The Divis Flats Complex located in the lower section of the Falls Road in Belfast comprises twelve high-rise housing blocks and one 20-story residential tower. Similar to the Ballymun housing estate, the Divis Flats were erected to accommodate the working-class Pound Loney community who were being displaced from their homes to make way for road expansions.

authors without considering the overarching political and cultural milieu within which they were writing; representations of class in literature will always be necessarily political thus requiring an approach that can accommodate political readings. For instance, when I deploy the term "domicide" in chapter two I am using it to unearth the larger socio-political apparatuses behind the choice to displace entire working-class communities into high-rise housing estates, effectively destroying their sense of belonging to a functioning and empathetic community. As such, the literature of Bolger, Reid, and Jones engage in an attempt to rediscover the cathartic possibilities of communal engagement with literature in the face of politically-contracted communal destruction.

Chapter Three: "Time, Space, and the Artist in Karl Parkinson's *The Blocks*" takes chapter two as its foundational premise by exploring the impact of communal "domicide" on the narrative evolution of a specifically working-class iteration of the *Künstlerroman* genre. Rather than adhering to literary rules skewed towards the representation of middle-and-upper-class social relations writers such as Parkinson, I contend, have created new narrative tactics to re-focus the genre on communities previously peripheralized. Specifically, by analyzing how Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope (a narrative device where time and space coalesce) allows us to clarify the structure of the *Bildungsroman* novel, I trace how Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* carefully narrates the space of the high-rise apartment building and its surrounding green areas in order to show how they delimit the type of personal and communal development available to his protagonist. By deliberately circumscribing the places available to roam and explore, Parkinson is circumscribing the temporal potential of his artist-protagonist. The only place his characters know is a grim, destitute, and hopeless grey expanse within which they are trapped by ongoing

housing inequities. This explicitly working-class space dictates the economic, artistic, and personal opportunities available to them and profoundly alters the linear timeline of the classical *Bildungsroman* novel.

Chapter Four: "Dem and Us Thari Crossways: Counter-Poetic Strategies and Opacity in the work of Emmet Kirwan, Rachael Hegarty and Melatu Uche Okorie" brings us into the more abstract communal space of linguistics and "accentism." I conducted personal interviews with three working-class authors currently published and working in Ireland today — Emmet Kirwan (poet, playwright, and actor), Rachael Hegarty (poet and teacher), and Melatu Uche Okorie (short story writer, novelist, and graduate student). In each interview I asked each author what the term "working-class" means to them, how language operates in their respective texts, and their conception of ongoing housing inequities in Ireland. I then put their responses into conversation with the post-colonial conception of "opacity" (the right not to be understood) coined by Édouard Glissant in order to uncover the complex methods of linguistic subversion used by Kirwan, Hegarty, and Okorie. Specifically, I uncover the way in which they form their complex linguistic critiques by creating a dialectical relationship between theories of language and their subjective sense of "home."

Dialect and vernacular language for all three authors are inextricably bound up with a sense of community and, as my other three chapters establish, community is analogous to a sense of "home" for working-class writers. By focusing each of their texts on the dialects, vernaculars, and accents used by their communities and by using the physical space of their classed communities as the backdrop to their work, they are returning these literary forms - drama, poetry, prose - to their working-class home-space. Indeed, they are vocally and defiantly

exclaiming that their home spaces are capable of creating a language that entirely breaks down the boundaries of these genres.

When concluding my personal interviews with Kirwan, Hegarty, and Okorie we inevitably turned to informal discussions about family, work, and the pressures of writing deadlines. While the conversations varied between each author a single theme consistently arose in these informal conversations — their underlying frustration at the continued lack of acknowledgment or awareness for the literature currently being created among Ireland's working classes. Whether it be the ambitious spoken-word poetry of Natalya O'Flaherty or Karl Parkinson; the place-based drama of Dermot Bolger or Marie Jones; or the poetic complexity of Rachael Hegarty and Paula Meehan, working-class literature is itself a community of artists who have been consistently peripheralized in the Irish literary canon.

While I knew of this lack of attention prior to undertaking this project it was the persistent confusion around *who* was deemed relevant as a working-class writer that confirmed for me the necessity of this research. Two particular incidents stand out. The first occurred during a book signing I attended in 2017 for a globally revered, *New York Times* No. 1 best-selling author. When I discussed my intended project with this person, their immediate response was to ask how much time I'd be spending on the work of Frank McCourt. A few weeks prior to this conversation I had mentioned my project to a colleague based in Ireland who specializes in contemporary Irish literature. Their response, "oh, so you're writing about Roddy Doyle and Sean O'Casey?" When I explained that I would not be including prolonged readings of Doyle and O'Casey, confusion ensued. In fact, the latter response has been the most common reaction when I explain the focus of my research. McCourt, O'Casey, and, Doyle have become, in

different ways, synonymous with any conception of what working-class literature denotes within the Irish literary canon. The gender imbalance aside, these authors represent limited versions of what the term working-class can mean. In privileging their narratives we lose out on the incredible, taboo-breaking contributions made by authors such as Maura Laverty who re-conceptualized martial ideals among differently classed characters; or Rachael Hegarty who chooses to celebrate the unique linguistic affects of her working-class community and their musical accent; or Melatu Uche Okorie who represents an entirely new and unexplored facet of what working-class means in contemporary Ireland among immigrant communities. We lose out on the way these authors interrogate how social class still functions as a political apparatus that disproportionately affects those from low income households; we lose out on how they resiliently advocate for their communities; we lose out on how they transform traditional genre conventions in order to accommodate differently placed narrative viewpoints; and we lose out on how their unique use of linguistics can create complex moments of opaque resistance. Without fetishizing their contributions we must begin to recognize the unique perspective offered by female working-class authors. If we continue to depend upon the same small cohort of male authors to provide us with their specific perceptions of working-class communities, we will always have a grossly unequal and unrepresentative literary canon.

At its core this project is an attempt to correct this imbalance. It showcases the boundless talent, beauty, and ambition in the poetry, drama, and prose of working-class authors who have either been overlooked or entirely forgotten. It is a hopeful endeavor embarked upon with the goal that when I invoke the term “Irish working-class author” in future conversations it will be Maura Laverty, Paula Meehan, or Karl Parkinson who become the reference points.

Community, Housing, and the (Un)Ideal Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of the Working-Class Woman in Irish Literature

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> "While it is by now axiomatic to observe what Eavan Boland terms the "'disproportionate silence of women'" generally in Irish literature, the disproportionate silence surrounding working-class women is barely discussed in critical inquiry"
> —Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey,* 114

> "'A husband and the factory,' Annie said. 'That's all I ever hear in this house. Well I'm not going into any factory and I don't want a husband'"
> —Paul Smith, *Summer Sang In Me,* 12

The character of the working-class mother is a vital mainstay of twentieth-and-twenty-first century Irish literature, from the long-suffering Juno Boyle in Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Peacock* (1924) to the stalwart Bridget Brown in Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* (1954) and on to the pitiable Paula Spencer in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1994). Narratives about working-class mothers written *by* working-class women, however, are relatively scarce. Yet, as Michael Pierse points out, the proliferation of working-class female characters in male authored texts from the early twentieth century onwards points to a "particularly striking preoccupation in Dublin's literature" (*Writing Ireland's Working Class* 110). Not only does the figure of the stereotypical "Irish Mammy" often act as the structural center of the narratives mentioned above, but, irrespective of their male-authored provenance, these narratives also offer us some of the most radical interrogations of gendered orthodoxies in Irish society at the time of their respective publications. These texts can be seen as a social barometer that checks the temperature of cultural change from the early twentieth-century to present-day Ireland. Given

such a persistent focus on this figure by male authors we cannot deny their contribution to the evolution of this character in Irish literature.

However, we also cannot overlook the ongoing silencing of female-authored narratives in academic considerations of working-class literature.[3] As Pierse notes, the elision of women's voices in literary circles has long been established, but working-class women are, in a sense, "doubly oppressed, by prevalent class *and* gender discriminations" (*Writing Ireland's Working Class* 114). While, as Bourdieu would point out, it is clear that there are certain financial and social barriers in place that make it relatively impossible for many working-class women to find free time to write and publish a novel,[4] this double oppression finds its manifestation in circles well beyond academia. There is a demonstrable homogenizing tendency in Irish politics and society of overlooking class, gender, and location when describing anything tied to the national experience; it is clear, for instance, that the "women" of Mary McAleese's 1990 presidential address, who are rocking the system instead of the cradle, are implicitly middle-class. Given that the women's movement in Ireland has repeatedly failed to include working-class women in their panels, texts, and conferences[5] it is unsurprising that McAleese could make such a statement without full acknowledgement of how differently classed women experience gendered bias in

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[3] Given that this area of literary critique is still in its relevant infancy I am referring here, specifically, to Michael Pierse's choice *not* to close-read any female-authored texts in his chapter on working-class female characters. While he makes minor mention of the dearth of such female-authored texts, he simultaneously mentions the work of Maura Laverty without providing a dedicated section to her literature in his chapter "From Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the System: Writing Working-Class Women" (110-142).

[4] Kevin Kearns also notes: "Can one imagine any figure in Irish society with *less* time and opportunity to write letters and keep diaries than Ma's from the Liberties or Northside—past or present—burdened with large families, financial problems, domestic chores, outside job duties and emotional strains?" (*Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History. Dublin,* xxii).

[5] Kearns, pp. xxi, and xxvii.

political and social arenas in different ways. Specifically, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, the religious orthodoxies that underscore the legal perceptions of the family unit in twentieth-century Ireland impact differently classed female characters in radically different ways.

We cannot continue to allow this silencing to occur in our critical appraisals of working-class literature. Not only is our literary canon poorer for this lack of inclusion, but we simply cannot fully understand how the character of the working-class woman has evolved over the last several decades until we understand how working-class women themselves have envisioned this character and her experiences. In order to correct this imbalance I will be examining the work of Maura Laverty and Paul Smith in section one (focused on mid-twentieth century literature) and the work of Paula Meehan and Karl Parkinson in section two (focused on early twenty-first century and contemporary literature). Considering working-class narratives by men and women alongside one another is a productive step forward toward creating a coherent picture of how the working-class female character has developed in Irish literature of the last century.

Keeping in mind the aforementioned homogenizing tendency, I will be focused on the way in which Laverty and Smith envision working-class motherhood as a communally experienced phenomenon that is, more often than not, structured around the failure of an idealized marriage model. In their novels motherhood is not something allocated solely to the individual family units lauded in de Valera's constitutional amendments of 1937, but, instead, is something taken on by communities living either within the same tenement building or on the same slum street. Laverty's and Smith's representation of communal motherhood depends upon the physical structure of a many-roomed but overcrowded tenement dwelling or a slum neighborhood that forces upon its inhabitants a closeness which in turn creates intimate interpersonal connections

between entire families. Additionally, due in part to the way Laverty and Smith re-envision the ideal mother figure, their female working-class characters often transgress staid socio-cultural boundaries that were common for the time. For example, in the tenement lane of Smith's *The Countrywoman,* Molly Baines's female neighbors openly discuss abortion as the optimal option for a young woman "in trouble" in their community. In a similar fashion, Laverty's *Liffey Lane* offers us a compelling portrait of a female character engaging in an extra-marital affair. Shiela [sic] Farrell acknowledges a smattering of remorse but eventually decides not to deny herself the sexual pleasure her affair provides, particularly given how lackluster her marriage has been.

In section one my consideration of this communal motherhood and female sexuality will necessitate a concomitant consideration of how Laverty and Smith choose to represent marriage and female sexuality and independence in their novels. Both authors demonstrate a multitude of marriage experiences, none of which are perfect but all of which depend upon the support of their working-class communities to survive. As Clear points out, Laverty walks a thin line of advocating for female sexual pleasure and freedom while simultaneously lauding a Catholic marital ideal (159). Smith, on the other hand, finds it difficult to represent marriage as anything other than a financial and social trap within which working-class women wither and disappear; instead, many of his working-class female characters prioritize the pursuit of an independent financial career over domesticity. However, for both authors the very fabric of the working-class "home" is held together by the steadfast unity and intimacy of their communal living spaces.

Reflecting how the treatment of working-class female characters in Irish literature has developed over the past two or three decades, the literature of Paula Meehan and Karl Parkinson in section two provides us with an altogether different approach to the representation of working-

class motherhood, sexuality, and domesticity. Given that many slum communities and tenement dwellings were forcibly removed or destroyed in the mid-late-twentieth century,[6] neither Meehan's nor Parkinson's characters experience the same form of communal motherhood so vital to the characters in the works of Laverty and Smith. Instead, their narratives are populated not only with failed marriages—and divorce—but also with single mothers who struggle to find any kind of social or political support within their respective housing situations. Whereas Meehan focuses on the broader implications of gendered oppression for working-class women in the twenty-first century, Parkinson delves more deeply into the ramifications of drug addiction and sexual violence experienced by young working-class mothers in the high-rise housing estates of North Dublin. While Laverty and Smith provide us with an early twentieth-century iteration of the working-class family woman, Meehan and Parkinson show us how the working-class woman has evolved since the introduction of far more liberal laws around divorce, abortion, and custodial rights.

As this chapter will demonstrate, although the political subalternity of working-class females remains largely unchanged between the early twentieth-century and twenty-first-century, the aesthetic role of working-class fictional characters produced by working-class male and female authors challenges the silences around their position in Irish society. Both sections will demonstrate the centrality of ideas of female sexual independence, motherhood, and failed marriage ideals to the representation of female working-class figures both in the way they inhabit

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[6] Chapter Two — "Communal Domicide: Hope, History, and Housing in the Estates of Ballymun and Divis" — develops the theory of "domicide" (i.e.: the "death" of the home) whereby entire working-class communities are destroyed in the name of urban redevelopment. As such, the communal intimacies that were once so vital to working-class mothers and families no longer exists in the same format as those depicted in the novels of Laverty and Smith.

or take care of their domestic spaces and in the way in which they attempt to challenge or move beyond these spaces. More than that, given the inclusion of oft-overlooked female working-class authors, both sections will provide a more comprehensive view of the evolution of the character of the working-class woman and mother. Rather than depending upon the canonical male authors who, for so long, have been positioned as the authority on this aspect of Irish literature I will be repositioning the vital contributions made by female working-class authors to the evolution of the working-class female character.

Maura Laverty and Paul Smith (1940s-60s):

Maura Laverty's novel *Liffey Lane* approaches the threefold issue of marriage, communal motherhood, and female sexual agency in an ambitiously subversive manner. Similar to what we will see in Smith, Laverty delights in depicting complex female working-class characters who display moments of social outrage and sexual pleasure. Indeed, her portraits of Shiela Farrell engaging in an extra-marital affair; Eileen Harte openly and proudly breast-feeding; and Mary Morrissey sensuously preparing a baked apple tart while considering how sexy her husband has helped her feel, led the Irish government to ban Laverty's novel under Ireland's sweeping censorship laws of 1929 and 1946. Indeed, Laverty's first three novels — *Never No More: The Story of a Lost Village* (1942), *No More Than Human* (1944), and *Liffey Lane/Lift Up Your Gates* (1946) — share the distinction of having been banned (and, in the case of *Never No More,* burned) upon their release. Yet, it is not these boundary-breaking novels for which Laverty is

often remembered. Rather, she is, perhaps, better known for her (oftentimes government commissioned) cookery books including *Flour Economy* (1941), *Maura Laverty's Cookbook* (1946),[7] *Kind Cooking* (1955), and *Full and Plenty* (1960). In addition to novels and cookery books, Laverty wrote articles for *The Bell*, children's books, and plays. She would also become the scriptwriter for Ireland's, and RTÉ's, very first soap opera serial — *Tolka Row* — which was based on her play which, in turn, had been adapted from her novel *Liffey Lane*. In addition to her literary career, Laverty held the position of national executive for Clann na Poblachta (founded in 1946),[8] a short lived radical Irish Republican political party that espoused ideas of social reform focused on improving access to adequate health care and housing.

As Caitriona Clear notes, it is a pity that, for many, Laverty is known only for her contributions to the cookbook genre, particularly as her "treatment of sex, motherhood, and cooking — what the Irish Constitution of 1937, controversially called women's 'physical and moral capacity and social function' — is a plea for generosity and compassion, earthiness alongside spirituality, and community without insularity" (819-20). Laverty does not draw a simplistic or reductionist line between women who abide by the teachings of the Catholic Church and women who choose to forgo such teachings; instead she creates what Cronin terms a "fictional version of the Catholic marital ideal" which emphasizes women's sexual pleasure (159):

> In Laverty's marital ideal the community's need for social reproduction and stability merges with the individual's need for sexual and emotional fulfillment […] The crux of

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[7] *Maura Laverty's Cookbook* has the added distinction of having been illustrated by Louis le Brocquy in addition to having a section on "Diet" provided by le Brocquy's mother, Sybil le Brocquy.

[8] See Eithne MacDermott's *Clann Na Poblachta* for a full overview of the party's politics.

> this project is to forge a society that is progressive, tolerant and pluralist without undermining its prevailing class structure, and to enlarge the scope for individual fulfillment without threatening the organic basis of the community (Cronin 159)

In *Liffey Lane* Laverty maintains this same focus on her fictional version of the Catholic marital ideal. She is not concerned with tearing down the institution of marriage, rather, she is more concerned with demonstrating that sexual pleasure *within* marriage is vitally important for working-class women. The necessity for a communally shared responsibility within each tenement building or slum neighborhood when it comes to taking care of the children that result from these marriages thus takes on a righteous or beatific edge in *Liffey Lane;* rather than critiquing the lack of access to effective birth control, Laverty instead opts to represent the need for shared maternal responsibilities as a laudable, rather than simply economically necessary, aspect of tenement or slum dwelling. In poverty she finds beauty as it were.

Laverty structures her novel around a single day in the life of a 13-year-old working-class girl named Christine "Chrissie" Doyle who lives with her unnamed mother, brother Lar, and younger cousin Kevin in a single room in a tenement house on the fictional Liffey Lane. The Lane has a row of tenement buildings on one side of the street and a row of well-kept mews on the other side of the street; there is a clear class difference between the two sides that forms the basis of the novel's tension. The physical layout of the street informs the layout of the novel's plot: each chapter takes as its heading the address of each house to which she delivers her newspapers. As Chrissie delivers a newspaper to each house on the mews side of the street, we are given an intimate portrait of the owner of the mews as the narrative point of view shifts from Chrissie to the occupant; Laverty depends heavily upon flashback sequences to explain her

characters motivations in the novel's present day. She deliberately emphasizes the physicality of the neighborhood in order to draw attention to the complex politics of differently classed families *within* working-class neighborhoods making it clear that we cannot continue to homogenize the experiences of all working-class communities. Other than Chrissie we are never given the point of view of any other character living in the tenement side of the street; the mews owners occupy a slightly elevated social status to the tenement dwellers as Laverty makes clear throughout the novel although they too experience certain financial deprivations and hardships.

Indeed, in one memorable flashback moment while Chrissie is delivering a newspaper to Eileen Harte at No. 7 Liffey Lane, Laverty makes the distinction between the two sides of the street painfully clear. While Chrissie watches Eileen Harte peacefully breastfeed her child she simultaneously recalls how her neighbor, Mrs. Buckley, in the tenement building across the street awoke to find a rat suckling on her breast which she had initially mistaken for her infant child:

> A dark hairy thing with questing ferrety eyes came out of a hole in the corner of the room […] It sniffed around the child's mouth which was wet with dribbles of sweet milk. The rat nosed further and found the woman's breast. It fastened on. Mrs. Buckley stirred. "You're hurting me, child," she muttered. "In God's name, go easy." She put her hand to her breast. Her hand found the rat, gripped it, squeezed it, could not let it go. She started to scream. Scream. Scream. Scream. One long high scream after another. They ran through the house and wakened everyone in it (109-110)

Laverty paces her syntax to force us to pause and appreciate the full horror she is describing. Referred to by Chrissie as the "Night of the Rat,"[9] this flashback appears only after Chrissie finds it difficult to watch Eileen Harte breastfeed her son. But, before we are given this explanation, we are provided with yet another contrast between Chrissie's experiences in her

[9] Clear, citing Kevin Kearns notes that this story of the "Night of the Rat" is common lore in inner-city Dublin and that Laverty more than likely heard of it when she lived there (826).

tenement building and Mrs. Harte's relatively comfortable mid-working-class upbringing. Prior to Laverty situating the narrative from Chrissie's point of view, we are given a first-hand narration of a slightly comedic scene from Mrs. Harte's childhood. Unlike Chrissie's struggle to look at Mrs. Harte as she breastfeeds her son, Mrs. Harte once struggled with an agonizing curiosity about women's breasts when she was a young girl of about Chrissie's age watching her own mother breastfeed. Her curiosity was stifled and punished by her mother; such was her shame and doubt about her need to look at her mother's breasts that she felt duty-bound to confess what she perceived to be her venal sin to her priest. When she admits that she had "immodest thoughts and desires and willful pleasures in them" the priest asks her to clarify: "I wanted to see a woman's diddies, Father […] She heard him make a quick sound with his breath, almost like a sob" (108). Given the earnest hilarity of this scene it's clear that young Eileen mistook the priest's stifled laugh for a stifled sob. This short vignette succeeds in establishing Laverty's point that motherhood, via the act of breastfeeding, can be sensuously pleasant and need not be shamefully covered up and hidden from younger children. In creating a juxtaposition between Chrissie and Mrs. Harte, Laverty is able to advocate for her fictional ideal of Catholic marriage and motherhood rooted in physicality and intimacy while also acknowledging how impossible this same ideal can be for women from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds.

As Clear notes, Laverty is nothing if not realistic: "poverty, poor accommodation, and lack of options can make motherhood dangerous, ugly, and even impossible" (826). For instance, when Chrissie passes by Holles St. she witnesses a couple leaving the maternity hospital with their newborn thus prompting the following consideration of the new parents on the tenement side of the Lane:

> That would be nice. Having a baby in the Maternity Hospital and your husband coming for you and the three of you going home together. Aunt Phil had Kevin in the Rotunda, but she had no husband coming for her. Molly Doolin had her child in the closet. She got a cramp in her stomach in the middle of the night and she went out to the backyard to the closet. Daddy Sweeney heard her moaning, and when he went out, there she was after having her baby in the closet. Mrs. Buckley said Molly would be had up for it. But they didn't do anything to her after all on account of the baby being dead when it was born (145)

Laverty affirms that motherhood and marriage can be a beautiful, sensuous experience, but only if you have the socio-economic means to make it so. The matter-of-fact prose reenforces the mundanity of Chrissie's violent experience of motherhood. Her knowledge is inextricably bound up with the parameters of her tenement building; there is a tacit awareness here that tenement life cannot sustain or accommodate the idealized image of marriage and motherhood so often propagated in mid-twentieth century Ireland.

Laverty further inculcates this underlying critique by persistently positioning the character of Chrissie as the working-class foil to the idealized images of motherhood who live on the mews side of the Lane. Throughout the novel Chrissie's only motivation to work and improve herself rests upon her desire to provide for her young cousin, Kevin, whom she has reared and taken care of as though he were her own child after her (unmarried) aunt moved to England to earn more money. In spite of the fact that Chrissie herself is still a child she is thrust into the position of maternal caregiver to an unwanted infant whom she raises from the time of his birth. During a flashback episode we learn that Chrissie's mother, citing the stigma of Kevin's status as the child of an unwed mother, unilaterally decided to send Kevin to an orphanage in order to clear the way for the rest of the family to find better accommodations. Chrissie is distraught and, from that

moment onwards, spends all of her time and energy attempting to make Kevin's life in his new home as comfortable as possible. Indeed, it is Chrissie's guilt at Kevin's sending-away that informs the structure of the plot: the opening chapter details Chrissie's attempts to purchase an expensive chocolate roll to bring to Kevin at the orphanage. When her brother Lar steals the money she had saved in order to feed his gambling addiction Chrissie is forced to sell the silver jug loaned to her by a kindly nun named Sister Martha. Each additional chapter depicts Chrissie's distracted mind-frame — focused as she is on recouping enough money to buy back the jug — as she weaves in and out of the lives of those living on the mews. In addition to the maternal responsibility Chrissie feels towards a child who is not her own, she is also periodically asked to assist the local garage employees in compiling a list of all of the children living in the tenements on the Lane with the aim of throwing them an annual Christmas party. It is striking that these garage workers do not approach the parents of the children to carry out this task but rather entrust this work to a child who has already been asked to take on the care of a small infant.

While Chrissie represents the type of communal motherhood often experienced on the tenement side of the Lane, her neighbors each take a noted interest in behaving maternally toward Chrissie each time they witness her starved, filthy, and pitiable appearance. From new dresses, to impromptu picnics, as well as securing improved accommodations for Kevin in order to alleviate her anxieties, Chrissie's mews neighbors all feel a communal responsibility to take care of the distressed daughter of the tenements who has, unexpectedly, become a daily presence in their lives. Laverty repeatedly plays up the juxtaposition of how Chrissie is treated on each side of the Lane — in the tenements she shoulders unequal maternal responsibilities but in the

mews she is the subject of a sympathetic communal maternalism that sees her receive special treats from each of her neighbors. Once again, Laverty works to subtlely point out the nuance of experience for differently positioned working-class women; on one side of the Lane 13-year-old Chrissie is an adult, on the other side of the Lane she is an overburdened child in need of help.

Laverty's complex representation of different types of maternal care in working-class neighborhoods in *Liffey Lane* is matched by her complex representation of marriage and sexuality in the novel. Unlike what we will see in Smith's novels, Laverty prioritizes sexual intimacy and pleasure as a core requirement for a fulfilling and functional marriage. As Clear points out:

> At a time when any public mention of sexual pleasure was banned, and mainstream Irish society was busily discarding anything in written, oral, or material culture that was earthy and sensual, Laverty's vision of Ireland placed women at the center of a morality founded upon generosity and expertise (and one was as important as the other) in the areas of life which concerned women in particular: sex, motherhood, and food (822-3)

Sexual intimacy is only punishable in Laverty's novels when it is "coercive, mean, dirty, and disordered" (Clear 823). For instance, the adulterous Shiela Farrell is deliberately portrayed as an unlikeable and unsympathetic character "not because she is having a love affair while her husband is away in Burma, but because she has always used her body as currency to give her power over men" (Clear 823). The only moment of empathy we feel for Mrs. Farrell occurs in the final sentence of her chapter when she is preparing for a date with her boyfriend, where "with the slowness of despair" she chooses to wear a hyacinth set of vest and knickers that she had been saving for her husband's return (158). Laverty positions Mrs. Farrell as a rueful figure who cannot maintain her marriage vows in the face of her newfound sexual fulfillment. Thus, the

marriage ideal can only function when we acknowledge the centrality of sexual happiness; she does not love her boyfriend for any other reason than his sexual prowess. An obsession with virginal purity is openly admonished in Mrs. Harte's chapter as she remembers her mother's complete lack of affection and love: "'A married spinster,' Paul had once said of her. It seemed true. It was almost as if she resented her children, resented them as visible signs of the loss of her virginity" (101).

This important inter-dependence of marital happiness and sexual fulfillment underscores all of the relationships in Laverty's novel. Mrs. Farrell's neighbor, Mary Morrissey, spends an entire pleasurable afternoon thinking about how satisfied she is in her marriage in large part due to her husband's continual sexual affections and compliments; Chrissie herself learns of sexual intimacy via her friend Nannie Buckley who mistakenly walks in on her parents in bed. We are given an account of this incident by a back-and-forth of narrative viewpoint between both Mrs. Buckley (the first speaker) and the red-faced Nannie Buckley who relays the scene to Chrissie:

> "'Danny,' she said softly […] 'Eh?' He looked up. At the sight of her standing there in her vest his face became alert. Her heart was pounding with anticipation, for these two had a passion for each other that was insatiable […] The Buckleys, lost in their love-making, never knew that the door opened and that a child looked in for a scared second before closing it again, quickly and silently (38-39)

Not only does Mrs. Buckley initiate this sexual encounter but Laverty chooses to describe the scene as passionately sensual and warm. The only moment of hesitation or inappropriateness arises when their young child mistakenly interrupts them. The restrictions and confines of the tenement dwelling once again intrude upon a key aspect for the foundational structure of a happy marriage.

Similar to Laverty's portrayal of nuanced working-class mothers and marriages in *Liffey Lane*, the cover art of Paul Smith's three best-known novels manifests the complex politics of working-class female characterizations of the mid-twentieth century. *Esther's Altar* features a full-color illustration of a slovenly, overweight female figure propped carelessly against the doorframe of a tenement building with a young, well-dressed little girl in the forefront; *The Countrywoman* depicts a stark sketch of a seemingly emaciated woman with a baby on her back; and *Summer Sang in Me* offers the most surprising visual with a photograph of a naked and sensuously posed woman tucking her head into her shoulder. While none of these covers give an accurate indication of the contents of the novels, they do indicate a tendency to assume working-class female characters fall into certain distinct categories: the lazy trickster dependent on social welfare or the illegal work of her children, the earnest and nurturing mother figure supporting her home/family unit thus highlighting the inequities of economic inequality, and the brazenly sexualized harlot.

All of these narrative stereotypes feature in the work of Paul Smith. However, they share their narrative space with a cast of female characters who are not so easily typecast including Annie, the young flâneuse figure in *Summer Sang in Me* who determinedly engages in capitalistic exploits in order to avoid falling into the same type of factory work as her sisters; or Mollo in *Esther's Altar* who repeatedly doubts the wisdom of marrying her childhood sweetheart and rushing into a domestic role; or Queenie in *The Countrywoman* who cannot decide whether to follow-through on her decision to abort her pregnancy. Each of these young girls and women understand home and motherhood in terms of feeling entrapped or economically unstable; the type of housing available – slum or tenement housing - offers no more than a repetition of the

dysfunctional mother-child relationships that surround them. These young women understand that they will simply swap their position as the child in that relationship for the position of mother. Motherhood is not romanticized in these texts but instead is recognized for the additional economic and social instability it can bring. They derive this knowledge from their experience of tenement and slum living whereby multiple families share a single home with a limited number of rooms and only a single toilet; often, elder daughters in Smith's families become stand-in mothers to their younger siblings or to young children living in the house amongst other families. Indeed, it is arguably this experience of communal maternal responsibility based on the physical intimacies inherent in their living spaces that drives Smith's female characters to transgress social norms surrounding the Catholic ideal of marriage. They have seen with their own eyes how this ideal operates for differently classed women and they refuse to buy-in to the message of the sanctity of marriage and the single family unit most often propagated by middle-class Catholic advice literature of the 1940s-60s.[10]

Paul Smith was one of ten children from an impoverished working-class family who resided on Masterson Lane, near Charlemont St., thus Smith was uniquely positioned to understand the demand for working-class women to be both mother/homemaker and sole breadwinner as his own mother grappled with maintaining the family home in the face of repeated abuse at the

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[10] In his chapter "Married Bliss: Sexuality, Catholicism, and Modernization in Ireland, 1940-65" Michael Cronin offers a detailed overview of Angela McNamara and her career as a pamphleteer/agony aunt for both *The Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart* and *The Sunday Press* over the 1950s-1960s. Specifically, the way "Angela McNamara's reassertion of Catholic sexual morality, including her fondness for the term 'purity', would be taken to represent a rearguard action by the forces of traditional Ireland to maintain the status quo of an inward-looking and illiberal stasis" (116). Given her established popularity and widespread circulation, it is likely the views expounded by McNamara were well-known to Irish writers of the time; certainly McNamara's views were representative of many strongly held socio-cultural beliefs amongst Irish politicians and religious leaders of the 1950s-1960s (the time Smith was writing many of his novels).

hands of a violent, alcoholic husband (White). We have few extant archival sources with which to trace Smith's career but we know he worked his way through a variety of low-paid jobs before entering the world of theatre with minor walk-on roles at Dublin Gate Theatre in addition to his work on costume design and production often alongside Micheál MacLiammóir (White). From the Gate Theatre he moved to Paris, before eventually relocating to Sweden to teach English at Uppsala University. It was during his time in Uppsala that Smith wrote his first novel, *Esther's Altar,* published in 1959. As White points out, this novel offered "an angry assertion of the irrelevance of the Rising for Dublin's poor." Smith would go on to write four more novels - *The Countrywoman* (1961), *The Stubborn Season* (1962), *'Stravaganza* (1963), and *Annie/Summer Sang In Me* (USA title: *Annie,* 1972; UK title: *Summer Sang in Me,* 1971) - in addition to stage adaptions and unpublished short stories while living in the U.S.A, Canada, Australia, and London. He eventually returned to Dublin, purchasing a modest home on Convent Rd. in Blackrock. Like many emigre Irish writers before him Smith wrote only of Dublin. He tells us in a short blurb on the inside jacket at the back of *Esther's Altar:*

> When I was a child fishing for pinkeens on the canal in Dublin, there was a man who used to come and sit for hours talking about pinkeens and moithering me about other fish that I'd never heard of. I knew he was a Mr. Yeats, but didn't know he was Mr. Yeats, the poet, until I grew up. Our canal friendship was long and sunny, for it always seemed to be summer.

