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“Narrative strategies and the themes of Bildungsroman genre in Patrick
McCabe’s The Butcher Boy, Roddy Doyle’s Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha,
Seamus Deane’s Reading in the Dark and Frank McCourt’s Angela’s
Ashes.”

Narativní postupy a témata románu formování ve čtyřech současných
irských dílech.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Irish fiction has always kept a prominent position amongst other world literatures. This claim still holds true today with many distinguished writers appearing in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it is necessary to note the development which the contemporary fiction in Ireland has undergone with many significant shifts in the use of themes and the approach to representation. For example the relationship with history “which once appeared to offer a secure source of cultural definition”¹ has become a problematic framework of many of the stories. In addition to the revision of many of the themes, “the new Irish novelists combine a willingness to confront the formal and conceptual legacies of a received literary tradition alongside a self-awareness of the role played by cultural narratives in mediating modern Ireland’s changing circumstances”². Here, Harte and Parker would provide a more explicit definition of the Irish society as “hybridised, globalised [and] multi-textured”³. Interestingly though, the authors who appeared at the very end of the 1980s choose to combine the theme of history, by setting their stories further back in the twentieth century, with the attempt to capture the changes in the modern society through the usage of innovative narrative techniques. One of these techniques is the employment of a child narrator and child’s perspective. Also, the novels tend to capture the child protagonist in the moment of a formative change occurring in his life, thus enabling the study from the angle of the Bildungsroman genre which connects to the tradition began by James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man.

¹ Liam Harte and Michael Parker, Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories (London: MacMillan, 2000) 2.

² Gerry Smyth, The Novel and the Nation (London: Pluto, 1997) 7.

³ Harte 4.

As was suggested above, the focus of this study will remain with the novels published in the 1990s introducing a child protagonist. Patrick McCabe's The Butcher Boy, Roddy Doyle's Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, Seamus Deane's Reading in the Dark and Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes all share a child protagonist and narrator while each offering a different approach in the representation and use of narrative strategies.

In order to be able to compare the different works it is essential to establish basic comparative categories. The obvious one is to analyse the novels on the basis of the Bildungsroman which shall be done with the recognition of the traditional features with regard to the recent development within the specificity of Irish literature. In addition to that, study of the narrative strategies and themes also offers a number of contact points and therefore will be addressed. Nevertheless, since the variety of themes is numerous on each of the books only a restricted number will be researched in particular. Those will include: family, community, religion and education in the context of institutions that provide them. From the point of narrative, specific interest will be dedicated to the position and use of the narrator, the use of language and representation of the child's perspective. Also, despite two of the books being 'purely' fictional and the other two (though it has been rejected by Seamus Deane with regard to Reading in the Dark) having stronger autobiographical ties, all share an elementary fascination with the play with the truth, resulting in jeopardising the trustworthiness of the story. Therefore, attention will be given to the use of the tools serving to strengthen the authenticity and to the failure of preserving the veracity, as well as its reasons.

Each of the four novels introduces specific undertaking of the representation and each chooses different aspects of the narration as central. Nevertheless, all can be studied in relation to the Bildungsroman genre, both from the traditional and specifically Irish perspective. However, due to the differences in the narrative field, the outcomes of this analysis do not reach a single conclusion which is, notwithstanding, possible in connection with the theory of the political Bildungsroman introduced by Kristin Morrison which will be explained fully in the chapter dedicated to theory.

Through the variety of approaches and use of narrative tools the traditional genre of Bildungsroman and novel in general is enhanced and developed offering, also, new possibilities of the study. Therefore, this work attempts at connecting the fields of Bildungsroman and narrative techniques in order to establish more appropriate readings reflecting the trends introduced in the four novels. Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge that these four novels are only partial representatives of this new development and therefore, this analysis only covers some of its aspects.

2. NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE BILDUNGSROMAN FORM

Four contemporary Irish novels written in the 1990s, yet set in the approximate time of the childhood of the respective authors: Patrick McCabe's The Butcher Boy, Roddy Doyle's Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, Seamus Deane's Reading in the Dark and Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes, form the body of my study. Their point of convergence is a first person narrative of a child protagonist. The narrative often oscillates from a childlike perspective to an adult retrospective recollection or commentary. This shift constitutes an important part of the approach to the specific topic of a coming-of-age novel and helps create an atmosphere which makes the story intelligible and accessible to the adult reader. All four novels can be read in the context of Bildungsroman, though each story displays its own rendering of the genre.

The subject of the narrative study can be reduced to the plot – or, the story that is being told, and the point of view with the use of the narrative voice – the way in which the story is being told. My approach to the subject takes as its source Robert Scholes' and Robert Kellogg's book The Nature of Narrative (1978)⁴. The Bildungsroman genre shapes the plot into the coming-of-age story in which the protagonist encounters events which play a formative role in his development and define the individuality which becomes his own. Thus, the nature of the narrative is determined by the Bildungsroman genre and therefore it is necessary to study both these literary topics in order to establish the particulars of the four novels.

The definition of the Bildungsroman was coined by German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who also, allegedly, invented the word. He identifies five essential elements: education and shaping of the main character, strong individualism of the

⁴ Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1978).

protagonist which coincides with his culture, biographical element of the author, psychological growth of the protagonist positively affecting the reader, “the individual come[ing] into an idealized state of recognition of his human potential and direct[ing] his life toward that goal.”⁵ The literal translation of the word Bildungsroman may also be used to illustrate the themes of the form; Jennifer Jeffers offers a useful explanation in her book Irish Novel at the End of the 20th Century. The word *Bild* means “image” or “picture” while the word *Bildung* used to mean “development” as in “shaping the image of” though it seems to have lost this denotation in today’s German.⁶ Thus, it is apparent that a Bildungsroman novel will be concerned with the shaping of oneself in relation to the surrounding environment and society.

In the European context Bildungsroman appeared at the very end of eighteenth century as a reaction to the modernisation of the society which brought about sharp changes both in the potential of one’s achievement and his expectations. One was no longer predetermined to live in the circumstances he was born into and so the youth became to be perceived as the phase of potentiality and promise. Thus, Western culture dropped the image of the hero of the classical epic as a mature man and chose Hamlet as its symbolic hero and pictured him as a young man, forgetting the fact that in reality of the play he was thirty years old.⁷ Therefore, “youth becomes a necessary and sufficient definition of [its new] heroes,” as well as an incarnation of ‘the meaning of life’ for the modern culture. Youth became the embodiment and reflection of the changes that nineteenth century society was undergoing; the widening of the gap between generations, the loss of continuity of occupation (son’s apprenticeship ceased to

⁵ Jennifer Jeffers, “Bodies over the Boundary,” Irish Novel at the End of the 20th Century (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 81.

⁶ Jeffers 82.

⁷ Franco Moretti, The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in the European Culture (London: Verso, 1987) 3.

mean his following in his father's footsteps) and, last but not least, the rise of capitalism which underlined the emergence of unexpected hopes.⁸

Bildungsroman, as a narrative structure, came to serve the need of its readership, and people in general for "the imitation" which "teaches them the nature of things as they are".⁹ The Bildungsroman does not only that but also stretches it to enable the reader to "experiment with possible selves and to learn to take our places in the real world".¹⁰ Thus, Bildungsroman represents the best possible literary form in order to shape the reader and direct him/her through the experiences and adventures of its heroes. An average reader, aware of the new possibilities opening up for him in the eighteenth and nineteenth century can re-live them first through the protagonist in order to figure out its likely outcomes. J. Hillis Miller attempts to define the role of fiction as either "to reveal" or "to create". The first would suggest that the stories "correspond to the way things are", while the second signifies that "a story is a way of doing things with words" in which sense, it is possible to perceive fiction as "hav[ing] tremendous importance not as the accurate reflectors of a culture but as the makers of that culture and as the unostentatious, but therefore all the more effective, policemen of that culture".¹¹ Miller then continues to propose a counter tendency of fiction "in which the reigning assumptions of a given culture can be criticized"¹². Both these points of view are interesting in the context of the shift which the approach to the genre of Bildungsroman undergoes in the twentieth century and of which

⁸ Moretti 4.