Such anecdotal evidence speaks to Smith's persistent optimism about the aesthetic possibilities of working-class narratives. Alongside the privation and arduousness of working-class poverty, there are the moments of wonder and chance which lend Smith's working-class communities a semblance of authority over their urban landscapes.

Smith does not propagate an essentialized concept of gendered domestic spaces, instead creating space in his narratives for his working-class female characters to transect multiple political, social, economic, and physical spheres. Paralleling my assertion of a non-romanticized view of motherhood, Heather Laird identifies three sets of narratives in twentieth-century working-class literature that, she argues "rely on an idealized and essentialized concept of motherhood": "those which employ the figure of the impoverished yet diligent working-class mother to expose the injustices of the economic and political status quo, those in which this figure offers a strong indictment of the Catholic Church, and those in which it provides a critique of 'abstract' politics" (Laird in Pierse, *A History,* 125). For Laird, the underlying assumption of working-class female characters striving to be "good mothers" forms the central framework of social and political critique in texts such as Terence MacSwiney's *The Holocaust* (1910), Paul Smith's *The Countrywoman* (1961), and James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969): "As Caitriona Clear states, 'the tenement-dwelling mother struggling to keep her family alive was the strongest indictment of the greed of property and the indifference of legislators'" (Clear quoted by Laird in Pierse, *A History* 123). Laird's analysis leaves space to expand her reading of the stereotypical figure of the tenement-dwelling mother to include the manner in which the politics and personification of housing in these narratives intersects with female figures who do not allow us to comfortably assume the slums are full of these "good mother" figures. The narratives of Annie, Mollo, and Queenie, for instance, do incorporate "an idealized concept of motherhood" into their perception of the woman's role in the slum and tenement homes they occupy, yet our emotional response to their stories is dependent on either their failure to escape enacting (or repeating) this concept of motherhood or their alienating lack of experience of this concept of

motherhood. In other words, Smith's novels demonstrate a clear refusal to propagate a rose-tinted ideal of motherhood in favor of showing us the multiple ways in which working-class women must embody a more socially radical way of being in order to survive the inequities inculcated by their overcrowded tenement and slum housing experiences which forcibly thrusts them into the position of shared maternal responsibility long before they even entertain the idea of marriage.

The Countrywoman fits into Laird's assertion that many twentieth-century working-class narratives relied on the concept of an idealized motherhood (Laird 125). The Blaine family is the focal point of Smith's second novel, specifically, the abusive relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Blaine and the effect this relationship has on their children and the surrounding neighbors in their tenement building in a Dublin inner-city residential area. Given the space constraints within an overcrowded tenement house where upwards of six or seven families would live in a single building, the Blaines' abusive relationship and the effect it has on her children becomes a communal concern; her neighbors often have to assist her in taking care of her children when she is in too much pain to do it herself. Mrs. Blaine refuses to leave her abusive absentee husband for a mixture of religious and economic reasons that are not shared amongst the other women in the tenement building. Rather, they believe she has the right to assert herself against her abusive partner:

> Around the lane and in Rock Street, other women with husbands like Pat Baines might leave them, defying the teachings of their church and Father Rex Aurealis, their parish priest, and wonder why the countrywoman didn't do the same. But Mrs. Baines had talked to the priest, who preached patience and humility and told her to stay with her husband, and it was no use the other women telling her to go anyway because, even if she

> could have brought herself to go against the priest – and once she had thought she might – where was a woman with six children to go? (Smith, *Countrywoman* 2)

Her potential to push back against the oppressive teachings of her priest is stifled by her realization that she literally has no other place to go. While the other women in her building have extended family in the area, she is a rural transplant and cannot depend upon the same support network. There is only so much assistance her neighbors can provide her, particularly given their own dire financial circumstances. Managing the intermittent bursts of destructive rage from her husband simply becomes part and parcel of the spatial politics in her tenement rooms; he destroys her attempts to decorate the domestic space and she dutifully rebuilds after he leaves. Even the faint hope of returning to her family farm, the "country" aspect of her "countrywoman" title, is taken away when she learns that its "somewhere presence" has been sold (Smith, *Countrywoman* 3). The faint but present romanticized binary of the countryside idyll versus the urban slum is quickly snatched away and Mrs. Blaine is left only with the slight stigma of her countrywoman title and her need to survive the slum she is now resigned to. Similar to the desperate, but futile, attempts of Annie to avoid the path mapped out for her, Mrs. Blaine quickly realizes, "She would never escape, no more than she would ever understand, the wide sweep of Pat Baine's fists, and she had long ago stopped searching for the cause" (Smith, *Countrywoman* 3).

Smith's narrative centers on the constant repression of Mrs. Blaine's spirit. It is almost farcical in its melodramatic repetition of death, despair, and destruction within the confines of Mrs. Blaine's homemaking attempts. Children leave her either through emigration or death, but her husband's abuse is constant. More than that, the narrative effectiveness of Mr. Blaine's abuse

depends on our sympathy for Mrs. Blaine's attempts to maintain a clean and ordered domestic space; we sympathize most deeply when her attempts to create a comfortable physical home-space are repeatedly destroyed. The idea of home as it intersects with the character of dutiful mother is key to Smith's rendering of working-class family life in *The Countrywoman.* Whereas in *Summer Sang in Me* Smith uses the characters of Annie and Ellen Simms to push at, and therefore emphasize, the boundaries of female working-class agency, Mrs. Blaine never seems to wield any individual agency at all. Smith's narrative depicts her as a constant victim of a wider social framework that pushed her into, and keeps her within, an abusive domestic relationship. Whether it is repressive religious dictates, or a lack of home ownership, Mrs. Blaine cannot escape her circumstances nor does the narrative provide any space for alternatives.

In fact, not only does the narrative deprive Mrs. Blaine of any hope for escape from her domestic confines, it reinforces a hypocritical relationship between the persistence of poverty and attempts to maintain a pleasing interior home-space through the character of Bedell, a governmental social welfare official. Neddo asks his mother, named only as "The Countrywoman": "'But doesn't the government have to give you relief?' 'No, only if it suits them, an' it mostly depends on whether or not Bedell thinks you need it. If he doesn't think you do, you don't" (25). In order to receive adequate social welfare assistance one's home must physically *appear* impoverished. Attempts to improve the interior spaces of working-class homes are counter-productive for the purpose of improving their economic conditions. Once again the homescape serves as the stage for the most insidious forms of social repression of the working classes in Smith's novels.

More than that, irrespective of her dire domestic circumstances, Mrs. Blaine insists that there are those who potentially need the assistance more than her family. Smith creates a character who is insistently empathetic in spite of her own hardships. Even if an alcoholic husband periodically destroys her rooms, the fact that she and her children have two rooms within an overcrowded tenement building means they're one step above homelessness. She does not wish for better; she simply appreciates that things could be worse. Such a characteristic further underpins Smith's reliance in *The Countrywoman* on the stereotype of the ideal nurturing mother figure who puts the needs of others before her own always.

However, against this ever-suffering ideal of devout motherhood and the ramifications it has on her children and neighbors to step in and constantly assist in protecting her children, Smith deliberately creates moments of vocal anger against the religious teachings that exacerbate the suffering of working-class women like Mrs. Baines. During a conversation about what they might do if they were able to leave the Lane, Mrs. Baines's daughter, Queenie, is astonished by her boyfriend Danny's assertion that he would like more than anything to "abolish the power of the priests over the minds of the people" (137). When she queries what is wrong with priests, he responds:

> 'Everything […] mostly the way they teach people to accept […] Rule from England. Poverty as a way of life. The way things have always been instead of the way they might be […] Brutality. To accept and endure brutality in the name of God. That's the worst of all.' 'But how do they do that?' Queenie asked. 'By refusing to face reality, by refusing to deal with the reality of our lives — their sheep, by refusing to answer questions. By telling us not to question at all, but to submit. Submit like animals' (137)

Danny voices the underlying current that propels Smith's representation of Mrs. Baines — disgust at the ongoing political and social support for a religious institution that forcibly inculcates the idea that you must accept the social status quo. While her neighbors also voice such beliefs in different ways[11] Danny is the only one to expressly identify the "priests" as proponents of a brutal type of social acceptance. More than that, he identifies their utter indifference to the way in which differently classed women experience their teachings in different, often violent, ways.[12] Although he denounces the priests for their behavior Danny also holds up his community to the same harsh judgement; he despises the priests their indifference, but he equally despises his community for their apathetic acceptance of this indifference. As such, Molly Baines's earnest decision not to have an abortion "because it went against the canon of a church that said you failed in your duty to God by not having as many children as He saw fit to bless you with" takes on an almost pathetically comedic aspect to it (186). Her earnestness is not rewarded but, rather, by strategic castigations of the Catholic Church voiced by characters such as Danny and Mrs. Kinsella, Smith positions the Catholic ideal of marriage as a failed venture for a large swath of working-class women who experience abuse at the hands of their husbands. Indeed, a large number of the female characters in Smith's fiction experience or depend upon communal motherhood and the pressures that go along with such needs precisely

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[11] For example, Mrs. Baines's neighbor, Mrs. Kinsella, repeatedly assists Mrs. Baines in cleaning up her apartment after Mr. Baines destructive rages, in addition to helping Mrs. Baines take care of her many children throughout their often stunted and painful lives. During one such scene, Mrs. Kinsella exasperatedly asks why Mrs. Baines chooses to remain with her husband (179).

[12] Pierse quotes Tom Garvin as wryly remarking: "Occasionally there were murmurings as to how it was that middle-class, relatively well-off people seemed to have relatively small families. They seemed to know something that the rest of us didn't" (Garvin 216). Pierse then continues: "Stricter adherence to Catholic dogma by poorer families, or their inability to purchase contraceptives either way, are offered by Garvin as some of "'the central reasons for Irish underdevelopment and poverty'" (Pierse, *Writing Ireland's,* 116).

because their ideal vision of marriage has failed to overcome the realities of their financial deprivations.

While *The Countrywoman* focuses predominantly on embodied gendered deprivations, Smith's third novel, *Summer Sang In Me* gives voice to some level of female autonomy and agency. The character of Ellen Simms in particular offers one of the most complex examples of the pushback I've identified against these essentialized concepts of home and motherhood. *Summer Sang in Me* is based in the inner-city streets of Dublin and is narrated by a twelve-year-old boy, Tucker, tagging along on his best friend's, Annie's, exploits. Annie is a freewheeling character who shouts back against her mother's threats that Annie "won't have any say in the matter" of entering into a job at the local Baker's biscuit factory (Smith, *Summer Sang* 13). Annie, with Tucker as a compliant partner infatuated with Annie's forthrightness, creates numerous economic schemes in her attempts to avoid the aforementioned threat of attaining a stable job to support her unemployed parents and her many siblings, including: P.R for a brothel, waiting to inherit a dealers cart, thievery at the local grocers, and buying/selling cinders for a profit. She explicitly attempts to engage with the capitalist framework – at one point, she is even referred to as "Capitalist!" – in order to escape the well-worn path her sisters and mother have trod before her: "'A husband and the factory,' Annie said. 'That's all I ever hear in this house. Well I'm not going into any factory and I don't want a husband'" (Smith, *Summer Sang* 124, 12). The narrative of Ellen Simms represents the most promising avenue of escape for Annie.

Referred to as "a man in skirts" by Annie's mother, Ellen Simms is a widowed cart dealer who suffers a miscarriage in the wake of her husband's untimely death. Prior to Simms sharing her

life-story with Annie and Tucker, Annie takes the time to comment on Simms's interior decoration:

> 'Well nobody lives with bare whitewashed walls and nobody expects to come across a crib right in the middle of the month of August…. Not that I've anything against bare walls, or a crib in August,' Annie said. 'It's just that it's unexpected […] and somehow I never allow for the unexpected or take it into account' (Smith, *Summer Sang* 105)

The unexpectedness of Simms's lack of interior decoration mirrors the way in which Annie's mother refers to Annie as "unnatural" which leads to her feeling "like a stray, even in the crowded bed she shared with her sisters under the roof her efforts kept over their heads" (Smith, *Summer Sang* 11, 68). Their lack of attention to the unpaid labor of homemaking separates Simms and Annie as oddities, almost masculine in their outlook; each of these female figures prioritizes the paid labor of dealing and trading and thus they are deemed unexpected and unnatural respectively.

Simms even refers to the importance of having a "room of my own" which allowed her to feel "human" for the first time in her life (Smith, *Summer Sang* 109). It's difficult to imagine that Smith was unaware of the implications of referencing Virginia Woolf's feminist treatise *A Room of One's Own* (1929), published forty-two years prior to the publication of *Summer Sang in Me*. This potential intertextuality reinforces Smith's careful connection between the perceived masculine "unnaturalness" of Annie and Simms and their refusal to settle for a room that is not their own but, rather, crafted for them by wider social and political restrictions. Tucker is flummoxed by the behavior of Annie and Simms and reverts to comparing them to his own mother who represents a more idealized mother figure: "unlike Ellen Simms who lived and liked

living with bare walls with the bricks showing, my mother fresh-papered the walls and whitewashed the ceilings of our two rooms every spring, and it was from things like this that the year for me gained shape and the rhythm I wanted my life to have" (Smith, *Summer Sang* 106). Tucker privileges what *he* needs from the spatial politics of homemaking and overlooks the importance of women *liking* their role within these domestic spaces. He balks at the idea that Simms might like her lack of homemaking effort but does not provide us with any indication of his mother's feelings towards her role in his life. She exists to give his life rhythm rather than existing to bring her own life meaning.

The intersection between individual agency and the restrictions inherent in the novels gendered spatial politics infuses Annie's behavior with its urgency. In addition, the representation of Annie as a flâneuse figure—the radical feminine counterpart to the traditional figure of the city-wandering male flaneur—who avoids her mother's home at all costs in favor of roaming the streets with an eye for entrepreneurial opportunities forces us to read her as the antithetical answer to the political ideal of the good and nurturing female figure. This reaches its climax in the scene where Annie and Tucker witness two gentleman engaging in oral sex in a private garden they are pilfering of fresh fruit. We know they are either middle or upper-class based on their wives' ability to buy an abundant supply of groceries earlier in the novel and the fact that they live in a beautiful Georgian house with a sprawling private garden. Both the groceries and the house are described and envied in detail by Annie and Tucker. The following night Annie and Tucker return to the garden to steal more fruit but instead find one of the gentlemen – identified as a Mr. Hogan – hanging from a tree, having committed suicide. Mr. Hogan exists only as a wealthy, peripheral character who represents all that Annie and Tucker do not physically possess

due to his position as a member of the upper-classes who possesses one of the beautiful Georgian homes from which Annie must forage for cinders. From that point forward Annie refuses to trespass in any more private gardens. Tucker is initially puzzled by this newfound reluctance until he realizes the root cause:

> He [Mr. Hogan] had brought the lanes and the streets and the people from them into the garden that night; had come with the stained, soured, troubled dark of halls and rooms and beds that sagged and sounds in the night it took a long time to place…. Into the dusky grandeur of his own garden, Mr. Hogan had come with the weight of movement – the slow, drawing sounds of clothes, the metallic snap of a buckle on a belt; and that smell, that cloyed sweet, like sick, that lay most mornings like a caul across Mrs. Murphy's face. Mr. Hogan and his rough hand, with their presence and their strange act, deprived her of her only escape, by making the garden real (Smith, *Summer Sang* 79)

The physical, or "real", experience of housing and the spatial politics of confined living quarters are contrasted to the escapist un-reality of wandering in expansive private gardens; a wandering brutally cut short by the discovery of Mr. Hogan's hanging body. Reality intrudes in the form of bodily violence. The physical landscape and homescape of the "lanes and the streets" of Annie's neighborhood are as repressive as the behavior of her family. It is not just people who shape her reality but the literal confines of her environment and the things it forces her to witness or carry out most obviously, perhaps, the role of family caretaker and maternal overseer.

If the garden represents an escape and is considered an unreal landscape, then there is a sense that Annie and Tucker are always already aware that reality in the form of their homescape will interrupt their wanderings. Eventually Annie must return to her mother's home and enter into work in Baker's biscuit factory; the figure of the flâneuse Annie disappears under the ever-encroaching pressures of poverty and homemaking. While *Summer Sang in Me* opens its

narrative to the possibilities of female independence outside the ideal of motherhood and homemaker, this sense of possibility is always couched by the eventual inescapability of the demands of economic hardship for working-class women. Following the death of Ellen Simms when she and her cart are knocked down by a horse and trap Annie gives up her hopes of inheriting Simms' dealers cart and allows herself to be steered into Baker's biscuit factory. Her willful spirit does not find a corresponding outlet but instead reverts to the same expectations as her sisters.

For Smith, marriage and domesticity, rather than offering an avenue of support and fulfillment, leads to working-class women feeling "trapped under the glass of [their] wedding photo frame[s]" (Kearns 124). In choosing to treat marriage and motherhood as a communal responsibility, Smith can focus on creating young working-class female characters like Annie who rebel against the marriage plot; they recognize the danger signs and attempt to escape even if not always successfully.

Paula Meehan and Karl Parkinson (1990s-2000s):

While the tenement building served as the leitmotif for the urban working-class lifestyle of the 1920s-1960s, with housing estates and apartment buildings replacing the tenement buildings throughout the late 1960s-early 2000s, urban post-Celtic Tiger Ireland is now grappling with a mixture of all three in varying states of over crowdedness and disrepair. In tandem with the shift in physical housing spaces available to the working classes, there has been a shift in the genre of narrative that has accommodated the representation of the intersection of home and social class

in Ireland. While novelists such as Paul Smith, Dermot Bolger, and Roddy Doyle dominated the literary scene as it related to voicing the experience of Ireland's working classes, poets and spoken word performers now offer some of the most dynamic depictions of working-class Ireland. More than that, these poets and performers predominantly tend to find space, both physically and narratively, for female agency that leads to economic opportunity and independence.

The poetry of Paula Meehan exemplifies the recent move to push past a reductionist approach to working-class literature which only reads it for its political content in order to unearth the aesthetic wonder and possibility of working-class experience and life. As Pierse points out, Meehan "points to the creativity and potential of working-class communities, citing the local and loquacious female rap artist Temper-Mental Miss Elayneous as a case in point: 'the intensity of the lives those kids lead… I do see suffering and desperation but I do also see the potential'" (Pierse, "My City's Million Voices" 52). This potential is always already present in Meehan's work by the very fact that Meehan, as a female member of the working classes is publishing, to great acclaim, literature that celebrates and voices the experience of working-class women and girls. Born in Dublin in 1955 Meehan spent part of her childhood in London before her family moved back to Dublin taking up residence in a working-class community in Gardiner St. Meehan completed her education in a vocational school prior to enrolling in a Bachelor of Arts program at Trinity College Dublin and went on to publish six collections of poetry including, *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter* (1991), *Pillow Talk* (1994), *Dharmakaya* (2002), *Painting Rain (*2009), and *Geomantic* (2016). An additional collection of poetry, *Mysteries of the Home* (2013) brings together selections from her two earliest publications (*The*

Man Who Was Marked by Winter and *Pillow Talk*). Meehan held the position of Ireland Chair of Poetry from 2013-2016.

Meehan's poetry volumes *Mysteries of the Home* and *Dharmakaya* demonstrate her consistent interest in the relationship between embodied female experience and the physicality of urban dwelling over the arc of her poetic career. Indeed, in *Mysteries of the Home* women are often personified as physical spaces. The emotional cartography of the city and the way it shapes ideas of home dictate the evolution of Meehan's poetry. It is not simply that housing aesthetically reflects the politics of female experience in urban Ireland, but that women intrinsically intertwine with housing and home when Meehan seeks to give voice to the female working classes. Wherever Meehan makes reference to the pain, growth, or potential of the female voice or experience in her volume, she inevitably connects this female experience to a physical domestic space.

For example, in her poem "The Pattern" Meehan interweaves her poetic understanding of her mother's position as a homemaker with her awareness of the oppressiveness of maintaining the physical space she occupies. The young female voice can only realize her full potential by escaping this space, by not repeating the same pattern of domestic housework and marital obeisance as her mother:

> And as she buffed the wax to a high shine
> did she catch her own face coming clear?
> Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
> Did her mirror tell her what mine tells me?
>
> I have her shrug and go on
> knowing history has brought her to her knees (Meehan, *Mysteries* 10)

The image of an overworked housewife using the reflective quality of floor polish to ponder the inequities of her lifestyle forms a striking critique of the ease with which Irish working-class women find themselves on their knees – whether through the politicization of housework or economic necessity. Meehan makes it clear that this pattern of gendered housework does not need to be an inherited quality. She deliberately juxtaposes the experience of mother and daughter in order to make it clear that the latter need never follow in the footsteps of the former if she does not wish to: "She favored sensible shades / Moss Green, Mustard, Beige. / I dreamt a robe of a colour / so pure it became a word" (*Mysteries,* Meehan 13). The daughter dreams of ships taking her along the Liffey all the way to Zanzibar and other exotic locations; the mother quietly resigns herself to economizing her daughter's childhood enough to allow the luxury of dreaming. One woman's sacrifice to domestic maintenance enables the other to escape the potential oppressiveness of such a lifestyle.

In another poem, "The Other Woman," Meehan continues to correlate feminine experience with physical domestic space by personifying the poet's husband's mistress as an urban space occupied by the poet's husband:

> That night when you entered her for the first time
> she was the lonely city, and you were a man with a key
> to a room in a house on a street where you might go out of
> the rain
> and sit by the window to drink lemon vodka (Meehan, *Mysteries* 48)

Such a personification dehumanizes this other woman until she becomes nothing more than a door that must be opened before the male figure can find comfort. The "she" of the poem is

repeatedly referenced in the past tense— "She was in shadow… she was scribed… she was the port in every girl"—in order to reinforce a sense of passivity and inactive agency.

This passivity Meehan ascribes to the space of the "other woman" is echoed in other poems such as "The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks." The title of this poem explicitly references the infamous case of Ann Lovett who, at the age of fifteen, died in childbirth at the foot of a Virgin Mary statue on January 31st 1984 (Boland). Lovett had deliberately kept her crisis pregnancy secret so as not to be socially stigmatized by her staunchly Catholic community. The tragic irony of such a young girl dying at the feet of a historically idealized female symbol was not lost on commentators at the time. Nor does it escape Meehan who gives voice, not to the experience of Lovett, but to the figure of the Virgin Mary at Granard who witnessed Lovett's final panicked moments. The voyeurism inherent in this decision reflects the passive voyeurism of Lovett's community:

> On a night like this I remember the child
> who came with fifteen summers to her name,
> and she lay down alone at my feet
> without midwife or doctor or friend to hold her hand
> and she pushed her secret out into the night,
> far from the town tucked up in little scandals,
> bargains struck, words broken, prayers, promises,
> and though she cried out to me in extremis
> I did not move,
> I did not lift a finger to help her,
> I didn't intercede with heaven,
> nor whisper the charmed word in God's ear (Meehan, *Mysteries* 27-8)

Meehan inflects this poetic positioning with a frustrated anger and disbelief. At crucial moments the speaker appears aware of their intentional passivity ("I did not move") underscoring the

obvious disjunction between real physical pains and idealized symbolic untouchability. The addition of the eighth amendment to the Irish constitution in 1983, which equated the unborn child's life with the life of the mother enshrined a class-based system of gynaecological healthcare in Ireland effectively offering abortion services only to those women who could afford it. Working-class women were, and continued to be until the repeal of the eighth amendment in 2018, disproportionately affected by this legislative refusal to grant bodily autonomy to Irish women. In the wake of this legislative amendment, Meehan uses the image of a lone working-class girl prostrate at the feet of Ireland's religious ideology, afraid to seek refuge in the domestic spaces of her town, a town preoccupied with bodily "scandals," in order to point out the hypocrisy of such a system. Rather than being safely ensconced in her own home, this young working-class girl is exposed to the elements in a lone field with nothing for company except the religious symbology responsible for her exile.

From the minutiae of working-class domestic work, to the casting-out of unwed mothers, Meehan portrays the figures of the working-class woman and young girl as shaped, always, by the parameters of their political, social, and religious ideological understanding of home. The possibility of slipping the net of these parameters marks the moment whereby these female figures can hope to occupy an entirely different kind of ideological space. Rather than the ignominy of a "woman / quietly weeping in a tenement room / until her tears become a blessing"

Meehan points, always, to her potential to be carried along the Liffey to "Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops" (Meehan, *Mysteries* 41, 12).[13]

Mysteries of the Home lays the foundations for Meehan's exploration of the relationship between the ideas of home and female agency that we see in *Dharmakaya,* published in 2002. "Thunder in the House" recounts the poet's memories of the family who lived above her in a tenement building on Gardiner Street. Specifically, the poet recalls the abuse suffered by a little girl at the violent hands of her father: "She was curst and soundly whacked" (Meehan, *Dharmakaya* 10). Throughout the poem, Meehan maintains a childish point of view by deferring to the confusing equivocations of the poet's parents who refuse to intervene to protect their young neighbor. According to her father, "It'd go/ even harder on her if anyone interfered" (Meehan, *Dharmakaya* 10). More than that, the young girl is imagined primarily through her physical (abused) presence and is devoid of individual character beyond the sound of the slap she receives or the way she affects the poets understanding of her own presence in the building:

> I'd meet her sometimes on the stairs, bruised
> black and blue or a stranger orange hue,
>
> thick smeared panstick on her twelve year old face.
> I thought she was like the coal man's mangy dog,
>
> a sleveen bitch so used to beatings she'd slither
> at your ankles, belly low, waiting for the boot to drop.

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[13] In his exploration of Meehan's representation of Middle Eastern and East Asian culture, Omar Hena argues that Meehan's poetry evinces a paradoxical relationship with Irish Orientalism whereby she both opens and closes the cultural gap between her Irish speaker's position and the Eastern women she imaginatively identifies with: "But while Meehan's poems invoke Irish Orientalism and flirt with the exotic, her work's ironic, playful, and self-reflexive juxtapositions between Ireland and the East also complicate and subvert the binaries Orientalism conventionally depends upon to establish hierarchical organizations of cultural and racial difference" (113-114).

She robbed me of my message money. A slide from my plait.
My blue scarf. I avoided her after that (10)

The young poet cannot conceive of the vulnerability of this other young girl without resorting to dehumanizing imagery. The physical parameters of the house force the young poet to experience her neighbor's abuse in a very specific way. It is less about the reality of abuse and more about the way it causes excessive noise (or "thunder") in the tenement building. Rather than taking the opportunity to speak with the abused neighbor in the hallways, the poet focuses on the things her neighbor steals from her, thus forcing the poet to avoid passing through the hallways by herself. We are later told that the abused young girl disappears one cold winter's day—around the same time the poet loses faith in Santa Claus. Meehan connects the physical space and layout of the tenement building with her ability to remember the physical nuances of her family's response to the plight of their young neighbor. The plaster ("snow") that fell from the ceiling after hearing the physical conflict ("thunder") from the room above forms the creative metaphor which lends the poem its unsettling childish naivety. Meehan's poetry emphasizes the creative power of the physical housing space to inhere such childish memories.

In another poem, "The Exact Moment I Became a Poet" Meehan continues with her focus on the emotional development of the young female working-class psyche and the way it indelibly interweaves with the physical and economic demands of their environs. In a moment comparable to Annie's refusal to follow her sisters' footsteps into Bakers biscuit factory in Smith's *Summer Sang in Me*, Meehan relates a teachers warning to her young charges: "Attend to your books, girls,/ or mark my words, you'll end up/ in the sewing factory" (Meehan, *Dharmakaya* 14). It is

not the idea of working in a sewing factory which causes the young poet to worry but rather "that those words 'end up' robbed/ the labour of its dignity" (14). It is the imposition of opinions about the supposed shame of working in a menial waged position which haunts the poet. She makes it clear that her knowledge of the underlying judgment behind her teacher's use of the phrase "end up" was not immediate. Rather, the connection between ideas of labour and dignity happened much later in her intellectual development: "Not that I knew it then,/ labour, dignity./ That's all back construction" (14). Midway through the poem Meehan switches from her consideration of her teacher's language to reflect on the multiple women in her life who were categorized by the same type of linguistic slippages she identified in her childhood classrooms. The physical and the linguistic clash in Meehan's poem as she begins to realize how the language used to describe the physical labour of her female community members strips them of dignity and agency:

> But: I *saw* them: mothers, aunts, and neighbours
> trussed like chickens
> on a conveyor belt
>
> getting sewn up the way my granny
> sewed the sage and onion stuffing
> in the birds.
>
> Words could pluck you,
> leave you naked,
> your lovely shiny feathers all gone (14)

Meehan emphasizes the physical act of *seeing* her female family and friends as a way to counteract the judgement passed upon their position as wage laborers by those either not in a position to understand, or unwilling to understand, the physical and emotional toll of trying to maintain a dignified standard of living while only having low paid, menial jobs available to you.

Instead, those unable to *see* the effort put forth by the working-class women of Meehan's community dehumanize them through their passive-aggressive bigotry. Meehan's poem places the relationship between memory, shame, and physicality at the center of her understanding of the subaltern position of the working classes in Dublin.

The poetry of Karl Parkinson picks up on many of the same thematic threads explored by Meehan. The poetry of both writers focuses on the politically repressed figure of the working-class female and the way in which a sense of both housing and home shapes her relationship understanding of social and political issues. However, Parkinson takes it a slight step further and introduces an, at times ironic, male working-class perspective in order to explore the gendered dynamics around ideas of housing and home. He goes to great lengths to illustrate how the instability of physical and emotional apartment homescapes can have a devastating effect on the health, happiness, and potential of the female working-class figure. Thus far in his career Parkinson has published two volumes of poetry, *Litany of the City* (2013) and *Butterflies of a Bad Summer* (2016), in addition to one novel, *The Blocks* (2016) which will form the focus of my third chapter. Hailed as "a singer of the human soul in its contrary states of degradation and exaltation" by Aiden O'Reilly in the *Irish Times* Parkinson's experience of growing up in the dilapidated flats in O'Devaney Gardens (formerly Ballymun) close to Phoenix Park plays a key part in his choice to focus on the violence, depression, and pessimism of the male working-class voice and the way in which it resonates and shapes the lives of its female counterparts.