⁹ J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995) 68-9.

¹⁰ Miller 69.

¹¹ Miller 69.

¹² Miller 69.

the four novels are examples, therefore I will address it when discussing the particulars of the contemporary Irish Bildungsroman.

But to return to the history of the Bildungsroman it is necessary to note that the genre is not interested in all aspects of the social change and seeks to isolate only two, which came to be defined as “mobility” (enabled by the spreading of capitalism) and “interiority” (reflecting the unexpected hopes). Therefore, the Bildungsroman came to indicate a “specific image of modernity”¹³ and offered only two contrasting endings both marking the entrance into the world of adulthood epitomised either by marriage or adultery both representing the only two possible directions of the hero’s life: marriage symbolising the conforming to the outer rules of the society; while adultery the rejection of them. However, the classical Bildungsroman was limited by its goals and the understanding of human values. The most important achievement of the young heroes was the acquirement of happiness usually connected with the damage and ultimate effacement of freedom, while another restriction was posed by the subordination of “youth to the idea of maturity”.¹⁴ The stories aimed to portray the youth as a state of imperfection, almost like a pupa life stage of an insect: no longer a larva but not yet a butterfly--a stage of a complete metamorphosis leading to “a stable and ‘final’ identity.”¹⁵ This, however, is predominantly an aspect found in the English coming-of-age novels, while the French novels, for example, consider this conclusion as a sort of betrayal of the hero’s freedom and individuality. This is, nevertheless, one of a number of discrepancies found between the English and continental treatment of the topic. I will concentrate, primarily, on the

¹³ Moretti 5.

¹⁴ Moretti 6-8.

¹⁵ Moretti 8.

development in the English context, since the development of this genre in Ireland follows a similar pattern, at its beginning at least.

From the angle of narrative, an analysis of the Bildungsroman's characteristics concerning the meaning, character, point of view and plot offers a useful insight into its development and the current position.

The meaning of Bildungsroman, has already been touched upon by noting its usefulness in order to reflect the social changes and show the reader their possible outcomes. The Bildungsroman form itself embraces the theme of development and change, since it covers the liminal spaces of one's life, i.e. the end of childhood and beginning of maturity. The meaning is encoded in hero's struggle to establish himself, first as an individual being and second, as a member of the society. Through his/her story the reader is offered the opportunity to reflect upon the actions, choices and, not least importantly, the consequences. In the times of the rise of the Bildungsroman, it registered the surge of the bourgeoisie and its struggle to establish itself in relation to the aristocracy, from which it was distinguished by work, yet which it came to resemble in its leisure.¹⁶ Thus the form of Bildungsroman reflected, in its very structure, the opposing pairs of values recognised by modern Western culture of the middle-classes: "freedom and happiness, identity and change, security and metamorphoses"¹⁷. This led to a compromise as a culmination rather than a synthesis, with those opposing qualities absorbed into one's life instead of being resolved. Despite the Bildungsroman's orientation towards the self, in the meaning of the focus upon the individual, the final resolution to be taken by the hero is to become a part of the society, thus, conforming to the idea of the

¹⁶ Moretti ix.

¹⁷ Moretti 9.

‘normal’, shedding the individual distinctions that were both discovered and cherished in the previous parts of the novel, in order to ‘belong’.¹⁸ Thus, the meaning of the Bildungsroman may be perceived as a manual for the emerging generation of bourgeoisie on how to establish oneself in the society. For this aim, the Bildungsroman draws upon the illustrative rather than representative form of narrative, choosing “to present selected aspects of the actual, [...] referring to ethical and metaphysical truth”.¹⁹

The functions of the plot and character (I prefer to use term ‘protagonist’ since it covers the characters who are also subjects of the Bildungsroman genre in the four studied novels) are closely knit in the form of Bildungsroman and therefore I will bring them together in this paragraph to study their specificities in the Bildungsroman narrative. The main concern of the plot is represented by the “conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the demands of socialization”²⁰. The sequential nature of the plot is rendered by the storyline in which the hero is driven out of his community because of the lack of understanding and the need to follow his/her own direction in search of self-definition. The protagonist needs to overcome obstacles, solve problems and clear misunderstandings which make his/her attempt at freedom and independence a struggle and a constant fight. Finally, he or she realises the impossibility of facing the world on one’s own and decides to return to the community he/she came from in order to adopt an equal place by the side of his/her father/uncle/guardian and become a complete member of the society, able to answer for its demand of the ‘normality’. However, it is disguised as something the protagonist perceives as his/her ‘own’, he/she constructs the social

¹⁸ Moretti 11.

¹⁹ Scholes 88.

²⁰ Moretti 15.

norm by what is 'natural' to him/her. Therefore, "one's formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one's social integration as a simple *part of a whole*", a characteristic Moretti calls "comfort of civilization".²¹ This narrative approach can be identified as "developmental manner"²² in which the character and plot parts of the narrative intertwine.

Nevertheless, the developmental formulation

is primarily a plot formulation rather than a character formulation. It involves seeing the character at long range, with limited detail, so that his change against a particular background may be readily apparent. [...] But the character who merely changes through age and experience, without developing along ethically schematized lines, does not seem to generate a limiting plot pattern the way a purely developmental character does. Change is an aspect of a mimetic approach to characterization.²³

Scholes and Kellogg continue further on by distinguishing between the *developmental* (italics Scholes' and Kellogg's) manner of characterization "in which the character's personal traits are attenuated so as to clarify his progress along plot line which has ethical basis" where Dickens' novels can be easily identified as examples; as opposed to the *chronological* "in which the character's personal traits are ramified so as to make more significant the gradual shifts worked in the character during a plot which has temporal basis".²⁴ The latter manner is represented in the contemporary novels which form the focus of my study and in which the story of the individual is scrutinised and is at the centre of the plot.

²¹ Moretti 16.

²² Scholes 168.

²³ Scholes 168-9.

²⁴ Scholes 169.

The last aspect of the narrative study is the point of view. However, this seems to be the narrative feature prone to changes through the history of Bildungsroman. Though, in fact, it may serve as the indicator of the development and shift in the approach to the genre. Here, I would like to introduce Franco Moretti's theory in which he claims that the era of the Bildungsroman came to an abrupt end after the destructive effects of the Great War on the society and its ideals and was resurrected and reshaped only with the emergence of James Joyce.²⁵ The 'traditional' Bildungsroman worked with the omniscient narrator, thus enabling an absolute point of view allowing the author to introduce through "multiple perceptions [...] a single reality, a single truth"²⁶. This method underlines the didactic function of the earlier Bildungsroman, mentioned earlier in connection with the meaning of the genre. James Joyce dismissed the omniscient narrator in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and replaced him with a first person narrator, making space for the more personal statements of the troubled young Irish artist. James Joyce's Portrait also marks the beginning of the new era of the Bildungsroman in the Irish context where, however, the trend of the first person narrative was interrupted by the narratives of John McGahern, William Trevor or Edna O'Brien. Though, these authors who entered the scene in the 1960s gravitate to the third person eye-witness method, the first person narrative is re-established again, in the 1990s, by the authors of my interest. This trajectory might suggest the shift in the perspective and approach to the topic. Despite the common focus on the social environment and family situation in all of the novels, the third-person narrative implies a certain distance between the author and his characters, thus, also, allowing for a gap between the characters and the reader;

²⁵ Moretti 229-30.

²⁶ Scholes 273.

while the later, first-person narrative erases the gap and makes the reader part of the story because it is directed towards him by the protagonist himself, without any softening intervention of the narrative voice outside the story.