We can see this focus in his debut collection of poetry, *Litany of the City*, where Parkinson employs slang, phonetic speech patterns, and disrupted rhythm in order to evoke the disconsolate and often destitute milieu of working-class life in inner-city Dublin flats. His poem "She was

found" offers one of the more obvious examples of this evocation. He inverts the figure of the dutiful domestic mother figure employed by novelists such as Paul Smith, in order to evoke the devastating impact of alcoholism and drug addiction among the contemporary working classes. She was found:

> cradling a half emptied bottle of vodka,
> the opened rim suckling her breast,
> alcohol slow
> ly
> drib
> bli
> ng
> down (Parkinson, *Litany* 35)

Parkinson's Dublin is one without very much hope. He gives voice to the abused, addicted, and discarded in order to restore some semblance of humanity and dignity to their plight. In Parkinson's poetry, "the streets" are as much a home to the working classes as the flats, apartments, and squats they inhabit. He dedicates "Down Here" "to all those who grew up in the flats" while re-emphasizing the idea that they occupy the lowest rung on the social ladder and need him to draw attention to what's going on "down here" (31). The working-class community he represents may occupy physically tall domestic spaces, but they are socially looked down upon:

> Down here
> in the gutter
> where the stars look down on us
> when I was a kid I wished
> I could fly to outer space
> Jupiter or Mars
> get away from this place

where the young men
get locked up behind bars for selling drugs
robbing cars
assault and murder
is it all their fault? Was it a lack of hugs that turned them into thugs? (33)

The juxtaposition between the imagery of outer space and the reality of living, symbolically, in the lowest position in society, creates an additional nuance to Parkinson's critique of mainstream representations of working-class communities in Ireland. He restores agency and ambition to a male presence that is continuously derided as violent and lazy. They too have the ability to dream of more, to dream of something beyond their current circumstances, but Parkinson's decision to question his audience at the end of the above quoted stanza reminds us that these men are often trapped within the self-fulfilling prophecy of social expectations.

Similar to Meehan, Parkinson emphasizes the central role of the female figure, how she shapes the domestic space, and how the social and political parameters of the domestic space shape the working classes, but for Parkinson it is often the female figures' lack of access to a stable homescape that compounds the violence experienced by the community he gives voice to. More than that, the working-class female figures in Parkinson's poetry are often overtly and violently sexualized in their embodiment:

City girl,
you were abused, raped, beaten
and told you were a whore.

City girl,
thinks early, that her sex is a weapon, her sex is a charm.

City girl,
body a production line, a playground for breasts (*Litany* 51)

The female working-class figure exists predominantly to act as a sexualized embodied relief against which we can recognize the social disdain experienced by the working-class male. She is passive, suffering the physical and emotional trauma of domestic violence and the attendant effect it has on her family. She is never given a name and never has a purpose beyond her negative effect on the male poetic voice. Parkinson asks: "Does anyone care that my mother can't get out of bed / cause she was on the sauce last night?" (*Litany* 31). His poetry allows us to overhear "some guy… beat his wife / left her with a fat lip and two black eyes / you can hear their kids cry / a grotesque lullaby" (*Litany* 32). While the female figure we encounter in Parkinson's poetry is deeply sympathetic, he also voices a quiet rage against her inability to change the on-going status quo of poverty and violence.

More than that, there is a constant sense of "Us v. Them" in Parkinson's work and the actions of the female figures in his poetry emphasize how *stuck* the male poetic voice feels enduring the disdainful social portrayal of the working classes. In his poem "Danger Dessie: A Hip-Hop Ballad" Parkinson demonstrates the centrality of the male working-class voice in his work and the difficulty this voice has in escaping from underneath the weight of established social prejudice against the working classes:

> Papers say I'm scum
> but what the fuck do they know?
> They ever been in the flats
> trying to survive with
> junkies
> hardmen bullies
> the garda
> stopping and searching ya when you were only a kid?

> […] I was born in inner city Dublin
> 2 bedroom flat
> 5 stories high
> Ma got drunk every night.
> At the age of 8
> I watched Da die (*Litany* 40-42)

Parkinson explicitly equates the politics of housing with the politics of social representation, and it is the presence of an apathetic female domestic figure – alongside the predominant absence or violent presence of the male domestic figure – that shapes the manner in which domestic dysfunction manifests. He does not necessarily align himself with the male voice at work in poems such as "Danger Dessie," but rather he is attempting to form a critique of the self-perpetuating cycle of media coverage which represents all working-class males as violent thugs with nothing productive to offer Irish society. Indeed, the simple act of Parkinson, as a male member of the working classes, writing poetry which voices this frustration ironically works to counter-act such generalized assumptions.

Unlike the innate cultural, economic, and social potential in the female working-class figures of Meehan's poetry, Parkinson's poetry evinces a far more cynical representation of the female working-class figure. Their impoverished housing circumstances circumvents their ability to rise above an always already established bigotry based, in large part, on the run-down spaces they occupy. Meehan and Parkinson's characterization choices share a distinct similarity to the choices made by Laverty and Smith in that all four authors use home and community as central framing devices to shape their narratives about working-class women. While these authors were writing decades apart, a similar type of social oppression rooted in housing inequities continues

to influence the trajectory of their working-class characters' lives. The oppressiveness of the tenement building simply gives way to the prejudices attached to the high-rise housing estates; both dictate the working-class woman's ability to thrive, grow, and experience pleasure. Their work espouses a distinct skepticism toward homogenous theories of marriage, motherhood, and sexuality. Instead, they find a way to create their own version of the Catholic marriage ideal (e.g. Laverty) or they rebuff the sustainability of the marriage model altogether (e.g. Smith & Parkinson).

Similarly, they complicate singular or stereotyped theories of motherhood and maternal support. The rise and fall of close-knit, inner-city working-class communities has profoundly affected the evolution of the working-class mother character in Irish literature. Widespread communal domicide of the mid-late twentieth century, explored more fully in the following chapter, means that many of Meehan's and Parkinson's working-class female characters can no longer depend on the same type of communal support so central to the narratives of Laverty and Smith. Instead, their narratives emphasize the rise in fractured families who have both drifted apart from one another and drifted away entirely from any semblance of unity with their neighbors.

We can only trace these similarities and differences if we include an equal number of narratives authored by men and women writing about working-class issues. If critics continue to omit the contributions made by these women to the figure of the working-class female in Irish literature, then we will not be able to fully recognize how and why interrelated theories of housing and female agency in working-class narratives have developed in such a nuanced and thoughtful manner.

Communal Domicide: Hope, History, and Housing in the Estates of Ballymun and Divis

"Ballymun you rock hard bitch
My childhood love you thieved.
Your harsh nature quarried my passion.
You carved me from barren streets"
– Colm Keegan "Stony, Grey, Soiled"

In chapter one I explored the idea of home and housing as defined by the agency, anger, and resistance of the female characters in the prose and poetry of Maura Laverty, Paul Smith, and Paula Meehan among others. Home, in their work, signified individual as well as familial (in) security and was tied to the socio-political inequities of housing. More specifically, their female characters represent a sometimes radical characterization of femininity (in the context of mid-twentieth-century Ireland) in the way the actions of these characters refuse to allow easy categorizations of home/private/domestic and work/public/political. Home *is* work and these author's work is inherently political due to issues of labor unionization, housing shortages, and class prejudice. Thus, home in the literature of the aforementioned writers comes not only to signify a space for memories, security, or kinship, but also the politicization of housing, a persistent contradiction between home as representative of intangible emotions and of housing as a commodified product always available for replacement, resale, or destruction.

This chapter continues to probe this contradiction by examining home as a concept defined by the idea of community or neighborly affiliations in continual tension with wider demands of rehousing or urban renewal schemes. Specifically, it looks to literature depicting the lives of residents in the high-rise housing estates of Ballymun, in Dublin, and the Divis Flats, in Belfast,

to think about what happens to entire communities after the everyday “domicide” of their housing spaces.

In a straightforward sense, the portmanteau term "domicide” coined by social anthropologists’ Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith refers to the murder of home. Specifically, their theoretical frame requires a “deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims. [They] specify that the human agency involved, and that the rhetoric of public interest or common good is frequently used by the perpetrators.” As such, “[i]t follows that home destruction perpetrated by or welcomed by the home dweller cannot be domicide; the notion of suffering is crucial” (Porteous & Smith 12). The cases of the Ballymun estate and the Divis Flats meet all elements of Porteous and Smith’s theory. The only way in which they diverge is the timeframe in which the suffering of the respective residents’ began, an issue that is directly addressed in all six plays under consideration in this chapter via a critique of ad-hoc urban planning and the long-term trauma such planning can inflict. By exploring the plays of Dermot Bolger, Christina Reid, and Marie Jones through the socio-anthropological lens of “domicide” I will show how working-class Irish drama thrives at the intersection of social activism and narrative creativity. Indeed, it is the persistent sense of anger and frustration toward a mode of governance that persistently pushes these communities to the literal fringes of society that both drives the action of these plays and informs each author’s narrative choices.

As we shall see, both Ballymun and Divis were feted as modern marvels in high-rise architecture. Cutting-edge building techniques, working elevators in each building, up-to-date amenities, and beautifully landscaped public areas were all promised. Very few of these promises

were met, indeed, both Ballymun and Divis rapidly proved to be shoddily constructed, dangerous to the health and safety of their residents due to asbestos and other hazardous building materials, and extremely isolating in their respective geographical contexts (Ballymun in out-of-the-way Dublin suburbia and Divis in its sectarian seclusion). The rhetoric around the displacement of inner-city Dublin tenement communities and inner-city Belfast tenement communities centered on ideas of renewal, opportunity, and hope. Residents in each high-rise estate were initially excited at the prospect of moving to these new sky-high communities, in fact they welcomed it. They saw it as an promising opportunity to move to state-of-the-art housing and out of the dangerous tenements of inner-city Dublin and Belfast which had a tendency to collapse unexpectedly. The consequences of poorly-conceived building planning and political prejudice did not make themselves known until residents had been living at Ballymun and Divis for at least 3-4 years. Promises made at the outset, and taken in good faith, and the subsequent problems in the maintenance of Ballymun and Divis were blamed on the very people initially so excited to begin a new chapter in these modern architectural havens. It is this element of delayed suffering which makes both Ballymun and Divis such important case studies for a literary examination of working-class displacement and community domicide. Much of the literature I will be examining either arose out of or depicts community organized strategies of resistance and creativity, specifically, community centers which focused on grass-roots drama groups or government subsidized job skills training.

In their investigation of meanings of home, Porteous and Smith emphasize the need to focus on the way in which our society stores attachments and information about place in a personal hierarchy: “my home; home neighborhood; home city, home region, and home country”; the

relationship between the first two tiers in this hierarchy (home and home neighborhood) inform the focus of this chapter and the way in which I will explore their idea of domicide as it applies to the literature focused on Ballymun and Divis (Lloyd et al. qtd. in Porteous and Smith 7). What happens when communities die in the wake of urban renewal schemes? Specifically, how can literature represent the fall-out of communal domicide and the way in which the residents of Ballymun and Divis attempted to heal and recover?

In the first section I look at Dermot Bolger's trilogy of plays collectively entitled *The Ballymun Trilogy*. Each play focuses on a different part of Ballymun's chronological growth from the original residents' move into Ballymun in 1967 in *From These Green Heights* to the prequel story of those residents that lived in cottages on land which would later accommodate the Ballymun estate in *The Townlands of Brazil.* This prequel story is juxtaposed with the story of a young Polish emigrant living in contemporary Ballymun and the challenges she faces. Finally *The Consequences of Lightning* takes an unflinching look at those families who lived in Ballymun from its construction in the late 1960s through to the time in which the play was written in the early 2000s. More than that, it explores the anxiety of "class-passing" (i.e. concealing the social class from which you originate in order to escape stigma or to attain different economic and social opportunities) felt by Frank when he feels it socially necessary to escape association with the working-class community of Ballymun. I argue that Bolger's plays, a direct result of his involvement in the Ballymun axis theatre and arts centre, demonstrates a complex strategy of working-class communal agency in the face of oversight failure, prejudice, and government subsidized domicide. Indeed, the existence of the Ballymun axis theatre and arts centre (not to be confused with the Crewe Axis arts centre), founded in 2007, shows a persistent

attempt to retrieve the threads of community splintered by negative media portrayals of "crime-ridden" Ballymun. It is a redemptive maneuver which emphasizes the potential and creativity of the Ballymun community in the face of decades of governmental neglect of their housing spaces.

Similarly, the second section looks at the plays of Christina Reid and Marie Jones in order to uncover the hope, anger, and cautious optimism (or, sometimes, outright pessimism), of the Divis Flats community in West Belfast. Reid's *Joyriders* (1986) offers another avenue into thinking about the Northern Irish conflict by focusing on the immediacy of housing inequity and, by extension, the dearth of economic opportunity needed to lift the residents of the Divis Flats out of abject poverty and hopelessness. Her focus is on privileged v. under-privileged communities rather than Protestant v. Catholic communities (although there can, at times, be overlap between these two). The violence of the sectarian conflict acts as a secondary backdrop that is exacerbated by the more immediate or primary issue of violence stemming from class-prejudice.

Marie Jones's *Somewhere Over the Balcony* (1987), produced by the feminist theatre group, Charabanc, employs a distinctly absurdist tone to underscore media and literature's tendency to romanticize run-down places like the Divis Flats. Jone's play focuses on the small number of residents living in the fully condemned, but only half-evacuated, high-rise blocks of the Divis Flats of the mid-late-1980s with only the British outpost on the 20th floor of the Divis Tower still in full working order. In particular, she focuses on three female neighbors as they witness, over the course of a single day, everything from joyrides to their husbands busy at work, and even the British Army laying siege to a Catholic Church hosting a wedding ceremony. Amid the humor are constant reminders of the violence perpetrated against the Divis Flats residents by persistent British surveillance and, by extension, the ongoing domicide of their dwindling community.

Both sections focus on the intersection between housing, domicide, and community and the way in which each of these issues shapes the narrative strategies employed by each playwright as they attempt to depict Ballymun and Divis respectively. Each play under consideration in this chapter demonstrates the vitality of community-based strategies of literary resistance for healing the trauma of domicide. For Bolger, that resistance rests on a reclamation of the physical space of Ballymun in order to create an entirely new narrative about the Ballymun community. For Jones, sardonic wit allows her to ironize the preoccupation with sectarian conflict while entire working-class communities wither around the political periphery of the "Troubles." Reid takes a different route and instead self-reflexively points out the need for authentic literary representations of the ongoing effects of communal domicide evident in the apathy and violence experienced by the youths of West Belfast; drama, for Jones and Reid, offers a unique space for communal unity in the face of politically authorized communal destruction. Each in their own way forces the audience to confront its complicity in shaping public perceptions of these classed spaces, and their concomitant responsibility to begin changing the assumptions upon which their perceptions rest.

Dermot Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy*

The most harrowing scene in James Plunkett's working-class epic, *Strumpet City* (1969), occurs when two tenement buildings, owned by Mr. Bradshaw, collapse causing the death of multiple children. Plunkett's description of this scene and Mr. Bradshaw's fraudulent bribery of building inspectors, pulls directly from a real tenement collapse in September of 1963 on Church St. in Dublin city centre. The Church St. collapse claimed the lives of seven people including 17-

year-old Eugene "Hugh" Sammon, a member of Ireland's Transport and General Worker's Union (ITGWU), who died while attempting, unsuccessfully, to save his 4-year-old sister. As columnist and digital humanities scholar James Curry points out in a centennial commemoration of the tragedy, "His death was a sad demonstration of the connection between the tragedy and the [1913 labor] lockout confirming a contemporary comment by an *Irish Times* reporter that IGTWU members lived 'for the most part in slums like Church Street.'" In spite of this fact and the outcry caused by this well-publicized tragedy, the Dublin Corporation (later renamed Dublin City Council) continued to ignore the disintegrating conditions of Dublin's tenement buildings and the safety of their predominantly working-class residents, focusing instead on half-hearted refurbishment initiatives throughout the 1940s rather than structural overhaul. This policy would result in two further tenement collapses approximately 50 years after the Church Street collapse. Two tenement buildings collapsed on Bolton Street on June 2nd, 1963, killing two elderly residents, Mr and Mrs. Maples. Only days later on June 12th, another tenement building collapsed on Fenian Street, killing 9-year-old Marie Vardy and 8-year-old Linda Byrne. Neither girl lived in the collapsed building but had simply been passing by at the wrong moment. It is the deaths of these two little girls as the culmination of years and years of neglect by the Dublin Corporation which sparked the urban renewal project which would eventually result in the construction of the Ballymun housing estate in the late 1960s.

As Joseph Brady points out in his exhaustive research on Dublin city housing between 1950-70, the secondary catalyst for the creation of high-rise housing in Ballymun was Dublin University College's divestment of a substantial piece of land to the north of the city allowing for initial interest in a new housing development plan to begin. Following the public outcry after the

tenement collapses in June of 1963, and the subsequent public inquiry by the Minister and Department of Local Government (with Minister Neil Blaney at the helm) which took place later in the month, there began a sustained, but ad hoc, process of identifying dangerous buildings and removing their tenants to alternate housing. This culminated in approximately 16,000 buildings being surveyed between June 1963 and November 1964. Of those 16,000 inspected buildings, 2,668 were deemed dangerous with eviction required in at least 913 houses (Brady 198). Sustained building developed alongside these ad hoc displacements with construction of hundreds of government subsidized flats and houses in Dolphin House, three-roomed maisonettes in Marrowbone Lane, and nine five-stores housing blocks in the Coolmine/Kilmore scheme among many others (Brady 195-5; 200). Even these small building schemes faced issues of increased demand from pre-existing housing requests on top of the demands necessitated by tenement inspections, issues of how to continue the scheme of prioritization (i.e. how to accommodate families who were offered housing only to have that offer cancelled due to the need to rehouse residents' living in condemned tenement buildings), how to accommodate as wide a cross-section of family-size as possible, and how to placate concerns over displacement out of Dublin city centre and away from pre-existing social support structures.

In the wake of these increased housing demands, the Minister and Department of Local Government were vocal in their interest in alternate methods of housing with a specific interest in housing young families, the elderly, and the newly married. Minister Blaney continued to pressure the Dublin Corporation and encouraged them to consider system building which would allow thousands rather than hundreds of dwellings to be constructed in a shorter period of time. Following research trips to similar system-built high-rise flats in Paris, Copenhagen, and

Stockholm, by a delegation consisting of a mixture of Dublin Corporation officials and members of the Department of Local Government, Dublin Corporation gave the green-light to move ahead with a major system-built project on the Ballymun site. Brady's examination of the multiple Council meetings in the run-up to this decision paints a picture of a persistent Minister of Local Government brow-beating a beleaguered Dublin Corporation into agreeing to his proposals for this new housing initiative. While Dublin Corporation clearly had reservations, they were in no position to turn down the opportunity to attain thousands of new housing opportunities to satisfy an ever-increasing demand. Miscommunications abounded and the unresolved anxiety around ancillary support which began to emerge in the first stages of the project in 1964 and would have long-lasting repercussions for the eventual residents of Ballymun:

> The plan included provision for road improvements, landscaping and churches, schools, community buildings and a shopping centre but the immediate aim was to provide the 3,000 dwellings for those in need. This was the point at which alarm bells must have begun to ring in the heads of the councillors for the Minster asked them to consider the desirability of 'facilitating the implementation of the general plan as far as practicable simultaneously with the provision of dwellings, in particular through the coordination of services directly provided by the local authority.' The Minister had mentioned only housing but the Corporation had assumed that the other elements would be provided simultaneously and by the Minister (Brady 215-6)

This willful miscommunication would make itself known throughout the project as repeated concerns would be raised by Dublin Corporation, and the housing committee specifically, about the lack of focus on the Ballymun town centre and landscaping plans (Brady 219). Questions of who would pay for what persisted throughout the project with no clear indication by Minster Blaney that they would cover the cost for any community support structures outside of the core high-rise dwellings.

Even with these questions unresolved, the consortium of London-based Hadens and Cubitt, and Irish-based Sisk began to build. The Minster for Local Government spear-headed the project, with lukewarm support from Dublin Corporation. The plans included: 1,574 4-roomed flats, 490 3-roomed flats, 725 2-roomed flats, 52 1-roomed flats, and 400 5-roomed Cottages. On 11 November, 1965 Minister Blaney made a vocal commitment to developing landscaped public access areas and playgrounds in a report to Dublin Corporation noting that, "in the long run the success of the Ballymun Project, socially and aesthetically, will depend to a significant degree on the landscaping treatment" (Brady 223). This prophetic statement by Minister Blaney foreshadows what would be the most persistent and visual problem with the Ballymun project throughout its most tumultuous periods and an issue Dermot Bolger returns to repeatedly in his depiction of the Ballymun estate throughout his *Ballymun Trilogy*.

By December of 1968 the final slab was fitted into place and construction was officially completed at Ballymun. Minor construction would continue until 1970 with a total of 3, 265 dwellings in Ballymun, a mixture of flats and houses. In all Hadens, Cubitt, and Sisk built seven towers and eight-storey 'spine blocks' linking them together to create long facades.

It is at this starting point in the history of the Ballymun estate that Dermot Bolger begins his dramatic exploration of the effects of gradual communal domicide in his first play, *From These Green Heights*. Hailing from the Dublin suburb of Finglas, Bolger can be considered as one of Ireland's most prolific working-class writers. He has produced numerous novels, poetry volumes, and plays focused on everything from unemployment in Dublin in the 1980s (*The Journey Home*, 1990) through the bittersweet nostalgia of remembering his late wife and the life they created together in Ireland (*The Venice Suite: A Voyage Through Loss*, 2012) to an ambitious

stage adaptation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Ulysses", 2018). More than that, Bolger has worked to create opportunities for new and aspiring writers through his involvement in founding both the Raven Arts Press in 1977, and, when Raven Arts ceased production, the New Island Press in 1992. Considering this background in grass-roots and entrepreneurial literary production, Bolger's involvement with the axis theatre centre begins to make sense. His decision to produce his *Ballymun Trilogy* as a feature of a community project organized by actual Ballymun residents (rather than a larger theatrical outfit) speaks to the abiding literary focus of Bolger's long career: to highlight those who have been continually overlooked, dismissed, or underestimated.

As briefly referenced earlier, *From These Green Heights* documents the initial hope and excitement of the first batch of Ballymun residents as they move into the housing estate in 1968-9. The play covers a 40-year-span with Act two transitioning into the residential experience of contemporary Ballymun residents and their engagement with the Ballymun regeneration schemes that had been launched in the early/mid-2000s. The transition into Act two shows the gradual disintegration of that first spark of optimism in 1968-9 with many contemporary residents feeling only a mixture of despair, apathy, and anger. By focusing on the evolution of two specific families and the generational differences of place-based class prejudice, Bolger is able to compare and offset the wide-ranging struggles with communal displacement and the way it has affected previously stable and contented family units.

As Niamh Malone and Carmel O'Sullivan observe, all three plays in Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy* fit, at times uncomfortably, within a genre referred to as community theatre. They cite critics including Helen Nicholson (*Theatre and Education*, 2009) and Eugène Van Erven (*Community Theatre: Global Perspectives*, 2001), to argue that Bolger's boundary-breaking

Trilogy orients our focus to communal narratives which have the possibility of articulating "local identities strong enough to negotiate a painful history, a comprehensive regeneration and a possible future, independent of corporate visions driving physical regeneration" (Malone & O'Sullivan 239). In other words, Bolger eschews the globalizing tendencies of urban regeneration schemes in order to emphasize distinctly local possibilities of community theatre. Specifically, the work carried out by the axis Arts and Community Resource Centre.

Established in 2007 (and still in operation) as part of an ongoing regeneration project for the Ballymun estate, the axis theatre's key stakeholders are the residents of Ballymun, and in its eleven years of operation it has recognition for the way in which it "places local people and their stories and creativity at the centre of works of the highest standard" (Malone & O'Sullivan 238).[14] Prominent amongst these works is Bolger's *Trilogy,* commissioned and directed by Ray Yeates, director of the axis theatre, and staged in 2004, 2006, and 2008 respectively. All of Bolger's play's are staged in the physical grounds of the Ballymun estate, with the forbidding and decaying towers serving as the literal backdrop. More than that, audience participation - or, rather, vocal interruption - is both necessary and encouraged. As Prentki and Selman have said of community theatre, "the issues and stories grow out of the community involved" and Bolger's *Trilogy* capitalizes on this idea in order to lend his drama urgency and relevance (9). In an anecdotal aside to their article, Malone and O'Sullivan reference Bolger in conversation with them when he recalls an event from an early staging of *From These Green Heights*:

> There's a line in the play early on where Christy is out of work and he says something like, 'You go to the FAS training and they send you into an interview you have no chance of getting but that was just to justify the system, move pieces of paper around you know'.

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[14] For more on Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, including the regeneration masterplan, visit: www.brl.ie

> And there were two fellas in the back row around 50, and one said 'too fucking right'… this line was true to him and they couldn't stop himself agreeing with it (244).

It is this undeniable sense of relevance and empathy which opens up Bolger's *Trilogy* to readings of his narratives as a form of radical protest, as a call for socio-political reform, and an affirmation of the urgency of local forms of narrative. The community of Ballymun, independent of political affiliations, drives the Ballymun Regeneration Project, and it is the presence of its uncompromising voice which lends Bolger's work its radical aura.

While Malone and O'Sullivan have established the manner in which Bolger toyed with perceptions of "traditional" definitions of community theatre, I reconsider the importance of the relationship *between* community and theatre and how the loss of the former shapes the latter in the case of Ballymun (and Divis as we will see in the second section of this chapter). More specifically, this particular instance of non-traditional community theatre was a redemptive attempt to recoup some semblance of community out of the reverberating devastation of the inner-city working-class communities' original domicide in 1968-9 when they were displaced into the Ballymun high-rise estate.

By focusing on the generational gap between the initial hopeful expectations of Ballymun and the contemporary reality of negative associations with Ballymun, *From These Green Heights* dramatizes most clearly Porteous and Smith's theory of everyday domicide. In their delineation of the effects of domicide, they quote Marc Fried on the grief which manifests when losing one's home. In particular, Fried "acknowledged the significance of relocation losses as they affect routines, relationships, and expectations. He found that grief associated with loss of place was closely linked to both loss of social network and of the physical structure and context of the

dwelling" (Porteous and Smith 112). It is this grief, centered on place and the affective connections associated or created by place, which manifests clearly in Bolger's first play.

Fried's trifecta of "routines, relationships, and expectations" based around a physical space is often what allows us to think of a place as "home." The layout of Bolger's first play underscores this idea as we witness Christy, Carmel, and their son Dessie move into their newly constructed flat in 1968. Alongside them is another family - Jane and her two daughters Marie and Sharon. Marie and Dessie will marry later in the narrative and have a daughter, Tara. The narrative follows their domestic tribulations as they settle into their new homes in Ballymun; from failed pregnancies, to job loss, to learning how to read, to drug addiction, both families represent a multitude of experiences on the wide spectrum of working-class life in Ballymun. Both Carmel and Christy, in particular, act as constant advocates for remembering all that the family have lost by being forcibly moved to the geographical isolation of Ballymun. As Dessie grows and acclimates to life in Ballymun, he loses his childhood memories of Bolton street, the inner-city Dublin street in which he and his family also later lived, and instead associates home with Ballymun. This tension between Dessie and his parents makes itself felt throughout the narrative:

> Dessie: It is home.
> Christy: Not for me.
> Dessie: Well it is for me and you can't take that away. I don't remember Bolton St. I love this flat and hate you always going on about Ballymun. I belong here even if you don't.
> Christy: This isn't the way Ballymun was meant to be.
> Dessie: But it's the way it is.
> Christy: I was somebody in Bolton Street. Neighbors came to me to write letters for them. Here I'm nobody, not even a proper father (41)

Bolger deliberately constructs a narrative in which home means different things to two different generations within one family. By connection, community means different things to each generation. The routine of living in inner-city Dublin, the relationships carved out by establishing himself as an intelligent letter-writer on his street, and the expectation of continuing in the footsteps of his family before him and remaining on the same street are diminished or entirely destroyed by Christy's removal to Ballymun. In contrast, Dessie knows only Ballymun as his home. His routine, relationships, and expectations are all shaped around a place that feels alien and destructive to his parents. The support network so innate to inner-city working-class communities fails to translate to the isolated high-rise towers of Ballymun. As Christy points out to Carmel when he tells her about his difficulty finding work: "An honest carpenter could always walk into a job in this city. I'd contacts, a whisper in the right ear on the street. But the grapevine doesn't stretch to Ballymun" (28). Instead he must ask for assistance from his local FÁS office, the office so despised by two of Bolger's audience members in the anecdote referenced above.[15]

Bolger balances the repercussions of forced displacement with the persistent hope that things might improve if the residents of Ballymun can recover a semblance of community well-being. Bolger's narrative makes it clear: recovery from communal domicide is not impossible, but it is constantly undermined by an apathetic or outright hostile government who refuse to adequately maintain Ballymun's residential amenities. As Carmel notes, "The newer tenants had a different attitude. We were sent here as a reward, but they saw it as a sentence" (35). Far from its feted

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[15] FÁS stands for Foras Áiseanna Saothair which, in English, refers to the Training and Employment Authority of Ireland. FÁS offered further education opportunities with the purpose of assisting the unemployed in seeking professional work placements. FÁS was disbanded in 2013 and is now referred to as SOLAS. SOLAS functions under a similar mandate to FÁS with the exception that the work previously carried out by FÁS is now shared between the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education.

beginnings, Ballymun became a "holding ground for awkward cases" (35). The blame for this disappointing evolution lies not with the residents who attempted to acclimatize to high-rise living as best they could, but to the haphazard planning, outlined earlier in this section, of the Dublin Corporation and the Minister for Local Government.

Minister Blaney's prophetic statement concerning the necessity of green spaces in Ballymun and his failure to follow through on his intentions for these spaces finds its rebuke in Bolger's play. The play areas and green areas which were promised by the Minister became, instead, a grey, concrete wasteland, rife with restless youth prone to bouts of law-breaking. This impulse of disaffected youth toward crime and excitement finds its representation in the character of Sharon, Jane's drug-addicted daughter. Where Christy mourns the community he has lost, Jane mourns the physical house she lost in her displacement to Ballymun. This grief manifests in her obsession with visiting open house events every weekend with her two daughters unwillingly in tow. It culminates in Jane's realization that Sharon has begun to steal small knickknacks from the houses she forces them to visit; houses they will never live in nor could ever hope to be able to live in:

> I realized nine-year-old Sharon stole things. A tiny toy dog that came in a box of Cornflakes. It had been in a child's room in the house we looked at. Sharon had it pressed in her fist as she slept, like she needed something to cling on to. I knew it was my fault, my unease she was growing up with. Gently I prized it from her as she slept. I went out to the balcony and let it fall, knowing it would break into pieces like everything else here. I never brought my children to look at houses again. But it was too late. Something had started inside my little girl that I had no idea how to deal with (37-8).

That "something" evolved into a lifelong drug addiction which eventually claims Sharon's young life.

Bolger draws a definitive connection between this tendency toward crime and addiction with the communal domicide experienced by Jane's generation. The forced loss of her home reverberates so violently in her psyche that her daughter felt the echo. Indeed, both of her daughters feel this echo keenly. Similar to Dessie's conflict with his father, Christy, about his association of Ballymun as his only home, Marie cannot understand her mother's impulse to reject her life and home in Ballymun in favor of her fantasy world: "That was the problem. I lived in Ballymun, yet she wouldn't let me be part of it. Every Saturday we were dressed in our best clothes and brought to view houses for sale in Drumcondra and Glasnevin… It was her fantasy world, examining gardens and converted kitchens. She always gave our old address in Pinewood Crescent to the estate agent" (36). Jane's inability to move beyond her grief for her lost home means that she cannot fully allow herself to embrace a new community. Instead she continues to enact a fantasy of living in a modest middle-class home far away from the high-rise, concrete towers of Ballymun. Marie and Sharon cope with this fantasy in different ways; Sharon by turning to crime and drugs, and Marie by emigrating to Australia.

Marie only returns upon the news of Sharon's death. It is at that point that she and Dessie eventually reconnect. Dessie, who never left Ballymun and "was the one who stayed through thick and thin, maybe because [he] felt someone had to" eventually finds himself leading the trade union movement for the Ballymun community. In a self-referential gesture to the work of his community theatre, Bolger concludes his play with Dessie claiming himself as a voice of his people. More specifically, Bolger cements the core tension in his play between the communal domicide felt in the initial move to Ballymun and the fledgling community that has been

struggling to find its feet amongst the grief of the initial domicide and the continuing lack of government support:

> If I haven't physically traveled as far maybe that's because I'm on a different journey. I was born in a tenement to a da with copperplate handwriting. Neighbors would get him to write letters for them, imagining penmanship would impress officials. It didn't because nobody listened to tenement dwellers. Now I sit at meetings as a full-time union official arguing people's cases and the bosses and officials have to listen. They think I'm a jumped up little bollix, but I make them nervous. When people were dumped out here in the 1960s nobody asked what we wanted: they made decisions for us. My journey is to make them listen. Not exciting, not glamorous, but I've traveled a long way from where Da started (89)

This idea of a "journey" is at the centre of Bolger's political critique, the idea of a generational journey coping with the grief of parental domicide on one side and youthful optimism for a better future on the other. Indeed, the structure of Bolger's play bears this idea out as he concludes his play with the image of Dessie, Marie, and their young daughter, Tara, moving out of the condemned high-rise flats of Ballymun to a new social housing scheme in Dublin. While the play opens with Dessie talking about his excitement about moving to Ballymun, the play concludes with Tara excitedly discussing their move away from Ballymun. It comes full circle with the implied hope that the mistakes of Ballymun will not be repeated.

Bolger uses this tension between two sides of a chronological timeline in his second play, *The Townlands of Brazil* staged by the axis theatre in 2006. The play consists of two acts with Act One taking place in 1963 and centering on the experience of a young woman named Eileen who lives with her mother and father in a cottage on the land that would later be purchased by Dublin Corporation to construct the Ballymun estate. Act Two focuses on a young female Polish immigrant named Monika who lives in contemporary Ballymun. Both young women are

mothers, and both experience the grief, loss, and trauma associated with being forcibly displaced from their homes. They experience a different type of domicide, one borne out of social and political pressures on young, single, unwed mothers. On the one hand, Eileen's unplanned pregnancy forces her to flee her strict Catholic mother who demands she enter a mother-child home thus depriving her of her childhood home in the process. On the other hand, Monika's planned pregnancy forces her to emigrate in order to send home money to support her infant daughter after the untimely death of the child's father thus depriving her of both her familial home and her home country. Both women yearn for a homes centered on "routine, relationships, and expectations" (Fried in Porteous and Smith 112).

In connection with this yearning, Bolger's play centers on the innate fear of change to home and housing. In particular, the fear of domicide wrought by outsiders changing the landscape of specific communities and thus forcing the original tenants away from their homes. For Eileen and her family, it is the fear of the Corporation building homes on their land for the new Ballymun scheme: "The real loneliness will start when three thousand tenement families land on our doorstep. Ever since the government announced their plans, I've been scared. I'm human and change scares me. The Corporation is stealing our home" (113). Bolger flips this experience in Act Two in order to show the constant loneliness of the emigrant lifestyle. As Monika points out: "The Irish look through us all. They keep us at bay with vague friendliness. They never invite you into their homes or their hearts" (164).

Both the Ballymun community and the emigrant community are obsessed with the loss of home but in different ways. Eileen's parents fear the loss of their home to an incoming wave of newly re-homed tenement dwellers and Monika fears that she may always be an outsider in the

community in which she has chosen to live and work. It is this type of forcible displacement which Porteous and Smith's theory of domicide has yet to adequately address. Bolger is not simply interested in government-subsidized schemes for urban renewal couched in the rhetoric of community improvement, but he is also interested in the more intangible domicides that occur as a result of social or political oppression. He understands that home can be murdered in more than a physical way.

As in *From These Green Heights* Bolger is focused on narrating the life experiences of marginalized or at-risk communities. In his first play, communal domicide — and the grief it can bring to bear on different generations of the same working-class family — takes center stage. In his second play lack of access to reproductive rights among at-risk women and the prejudice faced by members of Ireland's immigrant community are the focus of his social critique. The forced removal of unwed mothers from their homes via social pressure, not the physical destruction of their home, offers another avenue of analyzing the complexity of the Ballymun community. By showcasing the vulnerability of young women on both sides of the chronological timeline, Bolger refutes assumptions about the criminality innate to contemporary Ballymun residents. For instance, Monika's closest friend and co-worker, Anna, with whom she works on a mushroom farm originally owned by Eileen's parents, recounts why she felt the impulse to steal cheap shampoo products:

> I keep washing my hair but it stinks of mushroom. I feel foreign even to myself. I shouted back and one girl sent a text message. Soon all their friends were jostling me, chanting 'foreign bitch.' I entered the supermarket to escape. I'm lonely and homesick and sick of being afraid to stand out, afraid to cause trouble or question my rights. I just wanted to be in control. I wanted peach-smelling hair (177)

Once again, the question of individual agency and control returns. Whereas, Dessie, in Bolger's first play, sought to regain control of community rights via the trade labor movement, Bolger deliberately chooses to show Anna attempting to control something utterly mundane and easily accessible to a large cross-section of the Irish community, even the working classes - her hair. Thus, Bolger is tacitly reminding his audience that ideas about the working classes in Ireland need to adapt to protect the most recent addition to their ranks: emigrant communities.

Indeed, the structure of Bolger's play re-enforces this message. He deliberately parallels the experience of Eileen, who emigrated to England as a widowed mother in 1963, with the experience of Monika, who emigrated to Ireland as a widowed mother who needed to support her young daughter in Poland. While each woman copes with the non-physical domicide of their sense of home, they experience the prejudice, isolation, and fear of being alone in a foreign country. Bolger's play breaks down any preconceived barriers between the experiences of Irish emigrants and the experience of Eastern European emigrants (the largest emigrant community in Ireland).

In an added twist to this parallel storyline, Eileen's son, Matthew, returns to Ballymun employed as a construction worker involved in the project of tearing down the remaining Ballymun towers. He uses this job as an opportunity to try to find his mother's family. Instead he befriends Monika as he walks through the Ballymun estate one evening searching for a lost child. This play is crowded with lost, returning, or inaccessible children: Eileen's son, Monika's daughter, and this symbolic lost child. Their subtle thematic appearances underscores Bolger's belief that it is future generations who represent their communities' best hope for recuperation. In other words, by emphasizing the number of at-risk youth, Bolger critiques the ongoing socio-

political apathy toward investing in vital educational and housing for resources working-class children. Yet it is the striking similarities between Eileen's experience in England, as recounted by Matthew, and Monika's and Anna's experience in Ireland, recounted throughout Act Two, which point to Bolger's desire to create an empathetic response amongst his audience toward one of the most marginalized communities in Ireland, i.e. emigrants:

> In a city we were foreigners. For a child, a city can be just three or four streets. She was only a child herself. We'd stand there at night watching strangers in the window of a Wimpy bar… Sometimes, if a customer left she would tell me not to move… She'd run back out, breathless, and once we turned the corner she'd hand me half-cold chips in a paper napkin. One time a policeman saw and asked me why I was alone. I looked up and saw my mother hurry from the Wimpy bar. She was shaking and that was the first time I ever truly saw her. Because even to me she looked desperately young and scared and lonely (188-9)

Matthew's short vignette echos the language used by both Monika and Anna to describe their grief and fear of being outsiders in a community hostile to newcomers. In a deliberate response to Eileen's mother's comment about the invasion of Ballymun residents in 1963, Matthew and his mother, and Monika and Anna, experience first-hand the harm which that type of uninformed prejudice can inflict.

By showing Anna's pitiable petty crime, and by paralleling the experience of Eileen and Monika on separate sides of the Ballymun timeline, Bolger's second play challenges the strict socio-anthropological categorization of domicide outlined by Porteous and Smith. Bolger forces us to question what happens when the physical abode is still standing but your community sends you away for reasons beyond your control. It's domicide against the *idea* of home, rather than just the physical space of housing and its attendant associations to home. The physical house still exists, but neither Eileen nor Monika are welcome to return.

The final play in Bolger's trilogy, *The Consequences of Lightning*, (2008) uses a comparatively simple narrative framework. The play looks at the lives of two small families, Sam, Frank, and Philip on the one hand, and Katie, Annie, and their friend, Jeepers on the other hand. Sam, Philip, Katie, Annie, and Jeepers are all friends and all live in contemporary Ballymun but Frank has moved to a more affluent neighborhood in order to cut ties with his past life as a member of the working-class community. The play focuses on the interpersonal dynamics of the friendships between each family and the attempts of a priest, Martin, to intercede on behalf of the estranged father and son (Sam and Frank). Whereas, in his previous two plays Bolger focused on the domicide of inner-city Dublin communities, and the socio-political domicide experienced by young outcast single mothers respectively, his third play seeks to uncover the discomfort around the practice of class-passing (i.e: pretending to be from an affluent social class in an attempt to erase your associations with your working-class background) and the attendant fear around losing one's social status if one's working-class background were to come to light. Bolger's play pays attention to the physical abode attained by Frank when he leaves Ballymun and attempts to pass as middle-class. More specifically, his play explores Frank's fear of losing that home, and the attendant social status it bestows, should his background as a previous resident of Ballymun come to light.

Frank's reasoning for moving into a house in the style of "mock-Tudor, semi-Georgian, late Irish-twentieth-century-grossly-over-mortgaged grotesque," can be traced, once again, to the lack of agency afforded to Ballymun residents as a direct result of their communal domicide in 1968-9. As Frank describes it, it is a poverty of the mind cultivated by a sense of powerlessness stemming from their grim environs:

> Frank: I was trying to put a distance between myself and the thing I hated most.
>
> Katie: Being poor.
>
> Frank: Being helpless. The helplessness of standing in a pub doorway as a kid, unable to persuade Da to come home. The helplessness of knowing that if some bastards broke the lift or fought on the stairwell, I'd no control over it. Trying to get Philip to meet me after I left home, giving him money, knowing I was helpless to stop him using it to inject shit into his veins… What chance had he living here with Da? Ballymun killed his dreams, then it killed him (259)

This helplessness, I would argue, is a direct consequence of the domicide of the original tenants of Ballymun, and the ongoing gradual domicide of their living spaces as narrated in Bolger's first play. The trauma and grief experienced after the murder of their original homes and communities, and the ongoing trauma of the slow death of their current domestic environment due to lack of government oversight, manifests in outright disassociation or abandonment by the young adults of Frank's generation. As his father Sam comments, "My son built a wall of bricks and mortar. On one side, his new life; on the other side, the shambles that was mine. He left me behind" (200). Frank fully believes that "[p]overty isn't just about money; it's about horizons and confidence… [he] was brought up to think poor - to settle for second best" (237-8). This way of thinking is connected to the grief felt by his father's generation after moving to Ballymun in the 1960s. They thought of themselves as second-best, as their environment was treated as no more than a "designer-built slum" (252).

It is the character of Martin, a beleaguered but optimistic priest, who acts as Bolger's dramatic relief against the bitterness of Frank, Sam, and Katie. Each of Bolger's previous two plays balanced outright anger and pessimism with a hint of lightness and hope. In *From These Green Heights* it is Dessie's vocal advocacy on behalf of his community and his family, in *The Townlands of Brazil* it is the hope that Monika will be able to reunite with her daughter and effect

some positive change in the way Irish society thinks about emigrant families, but in this third, and final, play it is a celebration of the community that withstood the negative media portraits of Ballymun and stuck together to create productive narratives of their experiences through projects like the axis theatre.

Towards the final pages of the play, Martin tells us, “There’s always been two ways to look at Ballymun: an unmitigated disaster or the scene of thousands of daily unseen victories” (290). Bolger’s use of the present perfect tense in this instance speaks to his wider intent with all three plays. Rather than viewing his *Trilogy* as a finished or self-contained product that will operate as a straightforward social critique, Bolger’s work encourages us to consider the ongoing responsibility of Irish society to reconfigure its misconceptions of working-class communities such as Ballymun. The layout, structure, and characterization in all three plays strongly focuses on the importance of hope for future change; on the innate possibility of changing the way society perceives certain members of their community through a place-based hierarchy. Indeed, the decision to stage all three plays on the soon-to-be-demolished grounds of Ballymun speaks to the physical possibilities of change - out of the rubble can arise new opportunities. Domicide of a physical house need not mean domicide of a sense of home within your community. However, Bolger makes it clear that in order for community ties to survive the forced displacement of domicide, they must have the physical space to recover and heal. The axis theater centre thus becomes not only the creative vehicle via which these plays are set but the embodiment of Bolger’s social critique within the *Ballymun Trilogy.*

The Divis Flats in Christina Reid's *Joyriders* and Marie Jones's *Somewhere Over the Balcony*

As demonstrated in the foregoing discussion on Dermot Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy*, the reverberating effects of domicide on close-knit, working-class community ties created the feelings of grief, apathy, and anger so passionately narrated by Bolger in Ballymun's axis theatre. The political context of the Divis Flats estate on the lower Falls Road, in Western Belfast, offers a complex counterpoint to further our understanding of communal domicide and the strategies that have been employed to recover from government-approved urban renewal. Specifically, the sectarian context of the lower Falls road, in addition to the ongoing violence that plagued the Divis Flats once they had been erected, contribute to an altogether unique case study of communal anger, violence, and resistance. By deliberately positioning the violence of the "Troubles" as secondary to the violence of class conflict and governmental oversight, Reid and Jones are foregrounding the oft-overlooked or stereotyped working classes of Western Belfast. The "Troubles" do not dictate the thrust of Reid's and Jones's dramatic plots, but rather their characters' loss of their Pound Loney community and their access to safe and secure housing shapes the action of each play.

The plays of Christina Reid (*Joyriders*, 1986), and Marie Jones (*Somewhere Over the Balcony*, 1987) focus on different aspects of the residential experience of living in the Divis Flats throughout the most tumultuous periods of "Troubles" in the North of Ireland. Each play shares a key theme championed by Northern Irish playwright Stewart Parker, namely, the idea that "educating in an entertaining way is the primary goal of drama….[and] that for the word *drama* should be substituted the word *play*" (Harris xxi). Claudia Harris in her introduction to the work of the all-female Charabanc theatre group, of which Marie Jones was a founding member, notes

that, for Parker "'play is how we test the world and register its realities. Play is how we experiment, imagine, invent, and move forward'" (Harris xxii). This idea of drama as a type of playful registering of the world's realities, be they joyful or traumatic, is not only the founding vision of the Charabanc theatrical group, but also, I would argue, central to the way in which Reid, and, of course, Jones, structure their representations of the Divis Flats. Their plays are, at times, ludicrous, uproariously funny, and frighteningly sinister. If they are experimenting, imagining, inventing, and moving forward in the vein of Parker, then it is no coincidence that the Divis Flats, specifically, should be the focus of such consistent theatrical irony and comedy for Northern Irish playwrights. In their attempts to recover from the domicide of their original Pound Loney working-class community, Divis residents found themselves contending with a ludicrous balancing act between IRA and INLA activities within the boundaries of their estate on the one hand, and the ever watchful panopticon of the twenty-story outpost of the British Army atop the Divis Tower, on the other.

Constructed by the John Laing Construction Company between 1968-1972, the same period as Ballymun, the Divis Flats consisted of twelve interconnected eight-story deck access blocks and one twenty-story tower. There were roughly 2,400 residents among the 850 flats "of which 98 percent were self-identified Catholics" (Roy 1). Roy, an architectural student, goes on to note that:

> The 12 buildings of the Divis complex were accessible from three different levels of linked terraces: "walks," "paths," and "rows." Because the terraces were connected throughout the complex, an individual could potentially walk along the top row from St. Jude's block all the way to St. Colmgall's block without having to stop to go up or down stairs. While such design eliminated any sense of privacy or ownership for residents, it did make it easy for British troops to go on daily patrols throughout the complex (2)

The Divis Flats complex was beset with problems throughout its conception and eventual construction. Indeed, much like the residents of Ballymun, many of the residents of the Divis Flats estate hailed from a small, tightly-knit working-class community whose domestic infrastructure posed problems for local government. In the case of Ballymun, many of the tenants were being re-housed from unstable tenement buildings, but in the case of the Divis Flats many of the residents were being re-housed from two-up, two-down homes[16] in the Pound Loney community in order to make space for an expanded motorway. Issues of "unofficial segregation" along religious lines, "filtering" of undesirable tenants via rent and purchase prices in other government housing schemes, and the pressure to preserve (sectarian) voting patterns all contributed to tense deliberations on how to rehouse a large slum area (the Pound Loney) that needed to be moved to make way for the construction of the new M1 motorway (Glendinning & Muthesius 287-9). As Roy notes, "the highway was completed in 1984 to accommodate residents of the ever-expanding suburbs who commute to work" (4).

As Porteous and Smith argue, everyday domicide, of which the removal of the Pound Loney community is certainly an example, is insidious precisely because it is considered to be in the "common good" of the displaced community:

> Here [everyday domicide], the process is much more subtle. Motives, for the most part, may be legitimate or even admirable. Common good rhetoric makes more sense to the victims of everyday domicide; even removals for purely profit-making enterprises can be cloaked in the language of public interest, such as the generation of more local employment. Further, everyday domicidal actions are almost invariably legal. These characteristics contrast with those of extreme domicide, in which case subtlety is often absent and motives, legalities, and common good rhetoric are usually suspect (149).

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[16] This common phrase refers to a type of small house that had two main rooms downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. In the case of the Pound Loney community it was a terraced building.

Both Ballymun and Divis share the same initial optimism over the value of re-homing working-class communities housed in substandard tenements or two-up, two-down style houses. The issue is not simply that these communities were displaced instead of being supported within their original environs, they were displaced to high-rise accommodations which were not adequately maintained and gradually destroyed what little remained of these tight-knit communities. As Roy notes, "the very physical nature of industrial modern is a contradiction to established notions of domesticity and individuality" (25). Neither community was able to retain any agency, control, or dignity around their housing, thus, they lost any semblance of home and the community networks so important to the maintenance of home. Porteous and Smith capture this sense of loss in a carefully selected quotation by James Fenton:

> It is not what they built. It is what they knocked down. It is not the houses. It is the spaces between the houses. It is not the streets that exist. It is the streets that no longer exist. It is not your memories which haunt you.It is not what you have written down. It is what you have forgotten, what you must forget. What you must go on forgetting all your life (Fenton in Porteous and Smith 182)

The necessity of forgetting in order to move on haunts the literature of Bolger and the literature of Boyd, Reid, and Jones. The problems arise when their characters cannot forget, when they are subsumed with the grief of losing that intangible sense of home which exists in those spaces between their old communities and their old homes. Even the architects in charge of the Divis Flats project grasped, on some level, the importance of attempting to maintain some type of community structure: "Cullingtree Road's great size, and its deck-access pattern, were explained by the Trust in social or sociological terms, as an attempt to 'preserve as far as possible, the existing community with its long-established social and family relationships'… Laing breathlessly declared that the deck blocks had 'captured a genuine community atmosphere

as self-contained and humanitarian as a village'" (Glendinning & Muthesius 300).[17] While Laing rationalized his architectural planning, the reality was a dull, concrete space with no areas for children to play, or for adults to meet and socialize. Much like Ballymun, broken lifts, shoddy laundry amenities, and widespread crime as a result of youth restlessness abounded. In addition, as Roy comments, "the continuous-terrace design […] discouraged feelings of ownership, safety, and community" (38). As the Ballymun plans have already demonstrated, community amenities were a vital component in the success or failure of any social housing scheme. In the case of Ballymun and Divis these amenities did not materialize for years after the residents had already moved in. As Walter Gropius points out in his 1945 book *Rebuilding Our Communities*, "the building of neighborhood community centers is of even greater urgency than housing itself" (88). Once these buildings existed, both Ballymun and Divis saw an immediate engagement of local residents in community-building schemes. In the case of Divis, groups like the Divis Residents' Association, the Divis Joint Development Committee, and the Divis Demolition Committee formed almost immediately in the wake of the construction of the Divis community centre.

These committees were a clear attempt to address the continuing effects of the governments "everyday domicide" and the ongoing neglect of the Divis community in the wake of sustained sectarian violence between IRA/INLA forces and the British Army within the boundaries of the Divis Flats housing estate. Indeed, the very first child casualty of the Troubles occurred within the Divis Flats complex. Nine-year-old Patrick Rooney was killed on April 14th, 1969 when a tracer bullet fired by the RUC entered his flat in the Divis Tower. Just one day later, Catholic soldier Hugh McCabe, on leave from being stationed in Germany, was shot and killed by the

[17] Cullingtree is the original name of the road upon which the Divis Flats were constructed. The "Trust" quoted here refers to the Northern Ireland Housing Trust.

RUC in the Flats complex. They would be the first in a long line of fatal causalities within the boundaries of the Divis Flats. In April 1972, eleven-year-old Francis Rowntree was killed by a stray rubber bullet while walking home through the Flats. Later that same year, mother-of-ten Jean McConville was abducted from her home in the Divis Flats and murdered by the IRA.[18] It was around this time that the British Army set up an outlook post on the twentieth story of the Divis Tower. Violence flared unabated throughout the 1970s and in the early 1980s, eleven-year-old Stephen Bennet, eleven-year-old Kevin Valliday, and twenty-year-old British soldier Kevin Waller were all killed when an INLA bomb exploded in a walkway in the Divis Flats' complex.

Against this backdrop of violence, anger, and despair Boyd, Reid, and Jones grapple with the lives and aspirations of the Divis Flats community. Rather than taking the sectarian conflict as the entry point into my reading of their texts, the housing inequity indicated by Porteous and Smith's theories of domicide allows me to read the Divis Flats community as a persistent and creative group who stubbornly attempt to thrive in the face of the literal murder of both their Pound Loney community and their fledgling Divis community. The wider issue of sectarian conflict is background noise in three narratives about perseverance in the face of class prejudice, housing neglect, and communal resistance.

Indeed, Marie Jones's play *Somewhere Over the Balcony* deploys an often incomprehensible storyline to convey the incomprehensibility of continued violence in the Divis Flats. Jones wrote the play in consultation with the other two founding members of the Charabanc theatre, Eleanor Methven and Carol Moore, who both oversaw the creative production and staging of the play

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[18] See Patrick Raden Keefe's *Say Nothing* for further information on the Jean McConville case. By focusing on McConville's kidnapping Raden Keefe is able to contextualize the wider sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland and the role played by the IRA at the height of the conflict.

during its run in London, Belfast, and, later, parts of the U.S in 1987-8. Marie Jones, OBE, was born into a Belfast-based working-class Protestant family. In addition to her writing work with the Charabanc theatre between 1983-1990, Jones has written and produced several plays that appeared on Broadway and the West End including *Stones in His Pockets* (1996) and *A Night in November* (1994), both written for the DubbleJoint Theatre company in Dublin and both focused on issues of national identity, oft-romanticized imagery of Ireland and its sectarian struggles, and the realities of working-class deprivations. *Somewhere Over the Balcony*, written in 1987, contains many of the early threads of themes she would focus on in her later work.

Specifically, the narrative structure of the play encourages us to question the relevance of sectarian politics against the more immediate concerns of the literally crumbling walls of the Divis Flats. The violence is mere nuisance when read alongside the residents' attempts to work, survive, and simply live their lives. Claudia Harris tells us of a note that appeared in the original program for the play explaining that Jones's play "examines the bizarre kind of existence that passes for normality when people are trying to live their lives in a crazy, incomprehensible, uncontrollable situation" (xliii). For Jones, there is a sense of sheer absurdity in the juxtaposition of the death and violence of the conflict with the mundanity of life in a working-class housing estate: "Marie [Jones] tells of seeing children on their way home from chapel on a beautiful Sunday morning, eating ice cream cones while stepping around the bomb fragments and burning cars from the night before" (Harris xliii). As I previously mentioned, choosing the Divis Flats' and its Catholic residents as the foci of the play seems particularly apt when read against Porteous and Smith's theories of everyday domicide. The idea that the Divis Flats' fractured community has its roots in the original domicide of the Pound Loney community means that not

only are these residents' attempting to walk a tightrope between sectarian conflict and the banalities of everyday life, they are also attempting to grieve the loss of their community support network and to recover that sense of a tight-knit wellspring of love and support. As such, the residents of the Divis Flats form a unique community in the context of the Troubles in West Belfast. They were fighting for their community even before the Troubles ignited around them and found its way directly to their doorsteps in the Divis complex.

Jones's play abounds with ridiculousness. The three protagonists, Kate, Ceely, and Rose, narrate a series of events that happen over their balcony (and off-stage) including, but not limited to, joyriders stealing an ambulance and saracen, the elevator breaking down (again), trash chutes smoking and blazing, a car getting blown up, a wedding, a funeral, and a siege (all taking place in the same church at the same time), and a bingo game with the following catchy phrases: "two rubber bullets, 22; armalite gun, 21; on the run, 31; unlucky for some, 13…Doin' time, 29; two dead men, number 10; two fat peelers, 88…Prods are dirty, number 30; Pope's a Mick, 26… sniffin' glue, 62; Brits are thick, 36" (206-8).

All of it is aimed at eliciting a knowing chuckle that can't quite escape the knowledge of the sinister basis for Jones's comedy. For instance, in the opening pages of her play Jones immediately takes to task the use of staged, or dramatized, images of working-class neighborhoods amidst the Troubles in the North:

> Kate: Some big German photographers that are here for the internment anniversary. They asked wee O'Neill to hang out of an empty flat with a tricolor in his hand while they took his photos.
>
> Rose: (*sarcastically*) Oh, aye, right enough. All them empty flats was missin' was a tricolor.
>
> Ceely: And a child swinging from an aerial.

> Kate: The worst of it is, Mena Mackle was sittin' watchin' the last ten minutes of *Neighbours* and her reception went.
> Ceely and Rose: (*sympathetically*) Ach, no (188)

Jones makes it clear that this type of Troubles tourism and the exploitative nature of these photographs overlooks the innate capacity for depth, humor, and complexity that these residents possess. They are more than a byproduct of an ongoing political conflict, so neatly captured by a staged photograph of a run-down flat with a tattered tricolor, they are, rather, a resilient community who have organized at a grassroots level for the betterment of their domestic conditions. More than that, they continue to struggle for the betterment of their community in spite of the maelstrom of violence that often consumes their lives. Jones is not interested in providing a somber rebuke about the pointlessness of violence in and of itself, rather she is attempting to shine a much needed light on those communities who have always struggled to thrive both before the conflict reached its peak, and, particularly, *after* the cameras stop rolling on the more infamous moments of violence.

Given the founding feminist ideals behind the Charabanc theatre, it is no wonder that Jones's plays are particularly adept at showcasing a roster of complicated, and hilariously funny female characters. As Harris comments,

> [Charabanc rejects] the idea that women's stories are secondary to or simply supportive of men's, they show complex women in their plays. Women are allowed to be weak, strong, angry, nurturing, superstitious, knowledgeable naive, serious, funny, loving, and earthy. Charabanc plays place no limit on the role. In each, the female characters seem fully aware of their power and are willing to use it. But women are also shown to be soft and caring - recast into characters who, however tough, still yearn for love and children and home. That a women's company presented a fuller view of Irish womanhood is not surprising. What is most telling is how Charabanc rewrote the stereotypes; gone is the depiction of women as either unattainable saints or bewitching sinners; gone is the mystery surrounding their behavior (xxix)

Much like the work of the novelists and poets discussed in the first chapter, the Charabanc theatre group was particularly interested in writing out of existence the stereotyped, and more often entirely inaccurate, portrayals of working-class women. The Charabanc theatre group wanted its audiences to know that even if their female characters stayed at home to take care of their family and their home, and often their female characters do not, that small landscape encompassed so much more than the title stay-at-home-mom might imply. The home *is* political. As such, it can be violent, traumatic, and demanding and requires equally complex characters to navigate such a landscape.

For instance, when Rose is hauled in for questioning in relation to the murder of a policeman ("peeler"), Jones deliberately use the image of a young mother with a baby stroller to complicate assumptions about motherhood and domesticity; no-one is above suspicion amidst the suspicious atmosphere of the Troubles. As the two policemen harass and question Rose she tells them, "Mister, are you wise? Wouldn't I look sick reportin' a stolen buggy when there is people gettin' murdered out there?" (209). After which, we find out that the policeman had, in fact, been shot by a woman with a twin buggy on Leeson St. Once again, Jones toys with both the assumptions around female domesticity and the balancing act all Divis residents face when attempting to go about their business in a literal war zone.

However, Jones's focus on the physical walls of the Divis Flats and what they represent to the female residents constitutes a key part of *Balcony*'s more somber undertone. Throughout the slap-stick action of the British Army laying siege to a Catholic Church (within which a heavily pregnant bride is attempting to complete her vows before giving birth), we listen to Kate

repeatedly pray to "whom it may concern" that they protect her crumbling walls from the repeated trauma of British helicopters flying overhead: "(*to tape and wearing a gas mask*) To whom it may concern. This is Katy Tidy of 19…I repeat, 19 Dooney Row. My damp dividing walls are about to crumble before my two eyes, and my flat will soon be aptly named…God! Will you speak to the British army for me? Every time an army chopper flies by, my heart is in my mouth for my wee walls just can't take it" (193-4). The onslaught of sectarian conflict is quite literally taking its toll on both the physical structure of Divis, and, implicitly, the more intangible connections of community. The imagery of Katy's crumbling walls represent more than infrastructural damage, they also, at times, point to the inequities felt by individual members of the crumbling Divis community: "That's it, some people are lucky with their walls and some aren't. Ceely and Rose still have theirs, so it must be my fault. I get the blame for everything… Today, August 8th, 1987, as a result of a controlled explosion, my walls finally crumbled" (205-6).

Much like Jones's focus on the complexities of community relationships within the Divis Flats' complex, Christina Reid's play *Joyriders*, written in 1986, focuses on the dynamics of a small group of working-class teenagers, Sandra, Maureen, Arthur, and Tommy, living in the Divis Flats' and their middle-class supervisor, Kate, who oversees their job skills training. Reid who is originally from the upper part of the Ardoyne area and hails from a Protestant family has been considered as the first preeminent female playwright to emerge from the North of Ireland and certainly would have been influential to fellow female playwrights such as Jones and the Charabanc theatre group. This influence can be seen in the way Jones follows in Reid's footsteps by placing multi-faceted working-class female characters at the center of the action of her plays.

Yet another similarity between the two female playwrights is that, although they both hail from Protestant backgrounds, they do not shy away from engaging with the narratives of working-class Catholic communities, as seen in both *Balcony* and *Joyriders*.

The opening scene in *Joyriders* sets a pugnacious tone for the play. The teenaged characters have just finished watching a performance of Sean O'Casey's 1923 nationalist play *Shadow of a Gunman.* The kids are angry and fed-up with what they perceive as a sustained literary act of romanticizing their bleak lived reality. Sandra understands the grand romantic gesture of Minnie Powell dying for her beloved in O'Casey's play as a pointless act of female silliness, while Tommy sees the opportunism of Donal Davoren as base political cowardice. They identify a clear disjunction between how literature attempts to idealize such actions and the pragmatic reality of failed heroics in poor, working-class communities such as the one occupied by Minnie Powell and Donal Davoren not to mention that of the teenagers themselves. Reid goes further by juxtaposing two comments from Arthur and Sandra as they discuss the play:

> Arthur: All his [Donal Davoren's] big ideas come from books. So do yours.
> Tommy: I don't just read about it. I know a few of the lads.
> Sandra: We all know a few of the lads. They live in the same rotten housin' on the same rotten road we do. (108)

In the space of three sentences Reid's characters voice their skepticism about literary nationalism and a self-reflexive awareness of the way this type of literature narrativizes idealistic representations of poor communities caught up in large-scale political violence and conflict. They move from the intangible and philosophical ideals of literature to the physicality of the "rotten" housing within which they themselves live and which they saw on stage in O'Casey's play. Much like O'Casey, they're not buying into any easy narratives about nationalistic heroism

because they have first-hand experience of how entire communities can be devastated by the ongoing neglect and decay of their homes and houses. Later in the play, the character of Maureen, who alone seems sympathetic to Minnie Powell's plight, will be accidentally killed by an army saracen as she attempts to escape from a policeman who is arresting her on suspicion of shoplifting. Rather than dying for love or country, Maureen dies for the sake of an expensive two-piece suit that symbolized an escape from the grimness of working-class scrimping. As Sandra leans over Maureen's dead body, she shakes her and screams at her: "This is what it's like. Do you hear me? It's not lovely, an' it's not romantic like in stupid friggin' plays […] Nobody's ever gonna write poetry about you! Nobody!" (170-1). This is reality as these teenagers' see it. They feel a dangerous need for escape via the acquisition of money, possessions, and acceptance.

The characters in Reid's play misunderstand the underlying social critique of O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman.* Ironically, Maureen's grim, and rather pointless death at the hands of the British army in *Joyriders* is juxtaposed against the seemingly romantic overtures of Minnie Powell's death in O'Casey's play and yet both are victims of violent structural forces that persistently sideline vulnerable working-class communities. Taking her cue from O'Casey, Reid creates a damning critique of literature's ability to romanticize what can be a cruel, bloody, and gruesome lifestyle in contemporary Belfast.

To further this critique, Reid focuses on representations of housing to manifest the cruelty of the social prejudice experienced by working-class communities which so often goes unnoticed amidst the violence of the "Troubles." For instance, almost every scene in the play concludes with either a made-up song or a well-known pop song that dramatizes such issues as housing

("Children of Divis Flats" "Oh I Was Out Walking"), female oppression ("We are the Divis Girls"), or the desperate need to escape (Nik Kershaw's "Wouldn't It Be Good"). Thus, no matter the content of the preceding scene Reid ensures that we are consistently foregrounding home and housing when we consider what is shaping the actions of these teenage characters:

> We are the children of Divis Flats
> And it's for houses that we're fighting
>
> A place to live a place to play
> A place for health and happiness
>
> They took our houses they gave us flats
> How much longer must we live here? (110)

The above song entitled "Children of Divis Flats" in the play appears at the conclusion of two scenes as well as in the introduction of another scene. In another song, "Oh I Was Out Walking" which appears at the conclusion of Scene One, Act Two, Arthur sings, "Oh I was out walking outside Divis Flats/ Where the happiest tenants are surely the rats/ Where we all breathe asbestos and no-one is well […] And nobody cares about you at all" (143). At the conclusion of Scene Three, Act One we are simply treated to a repetitive, rhythmic chant of "unemployment, unemployment." All of these songs and chants underscore the horror of living in the Divis Flats including damp walls, rat infestations, and the impossibility of making a home out of a decaying house. They also focus our attention on the connection between place-based class prejudice and access to educational and professional resources. Throughout the play this connection between the forced displacement to Divis ("They took our houses") and the ongoing loss of job opportunities due to their association with Divis, nourishes the bitterness and jealousy felt by the

four teenagers. As Maureen tell us, “You’ve no chance when the Job Centre finds out yer from the Divis Flats” (140). If they can’t access a profitable job market they have no opportunity to change their housing circumstances. Not only have they been forcibly displaced, but that displacement actively ruins any possibility of a better future, a future that does not contain damp, rat-infested walls.

Even the Youth Training Scheme in which they participate - an alternative to signing on to the Dole in the case of three of the teenagers, and as a way to avoid jail in the case of the fourth teenager - can’t cure them of their valid sense of pessimism. They know they cannot escape the shadow cast by their Divis Flats address. According to Sandra the scheme is a “Government joyride. A good laugh for a year an’ then ye grow up” (162). Reid ironically twists any initial assumptions we had about the association of the term “joyriders” with criminal youths. Instead, it is the government who are criminally negligent in the way they string along entire sections of the working-class community with false promises of adequate housing and job opportunities. In this metaphor, the young working-class teenagers are the vehicle used by the government to score cheap political victories through ad-hoc housing and training schemes, but the actual products are shoddy, damaged, and ruinous much like an abandoned car.

Kate, the training scheme supervisor, provides a counterpoint to the apathy of the four teenagers. Throughout the play she consistently attempts to motivate and empower her young charges. However, her efforts are immediately undermined by their knowledge of her middle-class background. She has everything they wish they could have. As such, they implicitly understand that she cannot possibly understand their situation. At one point, Kate acknowledges their consistent rebuff of her concern and asks, “And I’m not the same as you, am I? I don’t

speak the same language?" (131). In a tongue-in-cheek move, Reid points out that, in fact, Kate does not speak the same emotional language as the four teenagers she supervises. While she chafes at the bit of her mother's domineering presence within their shared home, Kate knows nothing of arbitrary police raids, of damp, crumbling walls, of steps so shoddily constructed they cause tenants to slip and break bones, or of the need to shoplift simply to alleviate the drudgery of poverty. Reid deliberately ends the play with the pensive notes of Nik Kershaw's well-known pop song "Wouldn't It Be Good" which includes the lyrics, "[w]ouldn't it be good to be in your shoes/ Even if it was for just one day? […] The grass is always greener over there." Reid plays up the disjunction between perceptions of the working classes and the relative comfort enjoyed by those controlling the economic and domestic fortunes of the working classes. Much like the governmental ministers who oversaw the planning and building of the Divis Flats, Kate cannot fully grasp the reality of what these teenagers face on a day-to-day basis.

In a slim pamphlet published in 1982 by the Divis Community Arts Project (similar in aim to the Ballymun axis art centre and theatre), we are given a glimpse into the preoccupations and anxieties of some of the Divis Flats' youngest residents. *No Place for a Dog* capitalizes on its suggestive title by providing short stories, original photographs, poems, and illustrations that focus on domestic violence, crumbling infrastructure, and homelessness among a number of other issues. In one short poem from 10-year-old John McAllister simply titled "Divis Flats," we see the young poet meditate on the reality of this failed building experiment,

> I have really often wondered why
> This quiet place has to die
> and how the old and damp flats
> have been over-run with mice and rats.

> […]
> Young and old and in-betweens
> all together like sardines. (11)

This short piece is accompanied by a small illustration of a sardine can, with "Divis Flats" emblazoned on the side, filled to the brim with a faceless crowd of people. Much like the plays of Reid and Jones, and, indeed the plays of Bolger, this young poet foregrounds a sense of claustrophobia and despair.

However, it is the pamphlet's foreword that captures precisely the crux of my argument connecting communal domicide and the plays of Bolger, Reid, and Jones as a form of literary resistance to the trauma of communal domicide:

> This book asks you to stay "a while" and discover the people of Divis - an experience which will never leave you. In the process I am confident that you will discover something of yourself, something of value that you can bring back to your own community. And what would that something be, you may ask? The answer from Divis is straightforward and speaks for itself: Community development begins with you (1)

When reading the plays discussed in this chapter the authors ask you to stay a while to consider the unique circumstances of life in the Ballymun estate and the Divis Flats. They ask you to consider how the rhetoric of domicide, i.e. change for the "greater good", can gaslight vulnerable sections of the working classes and lead to long-term problems with educational, professional, and emotional disintegration. The manipulative policies behind large-scale displacements into sub-standard, poorly located housing betray an inherently inegalitarian mode of governance that forcibly moves working-class communities to the social margins. The plays of Bolger, Reid, and Jones act as vocal ripostes to this ongoing marginalization. Not only do these authors offer us a

specifically working-class perspective of the physical and emotional burdens faced by these communities, but they also demonstrate how these communities are taking back their narrative agency. They are using the genre of drama both to cathartically process their communal loss and to entirely re-write the story of that loss. More than that, these plays demand to be seen, they demand that we bear witness to the structural inequities that lead to the domicide of these communities, and they demand that we all play a part in dismantling the rhetoric and ideology that lead to this state-sanctioned destruction. These plays perform a dual role: they act as a space of creative catharsis for the communities they speak for, but they also act as literary rebuke for those audience members who have been complicit in perpetrating class-based inequalities; they are as much a call-to-action as they are a moment of healing.

Time, Space, and the Artist in Karl Parkinson's Working-Class *Künstlerroman*

> "I could roll out lots more memories of tower block life: drugs, murders, gangsters, parties, robbed cars, OD's...its all in the book. But the book is also my story. The story of an artist from the blocks"
>
> — Karl Parkinson, "Karl Parkinson, the first working-class writer out of the blocks"

The classical structure of the *Bildungsroman*, and the sub-genre of the *Künstlerroman*, privileges an implicitly middle-and-upper-class perspective. Whether it be the eighteenth-century German originary artist *Bildung* of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,* the nineteenth-century English *Bildung* of Dickens' *David Copperfield*, or the twentieth-century Irish iteration of *Bildung* in Joyce's modernist *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the *Bildungsroman* genre and its sub-genres assume a ready basis of disposable income, freedom of time (i.e. time not spent in work), and the physical freedom to move from one space to the next. As McGlynn and Pancake both comment, this genre not only fails to accommodate representations of working-class lives; it is not structured to do so (McGlynn 311). However, critics such as Esty and Townsend have identified emergent or alternate forms of literature which disrupt the inherited structures of this genre in order to critique, amongst other things, temporal-normative development narratives. Time quite literally needs to move at a different pace in the working-class *Bildungsroman*. As Núñez Puente has argued in her exploration of Meridel Le Seuer's feminist *Bildungsromane,* an entirely new genre needs to be created in order to fictionalize a working-class lifestyle (101). Specifically, in addition to differentiating between a male and female *Bildung* protagonist, Puente also addresses key differences in class positions arguing that:

> [O]ne of the main differences between the Bildungsromane of middle-class female protagonists and the Bildungsromane of working-class female ones [is that] "the middle-class heroine undergoes experiences which she both seeks and demands, either through goals set by herself or by an ideal she follows" (Labovitz 245); on the contrary, the lower-class protagonist pursues more materialistic goals, such as her own survival" (101).

Rather than adhering to literary rules skewed towards the representation of middle-and-upper-class social relations, writers create new narrative tactics to re-focus the genre on communities previously peripheralized. These tactics include "heteroglossia, polyphony, multiple narrators, family, and gender solidarity to supplant individuality with community and to rewrite the individual quest as a collective one" (Pancake 292).

Indeed, by challenging the inherited narrative structures of middle-class temporality, which privileges upward mobility accommodated by a capitalist focus on work productivity, working-class authors can effectively critique mainstream assumptions on issues such as class-based educational resources, place-based limitations for personal development, and linear career trajectories. Instead of privileging the development of a single individual, the working-class *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* privilege "the sort of collectivism that remains one of the few weapons of the dispossessed" (McGlynn 311). In doing so, they not only "assert the right of [their] story to be told" but they also provide space for critics to develop new theories about what a *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman* can or should look like (McGlynn 311).

In a specifically Irish literary context, the novels of Christy Brown, Seamus Deane, Roddy Doyle, James Joyce, Patrick McCabe, Frank McCourt, Edna O'Brien, and Sally Rooney — to name just a few — draw substantial critical interest for the way in which they experiment with the boundaries of the classical *Bildungsroman* structure; indeed, their considerable engagement with the developmental narrative indicates the ongoing popularity of the *Bildung* genre for Irish

writers and their audiences. However, in spite of the demonstrable importance of social class to the protagonists in many of the *Bildung* novels written by the aforementioned authors, there has been little critical attention given to the way in which social class influences the narrative techniques used to push back against the genre's structural boundaries. Pierse's scholarship suggests that without a clearly delineated working-class literary canon such oversight is to be expected. Class will always be seen as a plot point, albeit an important plot point, rather than a defining structural approach.

I will challenge this tendency to overlook how class influences the framework of the contemporary Irish *Künstlersroman* novel by analyzing Karl Parkinson's working-class disruption of the temporal structure of artistic change, development, and hope in his 2016 novel, *The Blocks.* By analyzing how Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope allows us to clarify the structure of the *Bildungsroman* novel, I will trace how Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* carefully narrates the space of the high-rise apartment building and its surrounding green areas in order to show how they delimit the type of personal and communal development available to his protagonist. By deliberately circumscribing the places available to roam and explore, Parkinson is circumscribing the temporal potential of his artist-protagonist. The only place his characters know is a grim, destitute, and hopeless grey expanse within which they are trapped by ongoing housing inequities. This explicitly working-class space dictates the economic, artistic, and personal opportunities available to them and profoundly alters the linear timeline of the classical *Bildungsroman* novel.

Franco Moretti argues that the socio-economic underpinnings of Paris's urban street planning shapes the types of *Bildung* available to narratives set in the French capital: "[w]ithout the Latin

Quarter, I mean, and its tension with the rest of Paris, we wouldn't have the wonder of the French *Bildungsroman*" (Moretti in Reznicek 40). Similarly, without the specific socio-political tensions between the economic limitations of Parkinson's working-class environs and his protagonist's hopeful push towards an artistic career we wouldn't have the wonder of a definably Irish working-class *Künstlerroman.*

Specifically, I will examine how Karl Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* depicts the working-class housing estate as a chronotope that intersects with a time-lagged *Bildung* narrative in order to critique Ireland's ongoing neoliberal temporality and its effects on marginalized working-class communities. In taking a genre undeniably preoccupied with time as viewed from a middle-class temporality and placing it within the confines of a differently timed working-class housing space, Parkinson disrupts any expectations his audience might bring to the *Bildungsroman* genre. He creates a complex development narrative which aligns most clearly with Bakhtin's fifth *Bildungsroman* in which:

> [M]an's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence. Man's emergence is accomplished in real historical time, with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature […] It is no longer man's own private affair. He emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres,* 23-4)

We must read Parkinson's *Künslterroman* in its post-Celtic Tiger socio-historical context whereby his working-class artist-protagonist reflects a community frustrated with its continued economic marginalization. Given that *The Blocks* is set in the late 1990s-early 2000s in the Ballymun area, we know, from the review of Ballymun in chapter two, that the complex

communal domicide that characterizes this classed space gives way to a fractured neoliberal cynicism; the ideal trajectory emphasizes moving up and getting out in the world but doing so within the confines of a middle-upper-class capitalist logic. Rather than a simple maturation story of an aspiring artist, Parkinson's protagonist navigates the social, cultural, and economic hurdles of growing up in a working-class housing estate that offers little in the way of financial stability or opportunity. In doing so, Parkinson's novel offers us a new and complex range of representation for a community that is often simply caricatured or sidelined in mainstream Irish literature.

In spite of the groundbreaking nature of Parkinson's text, critical reviews and responses to *The Blocks* have been disappointingly few and far between. While the *Irish Times* and RTÉ both covered the initial publication by Binary Press in 2016 there has since been virtually no academic engagement with *The Blocks*. This type of oversight does not reflect the critical value of Parkinson's text but, rather, reflects the uphill battle faced by small presses in Ireland, like Binary Press, who focus on publishing non-mainstream authors with experimental narratives. Indeed, as Kit de Waal notes, Binary Press offers authors such as Parkinson the opportunity to publish socially gritty content that many mainstream publication houses might not find palatable. And, even when Parkinson found a home at Binary Press, "he would find that the book hadn't been stocked in the bookshops" (de Waal). In Parkinson's case, publication did not necessarily guarantee widespread access to the marketplace for his text.

An added disappointment to the lack of circulation for Parkinson's debut novel is the resulting lack of comparative contrasts being made between Parkinson's early work and the early work of Roddy Doyle. Particularly as Doyle is often referred to as - or assumed to be - a

working-class writer and yet we have no sustained interrogation of what that term fully denotes in relation to Doyle's work and career more generally. As such, contrasting the work of these two authors allows us to position Parkinson's writing as a rebuke against any easy assumptions that have been made about what it means to be a working-class writer in contemporary Ireland. Where the *Barrytown Trilogy* utilizes a tongue-in-cheek comedic narrative style, *The Blocks* similarly employs a darkly humorous approach to social inequity. Both Doyle and Parkinson attribute a sense of flippancy and playfulness to their working-class communities in the face of their socially realistic financial restrictions; joking banter serves as a defense mechanism against ongoing classed strictures. However, Parkinson arguably picks up only the basic threads of Doyle's narrative approaches to representing Dublin's working classes. In a vitally important development to Doyle's fictional oeuvre, Parkinson provides us with an altogether more experimental approach to representing post-Celtic Tiger working-class Dublin. *The Blocks* divests of the hopeful or joyful undertones present in Doyle's *Barrytown Trilogy* and many of Doyle's later texts, and instead inheres a complex sense of time-lagged pessimism that can be attributed to the wider neoliberal framework of Ireland's contemporary political climate.

Parkinson achieves this complexity by offering us a multitude of narrative techniques designed to highlight the chronotopic nature of the high-rise housing estate in which his protagonist lives and works. Specifically, he uses the presence of premature death, ghosts and apparitions to highlight the temporal stasis of life in a time-lagged housing estate; he uses dreams, folkloric apparitions, and drug-induced hallucinations to create temporal disruptions in the *Bildung*'s linear timeline; and, finally, he creates a polyphonic and communal narrative structure in which the protagonist's voice is continually interrupted by alternating vignettes from

other residents in the estate. Throughout his debut novel Parkinson toys with and ultimately transforms the traditional focus and structure of the *Küstlerroman*.

In a basic sense, the *Bildungsroman*, and *Künstlerroman* sub-genre, are structured around an individualized and subjective hero or heroine who reveals, usually through multiple kinds of ordeals or tests, the maturation of their psychological and emotional complexity. The protagonists' character emerges or develops against a backdrop of social, moral, or political upheaval which allows them to offer their personal world view to the reader; quite often the term "coming-of-age novel" can be used interchangeably with *Bildungsroman.* Although many credit philologist Karl Morgenstern with first coining the term in 1819, it was later popularized by Wilhelm Dilthey in 1905. Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, published in 1795-6, is considered the original instance of the *Bildung* genre. Upon its translation into English in 1824 by Thomas Carlyle, the form exploded in popularity and began to find its way into popular British, German, French, and, American literature from the nineteenth-century onwards with a particular boon in popularity in the twentieth-century. From Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights,* to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and on to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* or Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence*, the *Bildung* genre has not only persisted in popular imagination but has necessarily evolved to accommodate a greater variety of viewpoints; the *Bildung* protagonist is no longer simply middle-class or male or white.

In the case of the *Künstlerroman* sub-genre the focus is specifically directed toward the development and emergence of an artist figure as opposed to the more generalized 'coming-of-age' or maturation narrative of the *Bildungsroman* more broadly. Thus, every *Künstlerroman* can be considered a type of *Bildungsroman.* Both of these types of *Bildung* novel have evolved in

tandem with the development of new forms of literature and literary critique. As Petru Golban points out, the "*Bildungsroman* in its historical moment, at least in its English version, can be viewed as part of a larger, generic system, of the novel, or of literature in general, in which it represents at once the culmination of a developmental process and the starting point for a complex novelistic typology, which, to this day, still develops and diversifies its systems of elements" (115). In other words, given that this novelistic genre continually evolves and changes, we must pay heed to the literary-historical context in which each *Bildungsroman* is written with an eye to the literary techniques and narrative spaces used to structure the developmental journey of the protagonist. In doing so we can identify how previous iterations of the *Bildungsroman* have been adapted, adhered to, or entirely subverted and for what critical purpose.

Golban continues by identifying the nineteenth-century English *Bildungsroman* — one of the most influential forms in the development of a twentieth-century Irish literary *Bildungsroman* — as a form which emerges from the "context of romanticism and [becomes] established as a novelistic pattern and tradition systematized by realism" (116). Golban claims it was this shift from romanticism to realism, which flourished in the Victorian Age, that led to a shift from "the individual to the general human, from the subjective to the social […] from the narrow circle of personal existence to the wide social panorama containing many social sectors and character types presented in social interaction" (Golban 137). This shift also challenged Goethe's prior emphasis on an "idealist tradition of the Enlightenment, which stipulates an organic and gradual growth leading to both individual fulfillment and social integration" (Golban 116). Rather than assuming an *a priori* harmony between the mind and reason and the world and nature, the realist *Bildungsroman* of the nineteenth-century began to outline the potential conflicts or tensions

between the individual and society at large (Golban 138). The twentieth-century *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* of Joyce continued this interrogation by showing the impossibility of fully reconciling internal and external priorities thus leading to moments of personal alienation: "The personal experience as fictionally treated by the modernists reveals the demise of the integrated individual subject through the expression of the fragmentariness of self" (Golban 138).

Given the loose parameters of this particular genre there has been extensive debate amongst critics about which novels can be accurately classified as *Bildungsromane*. James Hardin identifies the misapplication of the German translation as a key culprit in this classificatory confusion:

> *Bildung*, in an eighteenth-century context, is a verbal noun meaning 'formation,' transferring the formation of external features to the features of the personality as a whole. In the early nineteenth-century — as to some extent even in these times — it implied 'cultivation,' education and refinement in a broad, humanistic sense, certainly not merely education with all the current institutional connotations of the word. It also strongly implied 'formation' or 'forming,' as a meaning that is not rendered in the usual English translations. As long as critics in the English-speaking world had a clear understanding of what *Bildung* meant in German and what it implied in the early German models of the genre […] the term appears to have been applied with fair precision (xi)

It is Hardin's clarifying emphasis on the *Bildung's* translation in a nineteenth-twentieth-century context that is of particular importance for this chapter. While this translation still arguably applies to *Bildung* novels in a twenty-first-century context, contemporary development novels are now beginning to re-imagine what "cultivation" and "refinement" means within a class-based neoliberal hierarchy. These terms are no longer the privileged remit of the middle-upper-classes but instead their connotations have been expanded to account for the unique ordeals and tests faced by the working classes. For Karl Parkinson, the "cultivation" and "refinement" of his artist-protagonist depends upon his engagement with the cynicism, violence, and professional

circumscription of his working-class community; a "cultivated" working-class artist is one who does not shy away from his classed roots but, rather, embraces those roots in order to grow a new kind of literature.

Golban's expansive summary, and Hardin's linguistic clarifications, help to highlight the key areas of development in the evolution of the *Bildungsroman* genre which would later influence the contemporary Irish working-class iteration of individual *Bildung*: early nineteenth-century Goethe-inspired adherence to an Enlightenment tradition of temporal upward mobility and harmony leading into the challenges and tensions of Victorian era realism and twentieth-century modernist alienation and fragmentation. However, if we incorporate Franco Moretti's theory of the *Bildungsroman* as a symbolic form with "youth" holding the "meaning of life," we can expand on Golban's basic building blocks and begin to understand why the *Bildung* is such an important form for contemporary working-class Irish writers. Specifically, Moretti argues that the "*Bildungsroman* [is] the 'symbolic form' of modernity" (5). Moretti believes that images of youth, and all of its concomitant challenges, were chosen as the new epoch's "specific material sign[age]" in order to fully delineate the sense of restlessness, instability, and fragmentation that began to pick up pace at the *fin de siècle*. The *Bildungsroman*, according to Moretti, manages to incorporate two contradictory "evaluations of modernity and youth": the classification principle and the transformation principle (7-9). In simple terms, the classification principle dictates that events only acquire meaning when they lead to *one* specific conclusion i.e., when youth subordinates itself to the idea of maturity and leads to a final stable identity. In contrast, the transformation principle dictates that a story is meaningful only when it structures itself as an open-ended process i.e., youthful dynamism prevails and any subordination to maturity would

"*deprive* youth of its meaning rather than enrich it" (7-8). For Moretti, this tension "is above all the paradoxical *functional principle* of a large part of modern happiness, identity and change, security and metamorphoses […] Our world calls for their *coexistence*, however difficult; and it therefore calls for a cultural mechanism capable of representing, exploring, and testing that coexistence" (emphasis in original, 9). During the twentieth-century, the modernist iteration of the *Bildungsroman* fulfills precisely this role. In his work examining modernist-era fiction tracing that uses the "ideology of progress through the figure of stunted or endless adolescence" Jed Esty further clarifies the oblique aspects of Moretti's argument by pointing out that "the discourse of the nation supplies the realist bildungsroman with an emergent language of historical continuity or social identity amid the rapid and sweeping changes of industrialization" (Esty 4). Esty, whose scholarship establishes the potential of disrupting the conventional *Bildung* via a critique of bourgeois values, posits that where adulthood gives a finished form to the modern subject, nationhood gives a finished form to modern societies (Esty 4). In other words, Esty builds on Moretti's coexistence model by arguing that

> [T]he tension between open-ended temporality of capitalism and the bounded, counter temporality of the nation plays out in fictional or symbolic form as a vivid struggle between youth and adulthood - and this would be a formative condition of both the classic (national-era) and the modernist (global-era) bildungsroman (Esty 5)

If the modernist English *Bildungsroman* served to represent the coexistence of classification and transformation identified by Moretti, the twenty-first-century Irish working-class iteration of the *Künstlerroman* narrated in Karl Parkinson's *The Blocks* takes up this challenge, as Esty argues, by containing its own contradictory impulse: it melds a principle of forward-looking artistic hopefulness alongside a principle of spatio-temporal working-class stasis; such a coexistence

allows Parkinson to critique the the causal relationship between a capitalist focus on productivity and reward, and Ireland's ongoing class-based housing inequities. More than that, Parkinson continues a narrative tactic introduced in the nineteenth-century, and heightened in the twentieth-century of experimenting with the genre of the *Bildungsroman,* in order to interrogate his protagonist's relationship to a wider class-based economic community. He does so by employing a polyphonic narrative to demonstrate the innate interconnectedness of working-class communities. Rather than an individual-based *Künstlerroman*, Parkinson's narrative is a clamor of voices many of whom are presented independently to the protagonist's development plot. As Puente points out, "[w]riters of proletarian literature enhance the vitality of the community in the formation novels of working-class protagonists: they 'rewrite the individual quest as a collective one'" (Puente 101-2). In Parkinson's case, his protagonist's development narrative *must* be a collective one as his *Bildung* is inherently determined by his navigation of his working-class habitus and the temporal lag associated with a lack of educational and professional opportunities commonly experienced by the working classes as a result of class-based and space-based prejudice.

My use of the term "temporal lag" derives both from Bakhtin's theories of the chronotopic novel and Ann Pancake's use of Bourdieu's "dialectic of upclassing and downclassing" to suggest that class differences can be envisioned as timelags within a race with each class attempting to reach the same objective (i.e. financial, educational, or professional success and stability):

> [A]nd the antagonism "dominated vs. dominant" is replaced by "predecessor vs. successor." Bourdieu explains that the dialectic's efficacy in reproducing the existing class structure is as insidious as it is potent: the dominated, by agreeing to compete in

> "the race," legitimate the system that keeps them "behind." And their belief that by waiting they will eventually rise thwarts any struggle for systemic change […] In this case, the "order of successions" and the assurance that one's social status will always improve are a "programmed time" that forces a hegemony-serving temporal "logic" on the actual vicissitudes of class position over time in a capitalist economy (Pancake 293-4)

To subvert the linear timeline and the vertical narrative movement of the *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman* is to challenge the economic framework which continuously slows down the temporal progression of the working classes. In Pancake's seminal study of the twentieth-century American feminist *Bildungsromane* she traces this emphasis on temporal linearity to the capitalist maxim that "working hard and getting ahead" is equally available to persons of all classes: "It assures that any present disparities in the economic system are only temporary — if not for the collective, at least for the individual — and it insists that if individuals fail to rise, they have no one to blame but themselves" (293). Pancake's work explores the way in which American literature of the 1930s satirized the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* "for serving a particular middle-class ideology that 'valorized individual change'" (Puente 101). Instead, Pancake focuses on the way in which "the myth of an ever-ascendant class trajectory for those who strive hard enough has consequences in justifying American class inequities" (Pancake 293). Similarly, in an Irish post-Celtic Tiger context class division is often based on a difference in temporal mobility in that your time is literally valued (and reimbursed) differently depending on your classed position within the workplace. You either work hard for — and are thus deserving of — professional and educational opportunities or you do not work hard enough, in spite of the class-based hurdles you might face, and are thus deemed undeserving. The complex issue of waged labor versus salaried labor and their basis in class-based educational accessibility is often ignored entirely. As Karl Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* demonstrates, this capitalist

framework presumes a false equivalence between hard work and stability whether economic or housing. When this system inevitably fails to produce equal results for each social class, it is the working classes who continually lose out.

However, it is worth pausing to consider the use of the term time lag or belatedness as used by post-colonial theorists Fanon and Chakrabarty whereby temporal belatedness becomes a type of "logic wielded by imperial powers who maintained that their colonies were not prepared for self-government, insisting 'not yet' as they relegated the subjected to some 'imaginary waiting room of history'" (Chakrabarty in Townsend 351-2). In such cases the term time lag refers to a specific imperial discourse of control and domination. In an Irish context, as Townsend points out, it has been used to refer to "Arnoldian stereotypes of the sentimental, materially ineffective Celt doomed to historical obsolescence" (351). In applying it to the working classes of twenty-first-century Ireland, I am using it in the context of a capitalist discourse of economic productivity and linear career trajectories not often available to the residents of Parkinson's working-class housing estate. There is still an element of control and domination but by using the *Künstlerroman* genre — a genre arguably obsessed with time — Parkinson is able to represent a specifically working-class timeline and to open up space for new narrative voices and experiences. These voices and experiences allow us to critique permanent economic inequities that are often presented as temporary hurdles to be overcome through simple hard work and perseverance.

As I will show, Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* clearly subverts a capitalist-based emphasis on linear progression. He further complicates his novel by framing his narrative around the chronotopic nexus of working-class temporal stasis and the social restrictions of the working-

class high-rise home. In other words, his protagonist's high-rise home, and the class prejudices attached to it, intersects with specific socio-economic restrictions experienced by Ireland's working classes and creates a narrative that reflects a static lack of professional or personal progression. For Bakhtin, the chronotope refers to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84-5). In other words, we must pay attention to the way time elapses or stands still within specific physical spaces in the novel:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* 84)

There has been ample debate about the vagueness inherent in Bakhtin's description of his chronotopic theory. Indeed, critics such as Bemong and Borghart have remarked that this "lack of analytical precision in Bakhtin's essays has led to a proliferation of heterogenous chronotopic approaches to literature and, more generally, culture" (5). Bemong and Borghart identify at least five distinct levels of abstraction from Bakhtin's single definition. The most important aspect of this identification for Parkinson's narrative is Bemong and Borghart's critique of the way Bakhtin uses *motif* and *chronotope* interchangeably in his work. For example, when Bakhtin discusses the chronotope of meeting[19] within a narrative arc. According to Bakhtin, the chronotope of meeting fulfills "architectonic functions: it can serve as an opening, sometimes as a culmination, even as a denouement (a finale) of the plot" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* 97). However, during his outline of this chronotopic device Bakhtin switches his vocabulary and

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[19] Bakhtin specifically discusses the meeting between two characters on an open road but is careful to point out that the chronotope of meeting can be broadly applied to other types of encounters.

begins to call it the *motif* of meeting and further connects it to motifs such as loss, marriage, escape etc. as they are similarly focused on the "unity of space and time markers" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic* Imagination, 98). Different kinds of meetings can hold different emotional or symbolic connotations depending on whether the meeting is welcomed or not, and how it effects the timeline of the plot. Bakhtin does not clarify his vocabulary change but, instead, continues this theoretical thread by identifying a link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road and the frequency with which writers use chance meetings/run-ins on the road as a narrative device. As such, Morson and Emerson "have labeled these minor chronotopes "chronotopic motifs"" or a kind of "building block" of a narrative text (Morson & Emerson in Bemong & Borghart 6-7). These two chronotopic motifs — the meeting and the road — and their structural value are obvious examples of how the intersection of time (chance meeting) and space (public road) can be mediated through a fictional narrative in order to become overtly visible for critical consideration. According to Bemong and Borghart, Bakhtin's chronotopic narrative units interact with the overarching impression of a "*major* or *dominant chronotope*" which "serves as a unifying ground for the competing local chronotopes in one and the same narrative text" (7). In other words, the smaller building blocks of Parkinson's narrative, which includes his friends' bedrooms where they smoke weed, his girlfriend's flat among many others, and a pitch occupied by a minor character named Beatzer, all contribute to the overarching chronotope of the high-rise working-class estate and its interaction with a subverted linear temporality based in a neoliberal ideology of professional progress and capitalist profit. As the dominant chronotope unfolds over the course of the novel, we can also identify Parkinson's unique use of the "chronotope of the threshold," which is "connected with the breaking point in life, the moment of crisis, the decision

that changes a life" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 248). For Kenny, the revelatory threshold moment appears when he begins to realize that art and story-telling can offer him an escape from the boundaries of his high-rise housing estate. However, while Parkinson includes this breakthrough moment in Kenny's psyche, he chooses not to manifest any significant change in Kenny's narrative. Thus, while Kenny experiences a moment of revelatory crisis, Parkinson's narrative makes it clear that Kenny's circumstances will not reflect any change in the face of this artistic revelation.

Bakhtin traces his chronotopic theory from the genre of the Greek romance through to the Rabelaisian novel. In the context of Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* I will be reading Bakhtin's major chronotopes and chronotopic motifs as a theoretical method of parsing genre conventions. If the chronotope lies at "the heart of specific varieties of the novel genre" then we can use Bakhtin's chronotope to distinguish how Parkinson's working-class iteration of the *Künstlerroman* subverts literary genre conventions by creating a working-class temporality (Bakhtin in Bemong and Borghart 8).

Much like Kit de Waal's comments on *The Blocks*, Karl Parkinson describes his debut novel as atypical for the Irish literary market:

> In fact it's unique for more than one reason. It is, as far as I can tell, the first Irish novel written about and by someone who has grown up and lived in Dublin's tower blocks – Ballymun, O'Devaney Gardens etc. It is a work of proletarian literature written in the dialect of the least represented people in Irish literature – the working classes, drug addicts, prostitutes, long-term unemployed, suicidal young men, street people – represented in all their violent, tragicomic, resilient, mad, exuberant existence (Parkinson, *Irish Times*, 2016)

There is an element of desperate hopefulness and frenzied frustration which weaves its way through the actions and inactions of Parkinson's cast of characters. As Parkinson points out, his

narrative does not shy away from showing the despair, anger, and stuck-ness of many in Ballymun's community. *The Blocks* follows the artist-*Bildung* of Kenny Thomson and his friends, Georgie, Jimmy, Liam, and Rooner. Multiple other characters enter and exit Kenny's life over the span of the narrative, which stretches from early infancy to middle-age, including drug dealers, one-night stands, girlfriends, and bandmates. Kenny's life is split into three sections: "Block A: Childhood Visions," "Block B: Adolescent Blues," and "Block C: Bands, Break-Ups, & Poetic Escape." Block A begins with Kenny's childhood perception of his parents' failed marriage leading to his reliance on the spectral presence of creatures called "Glooptings" to account for the ugliness and sadness he sees within his community each day; Block B shows both a linguistic development and a physical development as Kenny discovers a new way of thinking about his community in a realistic sense in addition to discovering himself sexually and artistically; Block C shows Kenny moving away from Ballymun to Rialto and beginning a new artistic stage of development with the formulation of his grunge rock band. Each section is broken up with short vignettes called "Voices from the Blocks" which give us a glimpse into the random experiences of Kenny's unnamed neighbors in addition to key developmental moments such as "Career advice," "De bloom uv art," and "Jimmy follows Georgie out uv de blocks." There are also sections dedicated to the physical space of Ballymun such as "Sounds from de block," Music Block," and "Robbed car in de block." By coupling time and space in the title of each major life section, as well as creating sections that provide his audience with an equal consideration of time and place, Parkinson emphasizes the interconnectedness of temporality and spatial restriction. The structure of the novel reflects how Kenny's linear maturation is quite literally dictated by the influence of living and growing-up within a classed housing space. The

crimes, deaths, and career limitations described in multiple intervening sections are all attributed to the nexus of class-based time/space restrictiveness.

Parkinson establishes this nexus early in his narrative when he introduces the character of Kenny's best friend, Georgie. While Georgie will be a key character for much of the novel, his introductory section early in the novel reveals that he dies a premature death at the age of twenty-one. Parkinson toys with our expectation for a linear timeline signposted by the chronological arrangement of sections A, B, and C by weaving events from section C into Kenny's experiences of childhood in section A for instance. Throughout the novel he uses narrative segmentation to fold time back on itself in order to emphasize the relative impossibility of escape from a working-class habitué. Indeed, Georgie's only escape is death. An eventuality which he himself seems to accept early in his life. In a short scene where Kenny and Georgie are discussing their "future selves" Georgie avers:

> Psshht, I won't be livin te dat age.
> A dark prophecy. I shuffled awkwardly.
> So I says, Ah shut up, yil meet a good woman n have kids de whole lot, I betcha.
> Yeah right, Georgie said in a cloudy mood.
> Wer did de clouds come from? De clouds came from rage at de Mammy who slipped out for bread n milk n never came back. Rage at de Da who morphed inte a monster under de poison uv drink. Rage at de poverty uv welfare […] Rage in de blocks uv iz mind (51-2)

When Georgie predicts the likelihood of a shortened life span, Kenny's immediate response is to espouse a heteronormative family-based timeline. Such a lifestyle for Georgie would create a cyclic timeline whereby Georgie repeats his parents' experience of life in the blocks. While Georgie's life remains linear in a traditional sense of life events occurring in a tempo-normative manner, its financially and socially cyclical underpinnings of repetition mean that this kind of linear timeline will never lead to personal development or freedom. Kenny himself seems to be

unwillingly aware of this likelihood as he ruminates on the reasons for Georgie's sudden aura of rage. Familial violence and welfare-based poverty ensure that Georgie cannot escape the blocks financially. As such, he is seemingly doomed to a temporal cycle and repetition of place-based poverty, apathy, and ugliness. The chronotopic nature of the Ballymun high-rise housing manifests in the "blocks" of Georgie's mind; he has seen how the economic restrictions of living in a working-class community such as Ballymun leads to a communal sense of limitation from which death appears to be the only escape. His only other means of escape is via the haze of narcotics use - a habit, which we learn, leads directly to his death. During his treatment for a heroin overdoes, Georgie slips out of his unguarded hospital room and, clearly still under the influence, attempts to scale the fence surrounding the hospital building: "Georgie Teeling hung der on de barbed wire. Crucified by love n drugs, hung by heroin […] Georgie Teeling dead at twenty-one n free from de blocks" (61).

Even in death, however, Parkinson leaves a sliver of space for the presence of a kind of terrible beauty. We are told that Georgie's barbed-wire-hung corpse is like a "Francisco Goya Ethchin" (61). Such an image evokes a bleak tableau of painful contortions and torn flesh. In moments of senseless horror Parkinson's protagonist turns to art to make sense of what he is seeing. These references belie the educational limitations expressed and manifested by many of the characters in the novel. The use of these references has the same narrative effect of time turning back on itself as we realize that this knowledge is acquired by Kenny at a future time. Throughout the novel and in the structure of the novel itself, Parkinson creates these moments of hope based in an ambiguous futurity; while his peers escape the blocks via premature death, there is an unspoken hope that Kenny has found escape through art. In his study of James Joyce's

novel *A Portrait*, David P. Rando even goes so far as to say that the "*Künstlerroman* is fundamentally a genre of hope" (49). Using the theories of Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope*, Rando posits the idea that the *Künstlerroman* emphasizes the "ontological openness of the future, the future that tends to arrive in forms we cannot exactly anticipate" (49). The creation of a working-class iteration of a predominantly middle-class genre serves a manifestation of the type of hope Rando describes. In creating such a self-reflexively hopeful form, Parkinson's novel recalls a specific element of James Joyce's and George Egerton's *Künstlerromane* as described by Whitney Standlee:

> Joyce's professed literary mission at the end of *A Portrait* — in which Stephen vows to "forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race" — is likewise comparable to that of Egerton, who envisioned her fictional project of twenty years earlier as an attempt to articulate "the terra incognita of [woman] herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her." In other words, Egerton had set herself the task of forging the uncreated conscience of her sex (450)

Much like Egerton and Joyce, and recalling Bakhtin's fifth type of *Bildungsroman*, Parkinson attempts to use his *Künstlerroman* to forge the as yet uncreated conscience of Ireland's working classes as they navigate the chronotope of high-rise housing.

Whether they escape or not, and how they escape, is almost incidental to the fact that there is a need for escape in the first place. As it is, Parkinson is determined to represent the complexity of that need. Drug use in the novel becomes simply another form of escape from the high-rise chronotope of temporal stasis; LSD, marijuana, and heroin, for instance, allow certain characters a moment of relief from the destructive sameness of their environs. In fact, in a section simply called "First drug" we learn that Kenny's first experience with solvent highs stemmed from boredom: "Der wuz nuttin te do […] we wer a pack of wild dogs, snarlin n waitin for sumting te

happen, waitin for sumting te do. Waitin for sum spark te strike us" (76-7). Parkinson is not interested in moral judgements, but, instead, seeks to demonstrate the chronotopic roots of escapism for the working classes in places like Ballymun; he wants us to understand how the physical and temporal restrictions of this classed space can induce a sense of hopelessness and apathy within Ballymun residents. As such they feel a desperate desire to emotionally escape these spaces when financial and social escape feels impossible. Indeed, he goes so far as to term drug induced trips a place of "untime" (141). In a short section entitled "Doyler" we meet a minor character called Tommy who buys Kenny and his friends drugs and alcohol with money he had stolen from the hotel in which he worked. For Tommy a heroin trip is the only escape he can attain:

> Tommy finds de vain he wuz lookin for. Punches in de spike, n draws blood n wham de gear hits n Tommys out uv de blocks, no Da bangin on de door te have a shit, no job loss, no girlfriend dumpin him for bein a prick, no young daughter te think about, no six sisters n two brothers, no Ma worried sick, no gang uv mates in ODevaney, no charges hangin over him, nutting, just de solace n non doin uv untime (141)

With no way to move forward — either professionally or physically — Tommy attempts to escape temporality altogether. His character's choices manifest Parkinson's underlying attempt to critique class-based inequities through the figure of the chronotopic high-rise; place and time are intrinsically connected for this community in ways that force them into making desperate choices.

Once Parkinson concludes the Georgie introductory section, he returns to the linear timeline of Kenny's *Küstlerroman* for which Georgie is a central character but the presence of premature death remains a constant. In a section entitled "De Metamorphosis of Beatzer" we are introduced to the self-styled "king uv de pitch," Beatzer, who spends his days hanging around one of

Ballymun's green spaces — known as "the pitch" — dealing drugs and partying with passers-by. The first few paragraphs of Beatzer's section are third-person omniscient as they detail his drinking and carousing around the pitch while he contemplates how much he loves the pitch of Ballymun, how he can't imagine spending his time anywhere else: "Beatzer n de pitch, heed fuck it if he cud, heed make it iz queen" (112). The chronotopic motif of the pitch, whereby we can see the intersection between Beatzer's arrested development and his choice not to venture any further than the pitch each day, shapes Beatzer's conception of his personal capabilities and limitations. It allows him some modicum of power and authority that he cannot find within the confines of his working-class flat. According to Beatzer, the only alternatives to occupying the pitch are to waste away in front of the television, get a dead-end job and earn barely more than what the dole provides, or date women who will only make more demands on his time and finances (113). Instead, he holds court in the one area where he feels purposeful. The chronotopic motif of Beatzer's pitch allows us to see more clearly the economic and social limitations that have cornered him in that small green space day in and day out; it is not so much that he makes the choice to stay on the pitch as he is forced into grabbing hold of whatever opportunity *presents* itself as a choice. His free-will is circumscribed by an economic framework entirely beyond his control. Unlike the forward-moving trajectory in a classical *Bildung*, Beatzer's class position shackles him to a chronotopic plateau.

After our initial insight into Beatzer's static lifestyle, Parkinson switches to italics and a first-person point of view to indicate a departure from the normal rhythm of the narrative. Over the course of a single long paragraph, Beatzer recounts a hazy incident in which he appears to recover from a bad hangover before resuming his daily activities on the pitch. Parkinson then

returns to normal print, indicating that Beatzer is back to feeling himself again. However, we are now given a third-person limited view as we begin to realize that Beatzer is quite literally stuck in the same clothes and same place while repeating the exact same activities for months on end: "Beatzer on de pitch, its winter, its freezing, he has no top on, hes wearin de same tracksuit bottoms since spring but he duzzen smell, he drinks a can, smokes a joint dat never burns down or goes out […] Beatzer on de pitch, its Summer now n he still wears de same bottoms, he still duzzen smell uv sweat" (113). It is only when Beatzer attempts to yell out to a passing Kenny who does not hear him that our suspicions are confirmed: like Georgie, Beatzer has died of a drug overdose. We know now that the hangover detailed during the italicized first-person paragraph represented Beatzer's death. His spirit now haunts the same pitch that gave him such a sense of purpose during his young life. By showing this continuum between Beatzer's activities on the pitch while he was alive and Beatzer's activities as a ghost — he does not change a single element of his behavior and thus does not realize that he has died — Parkinson indicates that Beatzer's existence while he was alive was a kind of living death. He suffered from more than mere arrested development; he was almost a living specter in his spatio-temporal stasis when he was still alive. If he cannot move vertically towards any kind of personal or emotional accomplishment, and if he cannot even move horizontally toward a new space to occupy, then he almost ceases to exist in a developmental sense.

Parkinson goes further than simply devoting one or two segments to peripheral characters who contribute to Kenny's developmental arc. He also creates a total of ten stand-alone segments called "Voice from De Blocks" which detail short vignettes in the lives of various inhabitants of Ballymun's high-rise flats as well as the lives of some of Kenny's closest friends. These

segments depict such scenes as a first-person account of a young child's accidental death when she falls from a high-rise window; a young alcoholic mother angrily waiting for her husband to return home with the family's take-away dinner and the resultant violent argument witnessed by their infant son when the father arrives home late; the casual conversation between two older stay-at-home mothers having a shared cigarette on the balcony of O'Devaney Gardens; a young prostitute named Lucy attempting to score drugs and being forced to have sex with a stranger in payment for the drugs; and, a long biographical tale relayed in the first-person by a character named Mad Dog as he enjoys a weekend furlough from a prison sentence he is serving in Mountjoy prison. By structuring his *Künstlerroman* in this manner, Parkinson is able to make Kenny's story simply one among many to which we have access. He creates a sense of community and interconnectedness that characterizes the working-class iteration of the *Bildung* genre. It is not that Kenny becomes a synecdochic representation for a kind of working-class hopefulness, but that his own specific maturation depends upon his experience of and knowledge about many of these scenes that play out amongst his neighbors and friends. Kenny's awareness of these kinds of temporal plateaus contribute to the artistic impulse, and the threshold moment, that allows him to create music and poetry later in the novel. In essence, his creative endeavors celebrate communal resilience rather than individual progress.

Specifically, Kenny's creative endeavors in the third section ("Block C") of his *Bildung* arise out of his experience of the chronotopic quagmire of the high-rise estate in the first two sections of the novel ("Block A" and "Block B"). He understands the way in which, for many of its residents, the space of the working-class high-rise can create a cycle of educational limitations (via governmental cutbacks), welfare dependency (via a lack of educational/career

opportunities), emotional apathy (as a crutch to overcome the repetitiveness of daily life), and drug/alcohol abuse (to provide some measure of relief or escape from the confines of their classed position). Rather than simply focusing on the hopefulness of Kenny's *Bildung* and the innate potential present in every resident of Ballymun, Parkinson recognizes the importance of representing those stories that are often sidelined, ignored, or even derided.

For instance, in the seventh installment of "Voice from De Blocks," dated 1999, we read a letter penned by "Trevor Mad Dog" as he recounts the events of a single weekend he spent in Ballymun on "TR" from Mountjoy (Temporary Release). Trevor begins by telling the unnamed addressee that his father had allowed him to stay with him during his weekend furlough. At mention of returning to his childhood apartment in the O'Devaney Gardens complex of Ballymun, Trevor begins to ruminate on his mother's unexpected death by suicide seven years prior:

> I like te think dat it wuz a mistake, a cry for help. Dat she wanted te be found, a message for Da n me. But maybe she knew exactly wot she wuz doin, had enough uv her life, married te a waster who drinks almost every night, has no job, shows her no affection, her feelin old, tired, a son gettin inte trouble, cookin n cleanin n watchin poxy soaps on de telly, only leavin de house te go te de shops n back. She gave us a message all right, two useless cunts wuz de message I got (171-2)

In his bleak appraisal of his mother's lifestyle, Trevor recounts precisely the cyclicality Parkinson seeks to critique in his representation of Ballymun. There is a stuck-ness that, for many residents — Georgie and Beatzer included — feels wholly insurmountable. Trevor continues his letter by recounting his activities over his weekend TR which included a full Irish breakfast at the Kylemore cafe in Dublin, a tense reunion with his Da, a night at his local pub drinking and socializing, and a one-night stand with an ex-girlfriend. Trevor tells us that when he

awoke in his ex-girlfriend's apartment, his hangover had disturbed his "internal prison clock" "cuz uv de alcohol" he had woken up later than normal (178). In and of itself this is not an alarming statement but coupled with a small piece of reverie in the concluding paragraph we begin to realize its importance:

> I sat down on wunna de small bollards surroundin de block n had another smoke, I wuz sittin there thinkin te me self how fuckin easy it is te fall back inte tings in de block. Hopefully wen I get out for good I dont fall back inte all me old bad habits (179)

Trevor draws a direct correlation between the environs of "the block" and the temporal stasis of his emotional and professional development. Rather than a linear upward trajectory, he is able to see the prevalence of a passive repetitiveness in the Ballymun working-class lifestyle. In the space of a single weekend, the Ballymun clock overrides Trevor's prison clock as he takes up prior bad habits involving alcohol and drugs. At this point in the narrative, Parkinson's audience understands the hope expressed by Trevor is likely to go unfulfilled; the audience's expectations of a classical *Bildung* linear trajectory of setback followed by success has been replaced with what Pancake deems a "working-poor rhythm of anticipation and letdown" (298). We have been reconditioned to recognize how the chronotope of the working-class high-rise interrupts — or stalls entirely — any developmental progress.

These short narrative interjections provide the novel with a plurality of voices which refocus an individualistic genre toward communal connections. They reiterate through alternate viewpoints the overarching temporal stasis and repetitiveness of living in a corporation housing estate. Parkinson creates an underlying commentary on the necessity of genre adaptation for differently classed, differently located, and, thus differently timed, communities.

While our both our linear and narrative expectations of Kenny's *Bildung* are continually interrupted by these short polyphonic narrative interpolations, and Kenny's periodic daydreaming and drug use, Parkinson still provides narrative segments which address Kenny's professional and personal moments of breakthrough. However, once again, Parkinson subverts our expectations that these breakthrough moments — or threshold moments — will lead to the kind of individual fulfillment or social integration which traditionally occurs in Bakhtin's fifth type of *Bildung* narrative. Instead, in segments entitled "Career guidance," "School ends/Adult stirrins," and "Jimmy follows Georgie out uv de blocks," Parkinson relays the uniquely working-class hurdles faced by students and adults who live and work in working-class-based housing estates. These hurdles include: insufficient educational resources coupled with prejudicial assumptions; a school-to-dole pipeline; and the ongoing physical and emotional demands of experiencing or witnessing drug abuse, familial violence, or petty crime. For instance, in "Career guidance" Kenny self-consciously acknowledges — and rages against — the low professional expectations he has internalized as a member of the working classes. It is not simply that his career guidance teacher does not provide adequate guidance, but that Kenny does not see himself as someone who has access to the type of career path that would change his financial status in any significant way. He tells us that he "only stayed in school becuz it kept [his] Ma happy," and he had no idea if he wanted to "go te college, learn a trade, work a dead end job" (97). In a sense it doesn't matter to him as he, in his own words, "wuz from de blocks" and thus unlikely to excel (97). Once again, Bourdieu's dialectical theories of the relationship between "objective structures and subjective agency," as referenced briefly in Pancake's use of "upclassing and downclassing," allows us to understand the complex relationship between Kenny's space-based temporality and

his mediation of classed ambitions (Stahl 21; Pancake 293). Using Bourdieu's dialectics to "operationalize habitus," Garth Stahl demonstrates the chronotopic roots of place-based time lags:

> I seek to use habitus to critically consider pervasive neoliberal ideologies of competition and becoming "the best of the best" where aspiration is rendered an "unequivocal good" (Allen, 2013a)… Aspirations are always bounded by multiple logics of capital: cultural, economic, human, and social. As the habitus is always permeable, the young men in my study engage with complex identity work in order to reconcile competing and contrasting conceptions of what it is to be simultaneously a neoliberal subject and an authentic white, working class, and male in South London. My research concerns how schools are expected to produce a neoliberal subject who espouses the values of competition and self-reliance (Davies and Bansel, 2007, p. 252) and how the habitus has the capacity to rebuff and subvert such neoliberal discourses (124)

Stahl's conception of Bourdieu's theory of habitus emphasizes the fluid relationship between structure and agency whereby an individual's experience of an objective structure (classed housing) and their subjective agency (internalized perceptions of classed position) mutually shape one another (126). Where I identify the chronotope of the working-class high-rise as a key determinant in Parkinson's narrative conception of a working-class temporality or time lag, Stahl's use of Bourdieu's theory of habitus further contributes to my theoretical interrogation; Bourdieu essentially classifies the lived conditions of working-class communities as a habitus that shapes their internalized behaviors which are then translated into public practices. Where the sociological theory of habitus allows for a focus on identity, the narrative theory of the chronotope allows for a focus on temporality. Parkinson's representation of Kenny's identity can be understood in the context of Bourdieu's theory of habitus (i.e.: Kenny social choices are shaped by his experience of a classed lifestyle within a classed space) but it is Bakhtin's chronotope that allows us to look at the larger timeframe of how these identities contribute to —

or stall — a linear timeline in Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* (i.e.: Parkinson's narrative choices are shaped by the temporality of the high-rise chronotope).

For instance, during his career guidance appointment Kenny spends most of his time internally lashing out at his counselor's willful ignorance of Kenny's classed position. When asked what he might like to do after graduating secondary school, Kenny privately thinks:

> Sir, it will be great if I dont go on fuckin Heroin. Sir, I aim te stay out uv prison. Sir, not killin meself by immediate or slow suicide will be fuckin tops if I manage it. Sir, me Da died wen I wuz a child, before dat he wuz strung out on gear n me Ma threw him out. Sir all me adult role models er thick thugs, sad junkies, terrible thiefs, awful alcoholics, demented drug dealers, lovable lunatics (98)

Kenny's inability to vocalize his frustrations out loud lends weight to Stahl's theory of an internalized habitus shaping educational cynicism; for Kenny education functions as a "mechanism for consolidating social separation" (Grenfell 29). His conception of a cyclical timeline of certain repetitious behavioral practices also speaks to the theory of a working-class high-rise chronotope: "Sir, Im from de blocks, nobody has a career, or cares about college ya fuckin dickhead, just send me up te de fuckin dole office now will ya?" (99). Kenny's experience of educational practices can be traced to his working-class habitus, which, in turn, functions within the chronotope of high-rise housing within Kenny's artist-*Bildung*.

Simon Charlesworth, using the theoretical research of Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, also identifies a sense of habitus-shaped cynicism in a limited number of interviews he carried out

with individuals from a working-class background.[20] More than that, in the context of consistent privation and disappointment, he classifies the idea of hope or aspirational dreaming for the working classes as "pathological because it means feeling the weight of necessity more cruelly. It is a life of the absurd where hard work and self-development lead directly to a more painful experience of this condition. It makes most sense to deaden the self, one way or another" (59). We have seen in Parkinson's novel how many of the characters deaden themselves, Kenny included at times, through the use of drugs and alcohol and, in extreme cases, suicide. Indeed, the only kind of dreaming we see in Kenny's first developmental section ("Block A") and for much of his second developmental section ("Block B") focuses on creatures he calls "Glooptings" which essentially represent working-class financial, social, and professional privations. They appear to embody the darkness of a circumscribed futurity in that Kenny always witnesses the "Glooptings" causing others to become depressed, violent, or apathetic. In one of the earliest "Voices from de Blocks" sections we hear from Kenny's imaginary "Glooptings" directly: "I put the urge in you to grab that bottle. Drugs! Bullshit! Disease! Horror! I am your darkest thoughts. Fear of failure, fear of life, fear of death!" (15). As Kenny moves into "Block B" of his development, the Glooptings begin to recede and Kenny begins to dream less and less. Instead, Parkinson's chronotopic approach to high-rise housing in the working-class iteration of the *Künstlerroman* allows him to gradually show Kenny's discovery of the temporal stasis and

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[20] Charlesworth's sociological treatise, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience,* uses interviews conducted with the working-class community of Rotherham with a specific focus on their experience of de-industrialization. The stated aims of his text are to use the phenomenological arguments of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Bourdieu to address the academic inattention paid towards the specificities of working-class experience: "Far from working class culture being marked by solidarity or resistance, he sees it as characterised by conservatism and by enforced acceptance of the realities of the inegalitarian social order. He emphasises the way that this brute reality of working class life leads to the articulation of a culture of necessity, and to a passivity that can only be denied through the embracing of the hard realities of the everyday" (Savage).

frustration of his community; he moves on from his childish belief that specters are to blame for the pain and violence he has witnessed. Kenny begins to understand that a larger experience of place-based class prejudice and circumscription is the root cause for his community's cynicism.

However, the attempt to "operationalize habitus" in the research carried out by Stahl and Charlesworth faces practical limitations that fictional texts, such as *The Blocks,* need not address. As such, the aspirations identified as "pathological" by Charlesworth in his necessarily narrow study of a cross-section of working-class voices and experiences become part of the polyphonic narrative positioning that sets Parkinson's *Künstlerroman* apart from the normative temporality of the middle-class *Bildung.* In other words, Kenny's discovery of the way in which art and writing can become a place of "noblock" and can provide him with a sense of purpose and agency represents just one of demonstrably many experiences of being a member of a working-class community (Parkinson 18). Similar to his treatment of Beatzer's story, Parkinson does not clumsily attempt to apply the kind of hopeful trajectory identified by Rando to *all* members of Kenny's classed community, but instead uses his polyphonic *Bildung* to demonstrate that their habitus can lead to more than one outcome. In fact, the self-reflexive awareness of the existence of Parkinson's working-class *Künstlerroman* throughout the novel points to an already realized aspiration. However, the structure of Parkinson's novel depends upon a communal experience of classed boundaries. The residents' understanding of their communally shared classed status influences and often shapes individual development; there is a symbiotic relationship between the experiences of the communal and the development of the individual. In Parkinson's novel, Kenny's entire sense of ambition depends upon his awareness of his neighbor's "stuckness;" Kenny's knowledge - and, often, shared experience - of their time-lagged lifestyle feeds his

desperation to get out of the Blocks. In choosing to represent Kenny and his community in such an interdependent manner, Parkinson averts the danger of generalizing working-class lived experience. By using Kenny's *Bildung* as simply one narrative arc among many in his novel Parkinson refocuses the *Bildung* genre from an individualized viewpoint to communal perception in its working-class iteration. Specifically, Parkinson's use of multiple first-hand narrative vignettes throughout the novel allows us to experience a cacophony of working-class voices and experiences. Each immersive vignette demonstrates the unique lived experience of each individual within Ballymun's classed community; rather than existing to simply compliment or complicate Kenny's narrative arc, they exist to simply tell their own stories.

Although we are given quick references to Kenny's interest in literature and imagination in "Block A," it is only towards the middle of "Block B" that we see him verbalize his artistic impulses in a section understandably called "De bloom uv art" (114). For Kenny the artistry of composing both lyrical poetry and song lyrics does not represent a transcendental calling as much as it does an escapist release similar to the one sought by Georgie and Beatzer in their respective drug use. When he first sits down in an attempt to emulate his favorite rock artist (appropriately enough, he favors the working-class lyrics of *Oasis*), Kenny tells us he feels as though the "dank n pain had just been taken out uv [his] body n lifted away" and that he felt "powerful and renewed by dis act uv creativity" (116). A few pages later, during a conversation with his friend Rooner, Kenny further reveals how writing lyrics has allowed him to escape the repetitive behavior he had fallen victim to previously. When Rooner admits that he sometimes understands why people choose to commit suicide — much like Georgie's brother Jimmy who could no longer cope with "de system, de blocks, de world" (206) — Kenny responds:

> I know wot ya mean tho, all de shit dat goes on, makes ya feel, like hopeless sumtimes, ahh ya seen me goin nuts wit a few drinks in me, rantin n ragin n fightin n shit, dats wot it does te me sumtimes ya know? But man, I feel like Im gettin tru all dat since I start writin down words, de poems n lyrics, n music it fills me up, makes me feel strong, ya know? (132)

The first "it" Kenny refers to is the habitus of the high-rise chronotope where behavior, place, and time are all intrinsically interconnected and manifest in cyclical behavior patterns and aspirational cynicism. But instead of turning to drugs, crime, or self-inflicted violence, Kenny turns to lyrical creativity. He refers to this "musical education" as the first step in his "artistic development stage" (151). As he begins to discover these first steps we move into "Block C" which arguably contains the apex of his musical education (a point made all the more noticeable by Parkinson's choice to label this third development section "Bands, Break-Ups, and *Poetic Escape*"). Over the course of this shorter section we see Kenny move out of Ballymun and into a flat in Fatima Mansions (an apartment complex in Rialto, Dublin) with his girlfriend, Tara; create a grunge rock band called The Urban Gorillas; go through a band break-up; have his first LSD trip; start another band called The Junkyard Dogs before going through a second and final band break-up. While he physically moves away from Ballymun, Rialto does not represent a vertical movement upwards in terms of social mobility but rather a horizontal move outwards. Rialto and Ballymun share a similarly classed status as areas populated by social welfare housing and working-class communities; Kenny simply swaps one space of classed housing for another.

Kenny augments his musical education with his own discovery of literary classics including: "Blakes biography, De Beats - Ginsburg, Kerouac, Burroughs, Corso — De Romantics, *Moby Dick*, *Don Quixote*, Plato, Homer, Ovid, Joyce, Kafka, Whitman, Shakespeare, Genet, Celine, Rimbaud" etc. (237-8). He only begins to seek out these texts when his artistic awakening takes

hold. Previously, he could not understand how canonical literature could be relevant to his chronotopic habitus (as we saw in "Career Guidance"). Just prior to this listing of literary influences, Parkinson provides us with another segment titled simply "Education" — whether musical, literary, or emotional we are not explicitly told — during which Kenny, alone in his flat in the Fatima Mansions and worried that he's sinking "back te [his] primordial" form, discovers William Blake's "*Songs uv Innocence n uv experience*" (228). He refers to the text as "*A key!*" (emphasis in original). This intertextual reference to Blake's text reaffirms the sense of temporal disturbance that pervades Parkinson's *Künstlerroman*. Kenny's perception of childhood innocence (early sections of "Block A") and the way it is uprooted by moments of violent classed experience (mid-late sections of "Block A," all of "Block B," & early section of "Block C") is framed by his perception of working-class temporality throughout the text. If Blake's text functions as the key to unlocking the final stages of Kenny's artistic growth, the novel suggests that Kenny needs to confront his experiences of working-class temporality and its effect on his personal growth in order to produce a lasting piece of art as opposed to the ephemeral success of his two failed bands; he must use the distinct kinds of violence and poverty experienced by his community to fuel his art.

In another narrative disruption, Parkinson self-reflexively speaks to the function of his working-class iteration of the *Künstlerroman* genre. While not necessarily auto-biographical, Parkinson clearly peels back the mechanism of the text's creation through direct appeals to his protagonist: "Write poet, type poet, sing de song uv Kenny Thomson de angel uv de flats, be de hero uv de blocks n do thou will in dis world, without fear" (254). These appeals are sprinkled throughout the novel and range from references to the "sweet reader," to tacit encouragement of

Kenny when he becomes downcast by the fate of many in his community: "Poet, see that this is but another door, see that the blocks are but the mind, get up poet n sing" (117; 207). In a particularly bleak scene that sees Kenny involved in a violent altercation he is warned that he should not allow himself to be drawn so easily back into the temporal stasis of the high-rise chronotope (much like Mad Dog Trevor):

> [K]now this poet, this is not your role, this is ordinary, this is not the way out, this is deeper in the muck, this is the mind forged manacles of the blocks in dire action, be warned, be careful, be smarter, be better or be damned (183)

This metafictional approach further undermines a stable narrative timeline as we begin to question the relationship between the artist-*Bildung* of the fictional Kenny and the artist-*Bildung* of our author. If the *Künstlerroman* genre can be deemed an inherently hopeful genre, as Rando argues, then we can posit the idea that the metafictional narration of *The Blocks* represents the already realized potential of characters such as Kenny; by creating this novel, Parkinson fulfills the ambiguous hopefulness of Kenny's uncertain ending. In fact, the final lines of the novel affirm this metafictional relationship as Kenny reflects on his use of his working-class habitus and temporality in his poetry. He considers himself to be burning with the "godessence" of all that the working classes continue to experience: "De Godessence in de concrete uv de blocks… De Godessence in every face in de blocks…Im burnin wit de Godessence n de word…Finally I am out uv de blocks tru de writin uv dis here book called *The Blocks* n I am free, thank you" (266). In his final thoughts of the novel, Parkinson's protagonist draws a vital connection between the working-class poet and both the spaces his classed community occupy and the experiences shaped by those spaces. The working-class artist, in Parkinson's view, can only escape the chronotope of the blocks by confronting their centrality to the artist's *Bildung*.

In concluding his novel Parkinson provides us with a compressed view of Kenny's later artistic development. In the space of four pages titled "De world opens its arms" we find out that Kenny remains in a stable relationship with Tara who supports him as he participates in Dublin's spoken-word poetry scene. We learn that Kenny meets a new social group composed of like-minded poets and lyricists; no more huffing solvents with Liam and Rooner in their flat in Ballymun. Kenny now performs on stage with poems that express his own "human experience for a crowd dat related te it n gave [him] praise n encouragement" (259). Once again, we are reminded that Kenny ties his art to the spaces within which he initially developed his artistic impulse; the "human experience" of the working-class high-rise. In her assessment of peripheral *Bildung* narratives Sarah Townsend tells us that while the spatial parameters of the traditional *Bildung* tend to remain stable and, in fact, "exist primarily to serve and validate the protagonist's journey, the process is reversed in peripheral narratives of *Bildung*, so that the hero's successful maturation becomes the means for validating his or her locale as a viable site for full and timely human development" (353).By representing the static temporality of a time lagged working-class space, Kenny's artist-*Bildung* validates the vitality of the polyphonic habitus and its roots in the working-class high-rise chronotope. Parkinson does not attempt to make Kenny's experience representative of his entire community but rather he provides us with a differently classed iteration of the *Künstlerroman* in order to emphasize the need to include multiple voices, multiple experiences, and multiple outcomes of the same cyclical temporality; that is what characterizes Parkinson's novel as a uniquely working-class *Bildung*.

Dem an us Thari Crossways: Counter-Poetic Strategies and Opacity in the work of Emmet Kirwan, Rachael Hegarty and Melatu Uche Okorie

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"I think poetry and place, for me, are causation and correlation. My sense of home being Finglas makes me feel at home at a writing table" (Hegarty, Interview)

"The right to opacity, which Glissant claims is more fundamental than the right to difference, is a right not to be understood" (Britton 19)

"The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened* to, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak" (Bourdieu 55)

In the opening pages of Emmet Kirwan's irreverently tongue-in-cheek play *Dublin Oldschool* Kirwan's protagonist, Jason, combines a Northside, working-class Dublin dialect with the fast-paced tempo of American hip-hop and rap to produce a new type of spoken-word performance piece for the Irish stage. In a recent interview Kirwan stated his interest in bewildering his audience with a form they may not have previously associated with a night out at the theatre; he wanted to take easy assumptions of the genre of theatre and turn those assumptions on their head by playing with language.[21] However, when the National Theatre in London staged *Dublin Oldschool* in July 2017, Kirwan's use of linguistic playfulness was met with confusion, misunderstanding, and outright irritation.Writing for *The Guardian,* Michael Billington assures

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[21] In his interview Kirwan references the scholarship of Prof. Brian Singleton (TCD), specifically Singleton's book *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (2015): "I remember thinking to myself, 'I've seen so many plays where it was essentially just a single actor on stage in a pool of light.' And I know Brian Singleton has written about this in terms of masculinity in theatre and it was always stories about males and drinking and all that but, it was storytelling in a very much traditional Irish working-class setting of the pub or the stool and that kind of thing of men telling their stories of grief and telling their story about addiction. And I said, well look, *my* kind of experience of working-class life is quite fast and it's kind of, not aggressive, just mental you know. So, I said, at the very beginning of the play it will seem like it's gonna be that type of play in a pool of light and people will go, 'Awh, Jesus, another fucking monologue play' and then just basically hit them with something as fast as you can as loud as you can with kind of hip hop and all…."

us that if "Kirwan can harness his verbal power, he may yet write a play that offers more than a sensory impression." Yet, Billington's dismissal of Kirwan's "confusing profusion" of Dublin slang mixed with a hip-hop tempo betrays his misunderstanding of a key point of Kirwan's play: the right to not be understood by non-working-class audiences. In my interview with Kirwan he describes this as an attempt to "kick the audience in the arse" with his version of working-class life. Specifically, the sense that it is "quite fast and it's kind of, not aggressive, just mental":

> …the first seven pages are done in rhyme and a lot of the time the accents are so impenetrable, even for Dublin audiences, they can't understand it. And when we did it in The National Theatre in London fucking most of it went over their head. One night we tried to slow it down and then the vibrancy of it got lost. So, it [the content] actually wasn't even important; it was about the onslaught of words hitting, you know. (Kirwan)

Sensory impressions take precedence over verbal cognizance; by reveling in his use of an Irish English vernacular transformed by the accent and dialect of his Northside working-class community, Kirwan affirms the unique cultural currency of a dialect that has its roots in a specifically Irish anti-colonial subversiveness. Billington could not understand Kirwan's linguistic intent because the play was not written for an audience unfamiliar with the lyricism and quick wit of an inner-city, working-class Dublin dialect. That is not to say audiences outside of this niche cannot witness and enjoy Kirwan's writing and performance but simply that those audiences are not the primary focus for the play's reception. Kirwan deliberately wants to resist such audiences constructing the working-class "other" as an object of knowledge to be judged and measured. *Dublin Oldschool* self-reflexively uses an opaque working-class dialect to engage with a literary genre predominantly occupied by middle-class interests, narratives, and voices. It does so in order to simultaneously reaffirm the vitality and artistic possibility of Irish working-

class dialects and to critique the field of literary production that so often silences or derides those dialects.

In a similar fashion Rachael Hegarty deploys her uniquely "Fingalese" dialect as a method for both representing and translating the experience of growing up in a working-class suburb of Dublin in her 2017 debut poetry collection *Flight Paths Over Finglas.* In addition to the common slang phrases one hears on the streets of Ireland's capital, Hegarty peppers her poetry with phrases from the Shelta cryptolect heard only within Ireland's traveler communities.[22] She even goes so far as to write her poetic epilogue using only the Shelta vernacular — a vernacular created to be deliberately opaque to outsiders. Without the glossary of translations provided by Hegarty beneath the epilogue her audience would find it impossible to read or understand her poem in much the same way that Kirwan's middle-class British critics found his fast-paced dialect impossible to penetrate. In an interview, Hegarty further explains the ongoing reluctance of many traveler poets to openly publish or perform their work - "they're like, fuck it, we're not having anything to do with surveillance capitalism thanks very much." For Hegarty, the traveler poets whom she counts as her friends, and, if her family lore is correct, as family, not only insist on their right not to be understood by anyone outside of their closed community but they also insist on the right not to commodify their work. As will be discussed in this chapter, scholars of working-class Irish literature must begin to develop a critical framework that takes into account the ongoing contributions by poets who choose to remain resistant to the field of literary

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[22] Alice Binchy describes the differences between the terms Cant and Shelta thus: "The term 'Cant' refers to at least three separate entities: first, cant as a synonym for argot or jargon; second, a specific code called English Cant, or the Canting language; and third, the language which academics call Shelta and many Irish Travellers call Cant" (105). In keeping with Binchy's scholarship I will use the term Shelta to indicate that I am writing about the language from outside the Traveller community. Those who identify as members or relations of the Traveller community will generally refer to the language as Cant (as Rachael Hegarty does in our interview).

production. Ephemerality is a distinguishing characteristic to the literature of many "othered" communities, including Ireland's working classes, and we must attempt to recognize the importance of their right to use literature as a means of occupying a non-translatable or non-publishable space in the context of a publishing market that prioritizes the voices and languages of a bourgeois middle-class.

In a move that echoes Kirwan's and Hegarty's literary exploration of the linguistic aspects of working-class resistance and opacity (or, the right not to be understood), the Irish-Nigerian short-story writer Melatu Uche Okorie created a type of Nigerian pidgin English as a means of demonstrating the breakdown in communication between a multi-cultural refugee community and the Irish staff who oversee the maintenance of Direct Provision centers in Ireland.[23] Okorie's short story "This Hostel Life" centers the narrative around the need for developing a hybrid pidgin language that can function on two antagonistic levels: both the rejection and acceptance of standard English and Irish English. Okorie's text — based on the conversations she herself heard when living in Direct Provision (hereafter referred to as DP) — demonstrates what Glissant terms a "forced poetics" whereby a given community (asylum seekers living in DP) emerges in opposition between their shared attitude of mistrust towards the DP staff and their need to effectively use the dominant language of the DP staff (English and Irish English) to communicate with each other and with the machinations of governmental oversight. In the context of the DP center as a site of multiple languages, vernaculars, and dialects, language becomes a form of privilege, control, and power. By using a communally created hybrid pidgin language, Okorie's

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[23] The term Direct Provision refers to a system of asylum seeker accommodation in the Republic of Ireland. For more detailed information on the maintenance and use of Direct Provision please see: http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/Direct_Provision_FAQs

characters create a strategy of resistance towards a homogenizing dominant language while also necessarily engaging with that language in order to survive the process of seeking asylum.

Each author and text under consideration not only employ complex methods of linguistic subversion but each do so by creating a dialectical relationship between theories of language and their subjective sense of "home." Dialect and vernacular language for all three authors are inextricably bound up with a sense of community and, as previous chapters have demonstrated, community is analogous to a sense of "home" for working-class writers.[24] Indeed, in separate interviews, each author independently confirmed that it is a sense of the many over the sense of the individual that constitutes what "home" means to them. By focusing each of their texts on the vernacular and dialects used by their communities and by using the physical space of their classed communities as the backdrop to their work, they are returning these literary forms - drama, poetry, prose - to their working-class home-space. Indeed, they are vocally and defiantly exclaiming that their home spaces are capable of creating a language that entirely shifts the boundaries of these genres.

When theorizing and writing about the evolution of Creole in the context of anti-colonial Martinican literature, Éduoard Glissant provides a valuable critical framework and glossary of terms that allows us to parse the type of subversive opacity of writers like Kirwan, Hegarty, and Okorie. Additionally, Pierre Bourdieu's theories of the symbolic power of given discourses and dialects begin to suggest the way Kirwan, Hegarty, and Okorie are using their literature to

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[24] Fionnuala Kennedy's unpublished 2012 play, *Hostel,* also offers an important look into the experience of homelessness and sheltered accommodations. Produced by Kabosh Theatre in Belfast, Kennedy's play follows a young single-mother who grapples with the emotional repercussions of having to live full-time in hostel accommodations with a new-born infant. For additional information about the staging of Kennedy's play please visit: http://www.irishplayography.com/play.aspx?playid=33530

confront and interrogate Ireland's publishing industry and its continued neglect of — or outright snobbery towards — working-class dialects and vernaculars and the communities from which they derive.

Glissant developed his theoretical framework while examining a specifically post-colonial Creole in French-Martinique. He was thinking through issues of race, violence, and displacement when he coined the terms "opacity," "detour," "la Relation," and "counterpoétique/forced poetics" in order to describe the literary methods he both used and recognized as available to Creole speakers and writers. The context in which I am employing some of these same terms is necessarily different but has its roots in the same anti-colonial resistance inherent in Glissant's work. While there has been ample scholarship[25] exploring the ethical boundaries of considering Ireland as post-colonial in an academic sense I am instead exploring the linguistic (dis)inheritance of the colonial presence of Britain in Ireland and the necessary hybridity of Irish English in response to the loss of Ireland's national language. I am less concerned with theories of Ireland as post-colonial than I am with considering the linguistic methods of anti-colonial resistance that gave rise to the unique Irish English vernacular seen in the work of Kirwan and Hegarty, specifically, and Okorie to a lesser extent.

In his review of Ireland's linguistic history Terence Dolan's description of the evolution of Irish English echoes Britton's reading of Glissant's "counterpoétique" and its similarities to the processes of abrogation and appropriation identified by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writers Back, s*pecifically, the "basic sense of a conflictual yet necessary relationship to

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[25] I am thinking here of Jahan Ramazani's "Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?" *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1st, 1998, 17:3, and the work of Patricia King, Clare Carroll, and Joe Cleary in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory,* University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

the colonial language" (Britton 33). Glissant's theory of counter-poetics in the Dash translation of *Caribbean Discourse* contains certain key features: "mocking the language that one nevertheless uses, transgressing its rules, subverting its original meaning, resisting an 'order' from elsewhere, and beginning to form one's own 'counterorder' (Britton 33). By putting Glissant's theory of counter-poetics into conversation with Ashcroft et al.'s theories of abrogation ("the act of breaking away from the language…of the colonial power") and appropriation ("the process by which the language [i.e., of the centre] is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience"), Britton identifies a theoretical method for going beyond the Martinican context in order to see this phenomenon as "a feature of postcolonial societies in general" while, at the same time, highlighting "the difference between these societies, in particular as regards the existence or lack of a viable indigenous language" (Britton 33; Ashcroft et al. 38; Britton 34). In other words, these processes - such as opacity and counter-poetics - which have their roots in an antagonistic anti-colonial resistance via linguistic subversion can be recognized in contexts outside of Glissant's original study of Creole in French-Martinique.

Taking her cue from the work of K.P Corrigan and Raymond Hickey, Mariavita Cambria contends:

> There are several attitudes adopted by the colonized in answering and opposing the imperialistic language in the decolonization process, two of which are the most widespread: refusal and subversion. In the first case (refusal), the language of the empire is rejected tout court and the colonized restore their mother tongue and use the language of they feel is more appropriate to their own identity. In the second case (subversion), the imperialist language (i.e. English), is used because it represents a source of self-interest, but is re-written and re-appropriated through forms deviating from the so-called 'standard' by questioning and challenging its authority. Irish English seems to be a case of subversion. Irish English embodies the prolonged contact between colonizer and colonized (31)

The subversion identified by Hickey and, later, Cambria, aligns with the counter-poetics theorized by Glissant. As defined by Glissant, a counter-poetic strategy, or, alternately a "forced poetics," exists "when a harmonious practice of the *langue* is impossible" (Glissant 237). The langue denotes the dominant language used in a given context and was coined by Glissant in tandem with his term *langage* which denotes a shared communal attitude of "confidence or mistrust in the [langues] it uses" (Britton 30). Thus, giving rise to myriad forms of Creolization, subversion, and opacity. The benefit of placing Irish English within the framework of Glissant's counter-poetics lies in Glissant's emphasis on the communal aspect of counter discourses: "it is not restricted to literary language, but is a collective response to the impossibility of a natural autonomous 'own' language" (Britton 34). As such, it points to the ongoing, rather than historical, socio-political constraints that mark the use of Irish English by working-class authors in Ireland. It is not a static historical issue but, rather, a mercurial problem that finds its manifestation in the elision or outright derision of working-class dialects within the Irish English vernacular.

Terence Dolan is careful to call attention to the manner in which Irish English has often been dismissed or ridiculed: "authors have used Hiberno-English in their writings, for local color, or to produce humor, or just to belittle the speakers […] Translators tend to regard Hiberno-English as slang, rather than as a sophisticated member of the family of Englishes, with its own grammar and lexicon" (370). It is precisely at this intersection that the work of Kirwan and Hegarty intervenes. They are distinctly aware not only of the colonial history behind the grammatical

hybridity[26] of their vernacular, but also of the disdain with which their specific working-class dialects of Irish English are often treated. As such, they use — in varying ways — a method of linguistic opacity to inform their counter-poetic discourse in order to create a distinctly working-class voice in their literature. They are less concerned about translatability and more concerned with celebrating a working-class dialect while also creating the space for other working-class writers to feel similarly emboldened to speak in their own dialect.

With this theoretical background in place we can begin to see the way in which Kirwan has produced an ambitiously complex working-class retort to the ongoing mistreatment of demotic vernaculars in Ireland's publication industry. Rather than using his dialect as "local color" Kirwan positions it as a vital creator of innovation that transcends linguistic absolutes and can map out "the creative potential of extending the boundaries of the English language" while also mapping out, "ironically, its limits" (Dolan 370; Mazur 331).[27] More than anything Kirwan wants to establish the creative autonomy of his working-class community and the dialect that speaks authentically to their lived experience. The fact that many non-working-class audiences may not fully understand the impact of this dialect and the experience pulsing behind his word choices simply lends his play an opacity that further critiques the "othered" position still occupied by the working classes of Ireland.

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[26] When using the term 'grammatical hybridity' to describe the development of the Irish English vernacular I am thinking specifically of Terence Dolan's description of such hybrid grammatical features as the distinctive use of "preposition-plus-pronoun…ubiquitous use of the adverb "there" as a clincher… singular verb with plural subject" etc. which demonstrate a hybrid mixture of English and Irish linguistic syntaxes and grammatical structures (369-370).

[27] While this quotation is taken from Mazur's article on the French-Martinique Creole of Patrick Chamoiseau's literature, Mazur is specifically referencing Alan Garner's British novel *Strandloper*. There are relative overlaps between Mazur's discussion of Garner's rural Chesire patois and Kirwan's use of a Northside Dublin dialect. I am not drawing connections between Kirwan's dialect and Chamoiseau's Creole.

Kirwan's use of his impenetrable working-class Tallaght dialect in the 2016 publication of his debut play *Dublin Oldschool* marks his ongoing fascination with the performative potential of the Irish working-class accent transformed as it is by its unique use of Irish English grammar. While *Dublin Oldschool* - originally performed in 2014 before its formal publication in 2016 - is Kirwan's first staged play he previously wrote and starred in the RTÉ show *Sarah and Steve* in addition to writing and performing in the spoken-word piece "Heartbreak"[28] which achieved viral internet fame upon its release on YouTube at the time of the Repeal the Eighth amendment referendum in 2018. Similar to *Dublin Oldschool,* both *Sarah and Steve* and "Heartbreak" make a working-class accent and dialect anchored in a working-class community the focal point of the narrative. It is, specifically, the performative element of all three of Kirwan's major pieces of written work that bears further consideration. In order to fully advocate for the linguistic complexity, beauty, and creativity of his working-class Tallaght dialect, Kirwan must operate within a genre that allows him to literally *speak* his dialect. His audience must be sensorily exposed to the "mental" pace of Kirwan's speech in order for them to feel the full impact of what he's trying to achieve for his community:

> For example, the opening of *Oldschool* there's a bit in it where it goes "it's inured to the dirt of Dublin 8." So, those two words don't rhyme on page if I spelt it […] So, for me it was always about how does it sound? And how does it sound in a Dublin accent? If I handed it in to a professor in a college he'd fail me (laughs). But, that's the thing - I'm not writing it for them. I'm writing it to be heard (Kirwan)

Kirwan's oeuvre consistently returns to this performative focus in order to allow space for a critical awareness of the way in which his accent and dialect has previously been used in Irish

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[28] "Heartbreak" can be viewed in full at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv9oax2N160

literature and culture to shame, ignore, or mock working-class communities. Addressing this tendency, Kirwan refers to it as a type of "accentism"[29] where there is a devaluation of language: "the denial of your accent, the detail of your dialect essentially…it doesn't give you weight" (Kirwan). For Kirwan there is a sense of embodied invisibility that happens when your dialect is not given autonomous space within the field of literary and cultural production; you're denied your lived experience when your dialect is used to belittle and dismiss you. But, for Kirwan, there is an urgency to creating the space for his working-class counter-poetics because there is no possibility of representing an authentic working-class community in literature without using the language of the working classes as they use it and perform it.

More than that, if you deny the creative validity of working-class dialects that have evolved under the umbrella of the Irish English vernacular then you are denying the cultural identity of specific communities within Ireland. Kirwan is keenly aware of the connection between his working-class dialect and the way it shapes his personal identity as a member of a working-class Tallaght community. By extension, the denial of these dialects in mainstream literature continues to "other" large swathes of up and coming writers/performers:

> …who you are and how you sound is indicative of your neighborhood, and your area, and your family and, if you have essentially got it into the heads of young people to speak in a 'correct' fashion that basically contradicts how your community and your family and where you're from sounds like you're telling them, continually from the time they are a young child, that they are lesser than, that they are other than, than somebody else (Kirwan)

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[29] Writing for *The Irish Times* Fintan O'Toole has previously commented on this issue in the context of working-class boxers representing Ireland at the 2008 Olympics: "Their accents are heard most often in caricatured advertisements, where they stand for criminality or stupidity. Unless they become individuals by making waves in sport, they are skangers, chavs, hoodies, knackers." URL: https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/boxers-offer-a-window-into-our-marginalised-society-1.934451

Dublin Oldschool confronts this tendency to "other" working-class accents and dialects by combining a Tallaght dialect with all of the worst kinds of stereotypical behavior commonly used as a reason to deride and demean the working classes. In doing so Kirwan is able to demonstrate the humanity, complexity, and beauty that lies beneath these stereotypes and the way in which they can only be fully drawn out by using the dialect of those communities. The inherent opacity of such a dialect for non-working-class audiences lends an aura of autonomy and legitimacy to Kirwan's "mental" aesthetic (Kirwan).

The plot of *Dublin Oldschool* follows two brothers - Jason and Daniel - over the course of a single day. The brothers lead entirely separate lives but find themselves continually bumping into each other on the streets of Dublin at odd hours. Jason, the narrator-protagonist, is an aspiring DJ who makes his way through the city and its suburbs bouncing from one drug-induced party to the next with plenty of Gardaí run-ins along the way. Daniel, who appears in the narrative only twice, is a highly educated homeless heroin addict who camps out on the city streets espousing socio-historical philosophy.

Similar to Karl Parkinson's genre-bending conception of "unTime" in his working-class *Künstlerroman,* Kirwan experiments with a non-linear conception of time by creating a looped ending; the script in the final page returns us to the very beginning of the action. In conversation with Kirwan he tells me that he was particularly influenced by the experimental journalism and science fiction of Hunter S. Thompson, Frank Herbert, and Philip K. Dick, specifically the sense of "time dilation when you're on drugs" (Kirwan). This facet to his play ties in with Kirwan's interest in realistically representing the experience of homeless drug addicts as subjective individuals instead of objectified nuisances:

> I think a lot of it has to do with the idea of working-class writers like him [Parkinson] being stuck in that banality of repetition and then the ability of drugs to kind of bend time and to shape time in a different way. There's a frustration with not being able to change the world but basically what happens to a lot of addicts is they change their surroundings by altering their physical state through toxicity (Kirwan)

The experience of homelessness and the underlying causes that often lead to such an experience are handled with judicious care and empathy in Kirwan's play. And he achieves this by using a system of opaque references peppered in amongst his working-class dialect. For example, over the course of the play Daniel makes a throwaway comment about hanging out on Merchants Quay. The blink and you'll miss it reference would go unnoticed by many non-working-class audiences or audiences who have not had direct experience with drug addiction and recovery. As Kirwan tells me: "Merchants Quay […] is a drug rehabilitation center but middle-class people wouldn't necessarily know that." While this is, of course, a generalization on Kirwan's part he intentionally tests the boundaries of such knowledge in order to avoid fetishizing specific aspects of working-class life and experience; rather than making them a focal point they are slipped in casually to reflect the mundane nature of such institutions in the lives of his characters. Much like Parkinson, Kirwan understands the need to avoid creating the space for moral judgements to be levied against working-class characters in dire circumstances. Additionally, Kirwan clearly intends for his Merchants Quay reference to be recognized by only a select, specifically working-class section of his potential audience; whether or not the reality bears this out Kirwan feels as though he is only speaking to others from the same social background as himself i.e. Northsider working-class. Thus, this reference acts as an opaque nod to a specific community who share this background knowledge and shorthand.

This connects back to Kirwan's reason for writing his entire script with a mixture of dialogue and poetic performance in a Northside dialect - he wanted to create a counter-poetics in order to make visible the invisible dynamism of the working-class dialect and the home-spaces it makes it possible to represent. In doing so he makes his play a site of resistance to a homogenizing appropriation of the working-class accent and dialect as simply "local color" for middle-class narratives. More than that, he wanted to write a working-class narrative for a working-class audience. Staying authentic to their voices and their anxieties drives the linguistic action of the play.

We can see this in his choice to use American hip-hop and rap as inspiration for the tempo of many of the poetic pieces in his play. This choice makes even more sense in the context of the popularity of spoken-word poetry for young working-class poets in contemporary Ireland. According to Kirwan and Hegarty there is a flourishing spoken-word poetry and rap scene in every major Irish city including Dublin, Cork, and Galway. Such performers include TemperMental MissElayneous, Natalya O'Flaherty,[30] and the Rusangano Family who all fall in different places on what we might call a spectrum of poetic hip-hop (Maleney). Much like Kirwan they are focused on the sonic potential of their accents and dialects and the way in which they can push the boundaries of poetry to accommodate the experiences of their working-class communities. They are aware of their "othered" position in Irish society and so they choose to celebrate this positioning with a genre of poetic hip-hop that gives space for them to be understood only by those similarly socially positioned; their opaqueness rests upon the ongoing disinterest of non-working-class audiences in the narratives of those they continue to "other." In

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[30] Watch an interview with Natalya O'Flaherty at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNxaRR2Il3A

an interview with Elayne Cahill in *The Irish Times,* Elaine Harrington (aka Temper-Mental MissElayneous) calls attention to the specific type of prejudice attached to her accent: “"I live in D8 but I haven't shed my roots but the reason why my accent changes is because you can't get a job if you sound like you're from Finglas.”

As referenced above, Kirwan’s play begins with a long “confusing profusion” of rhyming dialogue and poetic rap verses (Billington). The play starts with a prologue where Time is indicated by a: —:— and Jason and Daniel exist “out of regular time” (5). They engage in a short but meandering conversation about the need to “valorize youth” by avoiding the “dis-ease” that comes with chasing career goals rather than time spent focused on “happy experiences[s]” (5). While Daniel sets up the play’s emphasis on time and personal regrets, Jason draws our immediate attention to the play’s continued use of dialect and rap:

> Before we begin,
> check the vernacular, the beats
> and the ability.
> With the Dublin diction and a predilection
> to make sure
> that when you tell it,
> it’s in a novella,
> version
> of a war and peace work style of fiction (5)

Jason self-reflexively addresses the way in which his working-class voice must confront the inter-related areas of diction and genre; he must make the form of theatre accommodate his community’s working-class narrative rather than adhering to a traditional conception of what makes “good” literature. Following the prologue we are given almost ten pages of fast-paced

back and forth dialogue between Jason and his friend Bobby as they prepare for a night out, which maintains the same tempo as Jason's opening meditations quoted above:

> **Bobby**: Now, just as a warner, I'm solemn like a mourner, when I say there's two Garda hanging like specters and they're staring from the corner.
> *He thumbs over his shoulder towards the Guards.*
> **Jason:** Aw oh, oh no, shit we have to go!
> Bird called Annie cross the way that we both know…
> *They both wave.*
> **Both:** Hello!
> **Bobby:** Take a preview,
> a little freeview,
> fat Garda and lovely red-haired Bean Garda?
> the fuck they gonna do!?
> […]
> **Jason:** Shit-in-it,
> because
> the consequences, of engaging with the law, on the street,
> will be steep. I got 2.4 grams of madman in me back pocket,
> sitting two wraps deep (8-9)

Their free-style lyricism relays their manic pace through Dublin's streets as they dodge vigilant Gardaí and the myriad community characters they meet along the way (such characters are referred to as "Youth One/Youth Two, Youngone One/Youngone Two"). After scoring a bottle of uncooked Ketamine from their friend "Dave the Rave" the Gardaí finally move in to arrest Jason and Bobby, an encounter which culminates in a full one-page verse of poetic rap from Jason detailing their breathless dash for freedom:

> Soooooooooooooooooooo/ Quick as a breeze/ I leave him to wheeze/ The side of the road/ All be told,/ I stop, with a cheeky little wave/ and him looking back to me./ Don't mistake this move for alacrity./ It's perspicacity./ It's tenacity!/ Is it termerity?/ More like focused serenity,/ to eye the angles of escape,/ and give a little hope./ Interlace this verse with a few insults like…/ 'Here! Garda! Ya fat fucking dope!'/ I see old Tailors' Hall/ I scurry over the wall/ and fall back/ to the eighteenth/ *century*/ This part of old Dublin acts

> as a/ *sanctuary*./ That's/ a half rhyme/ but it acts as a/ makeweight/ to save me from the agents of the/ Free State (14-15)

To echo Kirwan's thoughts, this play cries out to be performed. The written word, even if it were offered phonetically, could not hope to catch the dips and rises in Kirwan's Northside dialect as he details Jason and Bobby's riotous escape. While the written play script allows us to slow down and parse Kirwan's language, the performance deliberately melts one line of rhyme into the next in order to create a cacophony of sounds and impressions emphasizing the unique lyricism of the Tallaght dialect. It is the performance of this piece,[31] as opposed to the written version, that underscores the opacity of Kirwan's use of a Dublin working-class dialect. When describing Glissant's theorization of opacity, Britton puts Glissant into conversation with Spivak and her argument around whether or not the subaltern can speak (Spivak). In doing so, Britton is able to elucidate more clearly the way in which Glissant's theory of opacity functions as a form of resistance rather than disempowerment; while both Spivak and Glissant read the subaltern consciousness as opaque in that "it cannot be 'read' by the ruling groups" they understand the implications of this opacity differently; "Spivak focuses more on the subaltern's inability to 'speak' the dominant discourse whereas Glissant focuses more on the dominant discourse's ability to 'understand' the subaltern" (Britton 20). The working classes of Ireland could not be termed "subaltern" in the same way that Spivak and Glissant use the term in their work but they can be thought of as "othered," in keeping with Pierse's scholarship, in the context of their position outside of the economic, cultural, and social hierarchy of the governing center which

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[31] The official trailer for *Dublin Oldschool* the movie, available on Netflix UK & Ireland, allows us to glimpse how the stage performance would have sounded. It can be viewed at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x84xR-f2X7w

privileges the voices and narratives of the middle-and-upper-classes. As such, Kirwan's play with its working-class slang, accent, and dialect functions as an "unintelligible presence" within the parameters of the predominantly bourgeois form of Irish drama. It plays with the boundaries of this form but does not transgress them entirely. Kirwan's use of poetic rap, his hidden shorthand, and his emphasis on the need to hear this in a working-class, specifically Tallaght, dialect makes the invisibility of Dublin's working classes visible to the middle-class center. But, crucially, it does not fetishize working-class people by fully translating their experiences into something a non-working-class audience can quantify and easily digest. It remains stubbornly opaque to the point that critics such as Billington find it unintelligible.

In keeping with this undercurrent of linguistic opacity and resistance, Kirwan also chooses to tackle representations of drug addiction and homelessness in the character of Daniel through a humorous but contentious relationship between two very different brothers. The stereotype of the violent, un-educated, homeless heroin addict is all too familiar for anyone who has engaged in the debate about how to tackle the ongoing heroin crisis in Ireland. Indeed, as O'Toole points out when discussing the ramifications of classed prejudice, such stereotypes about the working classes "allow for the maintenance of a reassuring distance. These people are stupid and crude and potentially violent, and it's best to stay out of their way." However Kirwan chooses to approach this debate from an alternate angle, an angle that emphasizes the communities, homes, and families left bereft in the wake of this crisis. Instead of creating space for moralistic exhortations about the evils of drug addiction and the social backgrounds of those caught in the grip of addiction, Kirwan's two brothers, Jason and Daniel, demonstrate a warmly humorous if not empathetic rapport that both addresses and glosses over the most difficult aspects of losing a

loved one to addiction. More than that, Daniel himself alludes to these same stereotypes to indicate how he initially fell victim to experimenting with heroin when he was an undergraduate studying for a degree in history:

> **Daniel:** Man, we were smoking it, for us a junkie was a skinny fucker in a movie with a needle sticking out his arm. It was me teeth that made me stop the first time. And college […] **Jason:** I just always remember how me ma kept talking about your teeth. His lovely smile's gone, over and over like she was in a daze. Like your teeth and your smile were more important than anything else (40-41)

The small mundanities of rotten teeth and a heartbroken mother whom we never meet are all addressed in the same conversation that also addresses the rave scene in Dublin and the "craic" of doing recreational drugs. Kirwan deliberately keeps the dialogue clipping along in order to avoid dramatically fixating on an issue that, for his characters, is routine.

In the midst of these alternating topics there's a quick two-sentence dialogue that, similar to the reference to Merchants Quay, could be easily overlooked: "**Jason:** (*long pause*) Me mam. I said it to her. She said no. **Daniel** *takes this information in. He then puts a brave face on it and smiles*" (42). The conversation ends shortly thereafter and no overt explanation is given; however, context clues assure us that the "it" Jason refers to is Daniel returning to their childhood home. We are given an opaque glimpse of the agony experienced by Daniel's mother as she chooses to turn away her son knowing he will remain on the streets driven by his addiction. Kirwan does not need to dramatize the mother's pain as it is something with which many in a working-class audience, indeed many in a non-working-class audience, would be intimately familiar. Echoing the linguistic opacity that pervades Kirwan's dialogue throughout the play, this type of deft indirectness creates a space for a working-class narrative that is not

garishly displayed for consumption and objectification as a means of affirming the rampant stereotypes that pervade Irish mainstream media. Kirwan restores a sense of privacy to these families while also publicly calling attention to their relative social and political invisibility.

Kirwan's choice to accommodate the poetic hip-hop popular among his contemporaries displays key elements of Glissant's theory of opacity and its relationship to a discourse of counter-poetics i.e.: the use of an, at times, unintelligible language that resists the sense-making of the dominant discourse in order to explore the "conflict between the tongue one uses that is a means of expression, and a language that is a way of expressing a culture, a collective attitude towards the tongue used" (Praeger 43). By focusing on the orality of his dialect and the shorthand that can be created within his fast-paced dialogue, Kirwan can make visible the invisibility of Ireland's working classes and their continued resistance to being fully translated and quantifiable on any other linguistic terms but their own.

Similarly, Rachael Hegarty, when describing her own work in our recent interview, classifies the idea of the "working-class" not in the language and terms used by government officials or socio-historical scholars but by recounting an anecdote from her childhood. She recalls how Fr Peter McVerry[32] allowed her and a number of her friends to use the apartments owned by the Jesuit Brothers in Ballymun in order for them to have hot baths whenever they wanted. When Hegarty bumped into Fr McVerry at a recent book launch for Jenny Farrell's *The Children of the Nation: An Anthology of Working People's Poetry* he happily remembered her as one of the

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[32] Born in Belfast in 1944, Fr Peter McVerry is a Roman-Catholic priest who has spent his career assisting the homeless population in the Republic of Ireland, specifically in Dublin City Center. He founded the Arrupe Society in 1983. It continues to operate today under the name Peter McVerry Trust assisting thousands of at-risk youths in finding pathways out of homelessness. Additional information about the history of the Trust and Fr Peter McVerry's mission can be found here: https://pmvtrust.ie/about-us/our-history/

"Finglas bath fairies" referencing how she and her friends would take the Fairy washing-up liquid from the Brothers' kitchen in order to make bubbles in the bath: "So I guess that's what working-class is…you share free hot water with your neighbors! (laughs)." Hegarty's light-hearted but sincere response eschews any formal definitions of class differences and instead returns the conversation immediately to community-based support and a referential shorthand as a way of representing what the term "working-class" means to those who identify as such. Much like Kirwan, Hegarty's debut volume of poetry *Flight Paths Over Finglas* showcases the creative possibilities of her working-class dialect — or "Fingalese" as Hegarty terms it — thus demonstrating the necessity of creating space in Ireland's literary canon for working-class voices and the unique experiences their language can represent.

A native of Dublin's Northside, Hegarty received her Ph.D from Queens University Belfast after studying at U. Mass Boston for her B.A. and Trinity College Dublin for her M.A. She currently works for the Trinity Access Program and the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB). While *Flight Paths Over Finglas* was her debut collection (2017) she has since released a second collection entitled *May Day 1974* (2019) which contains thirty-three ode-ballads and thirty-three docu-sonnets to commemorate the 33 people killed in a sectarian bombing in Dublin city centre during the height of the Troubles. *Flight Paths Over Finglas* lays the groundwork for the type of experimentation she would continue to explore in *May Day 1974. Flight Paths* contains fifty poems that display a mixture of styles and forms with a particular interest in concrete poems and the aesthetic possibility of exploding text over the physical space of the page. The volume is split into eights sections that reflect a poetic life-cycle of a migratory bird ("Above, Them Before," "Hatchlings," "Nestlings," "Fledglings," "Migratory Birds,"

"Mating," "Working Birds," and an Epilogue). More than that, the volume is structured around Hegarty's sense of Finglas as "home" and her inevitable return to Finglas after her many years of travel in the U.S and Japan. Each poem reveals an intimate facet of Hegarty's maturation on the streets of her working-class community and it is her use of, as she terms it, a "Fingalese" dialect that allows her to fully and accurately give life to the nuance of a working-class childhood and adulthood in Finglas:

> I think I would have been very influenced by Paula Meehan. Like, she's my mentor, I met her as a student. Some of her poems where she uses words spoken by her Granny, you know, like that poem "Would you Jump Into Me Grave as Quick" and those kind of Dublin phrases. I think growin' up and hearin' poems about Finglas with phrases that were Finglas would help me realize, well actually I can make representations of my people using *our* voices as *I* heard on the streets….From a linguistic point of view, I was like, actually the way we speak is gorgeous! Then, I think, when you have formal education lined up with a rich cultural background you begin to see that there's nuttin' shameful about talkin' like ya talk on the streets in Finglas and, in fact, its a lovely twist and turn of language (Hegarty)

This mixture is at the core of Hegarty's approach to poetry - formal literary training melded with informal turns of phrase. In each poem of the collection we are exposed to multiple slang phrases, adages, and community-based superstitions. Much like Kirwan's opaque shorthand in *Dublin Oldschool* there are numerous opaque linguistic element in Hegarty's poetry that resonate much more deeply for those who have experienced similar communal upbringings in working-class housing estates. She draws on the subversive resistance implicit in working-class iterations of Irish English and the deliberately opaque evolution of the Shelta vernacular in order to position her debut collection as an emphatically working-class narrative that was written in celebration of a working-class community more broadly defined.

While she is performing some of the same subversive linguistic maneuvers[33] as Kirwan, Hegarty takes things one step further by opting to use the Shelta vernacular of Ireland's Traveller community in her "Epilogue" poem. In our interview she describes this vernacular in similar terms to Glissant's understanding of Creole: "So in the same way that African-Americans in days of the plantation they would have had Creole or pidgin-English or pig Latin so the masters couldn't understand them, Traveller's have, they call it Cant, so that those in the authorities wouldn't know their business." The sense of being deliberately unintelligible informs Hegarty's understanding of the Shelta vernacular. Indeed, the early scholarship carried out on the use of Shelta bears this assumption out: "It was termed the 'secret language' of tinkers or Travellers, reflecting the belief that its speakers were an occupational sub-group of the mainstream population, who needed a special vocabulary to communicate exclusively with their own group" (Binchy 107). Hegarty's poem demonstrates a tacit awareness of both the untranslatability implicit in the Shelta dialect and the need for legibility demanded by the field of literary production in Ireland. She wants to draw our awareness to the ongoing undercurrent of Traveller literature and the vernacular which they use while also allowing us to glimpse an insight into their vernacular by providing translations of certain Shelta terms:

> Dem an us thari crossways. We know other kinds of maps, places nay ever penned.
> I read the sky for graura and a body's palm for all its pain. You're too long in yer ken ladneach. Recall a blurt's crossroads: two sods of earth, telling her the best way to go next and to bagail only the who and what of her ukh. Light chera, grill yiesk and nap. Stop be the sheltering tree or hedge. Watch the phases of natrum moon. A road stauls

[33] Much like Kirwan she is happily aware of the way her accent/use of slang can distort the traditional meter/syllable count of any given form of poetry: "I lived in Japan for three years and I learned about Haikus and the syllable count of 5-7-5 (laughs) and there are words in my Finglas accent that in standard pronunciation they would only have two syllables but in Finglas pronunciation they might have three or four! (laughs)" (Hegarty).

> you. Dilí, sik families and sik people have nidish documents. Stafa tapa hum avokeen (Hegarty, *Flight Paths* 90)

Hegarty provides us with some basic translations beneath her poem: "thari: speak, graura: summer, ken: house, ladnach: girl, blurt: a Traveller, bagail: take, ukh: need, chera: fire, yiesk: fish, nap: take off, natrum: mother, staul: awaits, dilí: daughter, sik: some, Stafa tapa hum avokeen: Long life to you loveen" (90). In our interview she further explains the etymology behind a number of the phrases used in the poem:

> You know, I didn't know I spoke Pavee until I started teaching adult literacy.[34] I was volunteering at Pavee Point and I thought words that I grew up with were family words. I grew up with "gopin" and "ladnoch" and "gopin" I thought was our family word for kiss and I remember me Da roarin' at me, "Rachael Hegarty I saw you gopin the face off Tony Timmons!" "Ladnoch" was what me Da would call me and I thought that was his name for me and my sisters. But, no, it turns out that that's a cryptolect so "gop" is the backwards for "pog" which, as you know, is the Irish for kiss. And "lad/noch" is the Gaelic for "not a boy" so I'm a girl. And "gruber" we were always told, "don't be askin' any fellas about their gruber!" Which is a mix of obair and graft (Hegarty)

Hegarty's poem itself demonstrates an ironic self-awareness of the way in which the Traveller community literally speaks differently to those on the outside — "Dem and us thari crossways." But, rather than fetishizing this difference, Hegarty's counter-poetics creates a space to interpret the use of this vernacular along similar lines to Glissant's understanding of "la Relation" and its necessary use of opacity. In other words, her poetry does not work to reduce or homogenize this vernacular and its community but instead emphasizes "the Other as equal and as a presence that

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[34] Pavee is another term for what is also referred to as Cant and Shelta. Many who identify as a member of the Traveling community will use the terms Pavee and Cant interchangeably while those who are writing about this vernacular from outside the Traveller community will predominantly use the term Shelta. Pavee Point in the next sentence refers to a government funded NGO founded in 1985 and based in Dublin that works to advocate and protect Ireland's Traveller community. It operates public programs on community development, policy work, health, ethnic data collection, education, violence against women, drugs and alcohol, and youth work.

is necessary because it is different." (Britton 12). Relation is a system of particularities that are valuable only if they are "outwardlooking and related to other cultures and values" (Britton 11). Hegarty's use of the Shelta dialect reveals the interrelation between her working-class familial links to the Traveller community and the cultural-linguistic hybridity inherent in the etymological evolution of the Shelta vernacular; it operates on two levels, as both a closed communal language and a linguistic system interrelated to a broader working-class network of literary subversiveness that has its roots in anti-colonial resistance.

However, as Hegarty's poem makes clear "Dilí, sik families and sik people have nidish documents." Hegarty's poem is unique in being one of the only vocal literary attempts to speak about the Traveller community on their own linguistic terms. But we are faced with the ongoing problem of how to create a critical model that can account for the work undoubtedly happening in these communities while also allowing them to maintain their right to untranslatability and their right to resist what Hegarty terms "surveillance capitalism:"

> But I think it's worthwhile…just so that you know, that there are older working-class people and older Traveller people […] that don't want to be published ever. And are not online and don't want to be online. They are deadly, like. They're like, fuck it, we're not having anything to do with surveillance capitalism thanks very much. They don't know it's called surveillance capitalism. For historic reasons they've always wanted to stay off-radar. So, it's interesting to me as well the people who won't hand over their poems to the publishing commodifiers (Hegarty)

The historic reasons cited by Hegarty include the ongoing resistance to recognizing Ireland's Traveller community as an ethnic minority and the socio-cultural rights that go hand-in-hand with such recognition.[35] More than that, widespread discrimination and bigotry still pervades

[35] Ireland's Traveller community were recognized as an ethnic minority for the first time in 2017 by then Taoiseach Enda Kenny.

perceptions of Ireland's Traveller community as recognized in multiple reports including the The European Parliament Committee of Enquiry on Racism and Xenophobia, The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (Danaher et al.; Pollak & Holland).

If Ireland's working classes are an "othered" sub-group in keeping with Pierse's arguments, then the Traveller community have the unenviable position of being a sub-group within a sub-group. Their position is further complicated by their insistence on not publishing their literary work dependent as it is on their cryptolect vernacular and its vibrant orality. As Binchy points out, "because it is a largely unwritten, face-to-face language, the immediate context, tone, gestures and facial expression can carry supplementary information. Because of shared background knowledge, there is much that does not need to be said in Shelta" (115). Their reluctance to engage with the field of literary production in Ireland speaks to their awareness of what Bourdieu might term the symbolic power of "*the* language" which is "bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses" (Bourdieu 45). This tension is further complicated by the historical evolution of Ireland's linguistic landscape twisted as it has been by anti-colonial hybridity and adaptation. As McCrea has commented, "Irish is present as a ghost in English" thus creating an always already conflictual relationship between Irish English speakers and their language (23). *The* language in an Irish context has its roots in an originary anti-colonial tension between Irish and Irish-English, as referenced by McCrea,[36] which has since evolved into a

[36] McCrea's discussion of Gabriel's language conflict in James Joyce's "The Dead" directly echoes Glissant's theory of counter-poetics. Specifically, his reference to the idea "that even if one spoke only English in one's life, even if one did not know Irish at all, one's soul might yet speak Irish" recalls Glissant's theory about how the "Caribbean speaker has to 'force his way through the langue toward a langage that may not be part of the internal logic of this langue'" (McCrea 27; Britton 30).

conflict between Irish-English and the demotic languages of working-class dialects and the Shelta vernacular as demonstrated by the work of Kirwan and Hegarty. Glissant's theory of "la Relation," as demonstrated in Hegarty's balance of linguistic difference and inclusion in "Epilogue," offers just one avenue for theoretical consideration as we begin to account for the the unseen work of marginalized communities within Ireland's working classes.

Hegarty's use of Shelta lays bare the implicitly counter-poetic nature of this vernacular; her poetry works to highlight the subversive potential of giving space to such a vernacular as well as the inherent opacity required for such a vernacular to thrive. Such contradictions do not negate the necessity of attempting to recognize and lift up writers within the Traveller community who choose not to operate within the same fields of production and dissemination as other published authors. Much like the spoken-word poets referenced by Kirwan who do not care whether or not they are published, we must give space in our scholarship for celebrating the ephemerality central to so much of the work we study.

Hegarty continues her linguistic exploration in *Flight Paths* by strategically deploying Irish language terms as titles for poems which denote important developmental stages of her personal life in the section entitled "Mating." These include: "Samhain" (beginning of Winter), "Imbolig" (St. Brigid's day/beginning of Spring), "Bealtaine" (Beginning of Summer), "Litha" (Midsummer), and "Lúnasa" (Beginning of Harvest Season). Hegarty's references to the tradition of *dinnseanchas* and the "*file* going around and traveling and making a living from poetry" in our interview further inculcates the importance of an Irish-language poetry tradition in her work. This influence reaches a peak in Hegarty's complex use of the *caoineadh* (lament) in *May Day.* Angela Bourke has previously described the *caoineadh* as a specifically oral and

performative genre where "the lamenting woman led the community in a public display of grief […] Her caoineadh or lament was a series of breathless utterances of rhymed, rhythmic praise of the dead person (usually a man), and invective against his enemies" (Bourke, abstract). The subversive cultural and linguistic history that informs Hegarty's use of the *caoineadh* form can also be identified in her use of both "Fingalese" and the Shelta vernacular in her debut collection. In each case she is engaging with a complex set of linguistic subversions that seeks to make visible the ongoing invisibility of "othered" groups to a ruling dominant class. Whether it be the Irish language, a working-class dialect, or a Shelta cryptolect, Hegarty's work continually exposes not only the way in which demotic Irish vernaculars have been "othered" but the strategies these linguistic communities can deploy in order to use their voices to strategically represent their lived experiences. Similar to Kirwan, she chooses to develop a counter-poetics that self-reflexively employs an opaque system of references in order to reaffirm the lyricism, complexity, and vibrancy of working-class voices and the communities who helped shape those voices. By doing so, she demands that we engage with working-class literary communities on their terms as an autonomous and non-homogenized community of thinkers and poets who have more to offer than simply "local color."

However, Kirwan's and Hegarty's work also demonstrates the innate limitations of the term "working-class" itself. Neither the homeless population depicted in Kirwan's play nor the Traveller community celebrated in Hegarty's poetry fit neatly within the boundaries of current conceptions of this term. While Michael Pierse's scholarship has made great strides in complicating our understanding of Ireland's working classes as an "othered" community, we have yet to fully account for those subgroups within this "othered" community. Pierse's

deliberately expansive theoretical maneuvering which calls for a non-"exclusivist" analysis of working-class literature, decries any attempt to define working-class culture too narrowly (31); he leaves room for us to recognize differently defined but similarly positioned marginalized communities that can be productively analyzed alongside a broadly defined "working-class." In addition to the homeless community, and the Traveller community, Ireland's growing migrant community can be positioned within this expansive framework. These communities allow us to further develop our understanding of what it means to occupy a marginalized position within Irish society and the ways in which Ireland's literary production is either serving or failing to serve these communities. As Hegarty commented during a discussion of non-working-class authors writing about working-class issues, "at what point is it comic and at what point is it condescension?" We must similarly ask ourselves, when will we focus on creating space in our publication practices to allow these communities to represent themselves in their own voices?

While the space for such diversity in representation has yet to be fully created, we do have a limited number of migrant authors to look to for such narratives.[37] Prominent among them is Melatu Uche Okorie a Nigerian national who emigrated to Ireland in 2006. She lived in Direct Provision in Dublin for eight and a half years during which time she began to write about her experiences of living and surviving in a Dublin that "othered" her in terms of her race and her language. She is currently studying for her M. Phil at Trinity College Dublin, and in our interview she revealed that she is also under contract for a new novel. *This Hostel Life*, published in 2018 by Skein Press, is Okorie's first published book. It consists of three short stories: "This

[37] I would also include the work of the Nigerian-Irish spoken-word poet Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi who recently co-edited *Writing Home: The 'New Irish' Poets* which anthologizes the work of Irish poets who emigrated to the country.

Hostel Life," "Under the Awning," and "The Egg Broke." The first published edition also includes a non-fictional essay on "Ireland: Asylum Seekers and Refugees" by University College Dublin law professor Liam Thornton. All three stories consider issues of race, prejudice, and alienation. "Under the Awning" is a meta-fictional narrative about a young girl's experience of dealing with vocal racist abuse on Dublin's streets and the difficulty of getting a white audience to listen to such narratives, "The Egg Broke" returns us to Nigeria of the past where we learn of the superstition surrounding the birth of twins and the ongoing violence committed against vulnerable women and children. "This Hostel Life" forms the focus of my analysis, specifically, its depiction of a Nigerian pidgin English language that gives us an glimpse into the creativity of the communities attempting to live and thrive in Ireland's Direct Provision system.

In our interview, Okorie's prevailing anxiety around her newly published work is the idea that her narratives may be fetishized as *the* narrative of migrant experience in DP: "Everyone has their own experience and I have to be careful that I'm not put in that position where I begin to feel I should represent other's experiences or everything I say is echoed by everyone who has been through DP. That is not the case and I don't want to be put in that position." Okorie repeats this sentiment multiple times throughout our interview in different contexts. The underlying tension can be traced to the fact that Okorie's short story is one of the very first published narratives detailing life within DP as experienced by a former resident of DP. As such, it has been given the lonely responsibility of carrying a multitude of voices and experiences within a single, restricted narrative. Given the dearth of literature focused on this experience, the resoundingly positive reaction to Okorie's text tells us that there is a clear interest in accommodating more of these voices in our publication practices, rather than expecting just one author to represent an

entire community of experiences.[38] The importance of the work carried out by small independent presses such as Skein Press in creating a space for these narratives cannot be overlooked; dominant publishers have not yet fully caught up to the the fact that Ireland's marginalized communities have a plethora of creativity and originality to offer.

A key aspect of that creativity in Okorie's case is her use of a distinct Nigerian pidgin English vernacular in "This Hostel Life." Her protagonist, a Congolese woman named Beverlée speaks in a "mixture of Nigerian pidgin English and some American slang words which she speaks in a strong Kinsala accent" (Okorie *Hostel* xiv). In the introduction to *This Hostel Life* Okorie tells us that,

> [T]he idea was born from [her] observation of how the different nationalities in the direct provision hostel were reconstructing language in order to communicate with one another. The Nigerian pidgin English (albeit with all kinds of variation) became one of the most commonly spoken, which is not surprising as Nigerians made up the highest number of residents (xiv)

In my interview with Okorie she further elucidates her creative process by detailing a story about how she came to be aware of this Nigerian pidgin English, as she describes it:

> I think for a long time when I was writing that story and doing the drafts of it, it was just in standard English initially. I knew that there was something missing with the language. And, I heard it. I overheard somebody — a child actually. I was keeping some journal to write out some things on my computer and then I overheard two kids playing. It was just the language that did it for me. That's the voice, that's the language which I'm looking for! It's just that thing about someone trying to…. Is almost like people were communicating in broken English, which I wasn't even aware of that people were communicating in that way. Like, you had to break down your English to communicate. People were coming in with different levels of English and the way of communicating

[38] I'm specifically thinking of repeated reviews from *The Irish Times* (O'Toole) and other Irish media sources (Armstrong) upon the release of *This Hostel Life* in addition to an operatic adaptation of all three short stories by Evangelia Rigaki staged in the Christ Church Cathedral (Byers).

> was just a broken down form of the English language that we're all using to communicate. Nigeria has this kind of pidgin English and I know that other cultures have other forms of broken English so it's just this combination of all of those Englishes that was the standard way of speaking. And I just thought, this is it! This is the sound! This is just what I was looking for.

Okorie's description of language as something that was being "reconstructed" or "broken down" recalls Glissant's theory of creolization and the way in which it involves a counter-poetic impulse of linguistic appropriation and abrogation mixed with opacity. It is a double-sided strategy of resistance and communication that attempts to create an opaque individuality while accommodating basic understanding. In much the same way, Okorie's description of the languages she heard while living in DP demonstrate the linguistic strategies of resistance available to her migrant characters. While English is *the* language, in the same symbolic sense described by Bourdieu, it is open to subversion and adaptation as seen in the mixed Englishes described by Okorie.

The story itself follows Beverlée and her friends, Mercy, Ngozi, Franca, Mama Bomboy and Mummy Dayo as they experience an average day as DP residents. The first-person narration allows us to envision a version of the drudging routine experiences of DP residents including GP visits, laundry days, and provisions distributions by the Irish staff of the DP hostel: "From laundry to collect provision, from collect provision to check laundry, from check laundry to see GP, from see GP to collect food, from collect food to check laundry" (4). Beverlée's narration also reveals the way racist stereotypes and prejudices pervade the interpersonal dynamics of her DP hostel:

> Eastern Europeans dem all be fake *oyinbo*…She [Mummy Dayo] have warn me about Ngozi many times. She say, 'be careful. Igbo people na real scorpion. If you stop to watch dem for one minute, anything you see, you have to take it like that…She even warn me for women from Franca kind of country, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and she tell me, 'You better watch your husband around those women. Their toto loose like anything' (8)

Throughout such descriptions Okorie maintains a rather tongue-in-cheek sense of humor in order to create a certain levity around the ongoing dreariness of these women's surroundings; rather than adhering to popular descriptions of the objective experience of DP as seen in media coverage of asylum accommodations, Okorie uses her story as an opportunity to depict the diversity of opinions, prejudices, and humors that percolate amongst this dynamic community. In addition to such interpersonal conflicts, Okorie describes multiple conversations focused on contemporary television shows such as *Big Brother* and *Real Housewives.* The fact that these conversations are happening while Okorie's characters are waiting for food/bathroom provisions to be dispersed by the DP hostel's Irish employees does not detract from the comedic nuance of these witty back-and-forths: "Try to understand me, Mercy say, touching Mama Bomboy for arm. 'Why is Ngozi saying something she hear from television like she hear it from the doctor?' […] Ngozi just told us that she heard from a woman on the *Real Housewives* that eating yam help with fertility […] What of that boy in *Big Brother*, what's his name again? He has never heard of Shakespeare!" (12). Okorie deliberately melds references to British, Irish, and American t.v. shows and literature with references to the agricultural staple of Nigeria's Igbo population in order to continually toy with the boundaries erected by Irish mainstream media in their "othering" of Ireland's migrant communities living in DP.

More than that, in our interview Okorie described how she wanted to truly celebrate the diversity of characters she met while living in DP:

> I think that to write difficult things you just have to use humor. One thing I didn't want was just that sense of…writing something that would be, "oh my god, look at how much they're suffering!" So, I wanted to tackle it from a point where there's just this humor. And, the great thing within DP, that I don't want people to overlook is just how resilient the people are and how funny they are and how many loud characters you'd meet in a day. (Laughs) Like everyone is a gangster almost so you know, so I wanted to represent that part of their character and not just swallow it up with the whole system thing which ended up happening because there is just this thing about "DP, DP, DP" that is swallowing it up as opposed to actually looking at the characters that are in there. You know, the amazing people that I was in there with. And I wanted to celebrate them, really because there's just so many funny characters that you meet everyday. And there's just something to always learn about everyone. Something unique about each and everyone of them which was an eye-opener for me as well.

Okorie is describing the homogenization of DP's residents through "othering," both in a malicious sense and in a sympathetic sense, which happens both within mainstream Irish media and within Ireland's publication industry. Okorie's choice of language, her choice to use humor, and her choice to represent the prejudices that prevail even *within* the DP community are part of her counter-poetic strategy that attempts to restore an autonomous subjectivity to a commonly homogenized "other" in Irish society.

We can see the necessity of Okorie's counter-poetic strategy in the conclusion she chooses to give her characters. Their light-hearted conversation comes to an end by the outbreak of an argument between Ngozi and the staff distributing provisions. Ngozi, who had requested a jar of honey, is publicly berated by the manager when Ngozi refuses to back off her request. Rather than ceding to Ngozi's request, the staff arbitrarily close the distribution office, leaving the waiting crowd with no provisions for the day. Rather than blaming the staff, who are impervious

to their aggravation, the DP residents turn on Ngozi: "I am quiet and sad as I go. Ngozi is my best friend for dis hostel but I have to leave her. From the window outside, me I can still see her stand alone for the dining room, fighting for her honey" (22-23). Ngozi's pathetic figure dramatically outlines the complete lack of autonomy experienced by DP residents. Without the right to work, DP residents are dependent on the provisions doled out by the DP staff and are thus at the mercy of their changing moods. Given that they have no recourse to fight for such a meagre request as a jar of honey, we can begin to understand the vulnerability of their liminal position. While they can maintain some semblance of an individualized identity amongst themselves, they are relatively powerless against the ongoing dehumanization wrought by the overbearing Irish DP staff.

All three authors locate their counter-poetic strategies within a place-based narrative that challenges a stable theory of home within a marginalized community. Their response to the ongoing sense of alienation and dislocation felt by each community represented in their texts (i.e. Dublin's homeless community; Ireland's Traveller community; Ireland's migrant community) is to reaffirm each community's access to a linguistic resistance and subversion that marks their subjective autonomy and creativity. Each author uses their text to forcibly carve out a space in Ireland's field of literary production for a non-fetishized representation of what it means to literally *speak* from a marginalized position or physical space in Irish society.

Pierse has previously suggested that we must focus our analysis of the working class on the way in which the "working class forms in *dynamic* struggle with other classes" and the way "it is the product of a dialectic of economic development and self-actuation; it has a culture, a history, a sense of its own existence" (9). My analysis of Kirwan's, Hegarty's, and Okorie's debut texts

emphasizes precisely this sense of working-class literary production as a non-reified space of representation born from the counter-poetic tension of each author's engagement with linguistic opacity, resistance, and subversion.

In our interview, Hegarty spoke about how the poetry of Paula Meehan, and the "Fingalese" used by Meehan, gave Hegarty "a sense of permission to be able to write like that." She further clarifies that "poetry and place [are] causation and correlation": "My sense of home being Finglas makes me feel home at a writing table." And being at "home" at the writing table allowed Hegarty to unrestrainedly use her working-class dialect and accent. Language and space are inherently interconnected for all three authors. By advocating for their communities via a counter-poetic discourse, each author affirms the inherently non-homogenous creativity and vitality of their subversive dialects and vernaculars. No longer can we use these voices as "local color" in non-working-class narratives but, instead, we must recognize the space these authors are creating for the actual voices of their communities.

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