From what has been outlined above, it is obvious that the Irish Bildungsroman displays certain original characteristics and therefore it is necessary to look at its development. Despite a relatively slow rise of the Irish novel in the strict sense, the Bildungsroman, like all the other literary forms, appears early, even preceding the dominant work which established the genre as such – Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship (1795). According to James Cahalan, in The Irish Novel, the first novel set predominantly in Ireland, and coincidentally also a Bildungsroman, is The History of Jack Connor written in 1752²⁷; a single novel by William Chaigneau who was born in Ireland of a Huguenot family²⁸. It is a story of “a young man who runs off to London and Paris, and abandons his Irishness” [becoming John Conyers], only to discover “that the stability he seeks can be only found in his native land”²⁹. The following Bildungsroman novels pursued a similar pattern of a moral lesson closing on the importance of love for the land and acceptance of the hero’s belonging to Ireland.³⁰ Nevertheless, though drawing on the pattern of its English Bildungsroman counterpart, it also manages to subvert the traditional feature of it by focusing its attention on the rural environment as opposed to “the big city as a place of fulfilment”³¹.

²⁷ James M. Cahalan, The Irish Novel (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988) 11.

²⁸ Robert Welch, ed., “William Chaigneau,” Oxford Concise Companion to Irish Literature (Oxford: Oxford, 2000).

²⁹ Cahalan 11.

³⁰ Cahalan 11-13.

³¹ Cahalan 24.

James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man references George Moore's A Drama in Muslin (1886) which also presents the first significant introduction of a female protagonist in the Irish Bildungsroman tradition.³² It narrates a story of Alice Barton who is a Catholic turned agnostic and a “would-be writer and exile who must fly by the nets of family, religion and nationality”.³³ Thus, James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, published in 1916, “examined quite a quintessentially Irish experience of youth and [...] the seeming predisposition of Irish novelists to use the Bildungsroman form and focus on the transformations of youth”³⁴. The treatment of both the hero and the form reflected the changes both in the society and the literary tradition; and seemed to be adopted by the novelist writers of the later twentieth century such as John McGahern (The Dark), Kate O'Brien (The Land of Spices) and Edna O'Brien (The Country Girls) to mention just a few.³⁵ These, in turn were influential for the writers of my focus, all of which published their stories in the 1990s.

But to return to Portrait, Joyce in his autobiographical story refuses the classical openly optimistic ending of the English Bildungsroman of the previous century and turns towards its more sinister and ambiguous continental counterpart (“Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”³⁶). Stephen Dedalus is encountered as a child, we are given description of his family and his early confrontation with education and follow him into early adulthood marked by both sexual and philosophical

³² Cahalan 107.

³³ Cahalan 107.

³⁴ Cahalan 137.

³⁵ Cahalan 137.

³⁶ James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (London: Penguin, 1996) 288.

discoveries. In between, he undergoes attraction to religion which, however, soon turns into a struggle. Finally, he realises that neither his family, school, religion nor nation understand or fulfil him and that more than anything they prevent him from becoming an independent personality, a necessity which he believes will guarantee him artistic freedom and maturity, and so he leaves Ireland not to return. Unlike most of his predecessors, which left only to learn that they cannot become complete without a reunion and recognition of their roots, Stephen abandons his origins to achieve all that. His example is soon to be followed by Tarry Flynn written in 1948 by Patrick Kavanagh in which the hero proclaims: “The best way to love a country like this is from a range of not less than three hundred miles.”³⁷ The need of exile in order to see Ireland, and all its aspects, clearly, seems to be a purely Irish addition to the number of Bildungsroman sub-genre. From the time of Joyce it has become a recurrent motif in Irish literature allowing for a variety of approaches to the theme of exile. This seems to reflect a certain tendency of the Irish Bildungsroman to attempt to merge both the English and the Continental tradition seeking the reconciliation with one’s society in abandoning it and realising one’s full potential outside the boundaries of the familiar with a possibility of a happy ending into the bargain.

To conclude the brief excursion into the history of Irish Bildungsroman it is essential to look at The Dark (1965) by John McGahern. It is exemplary not only as far as the piece of writing is concerned but also in the way the novel influenced and shaped Irish society itself. The novel depicts the life of “a sensitive young boy”³⁸ living with his widower father on a small farm. The novel

³⁷ Cahalan 199.

³⁸ Cahalan 271.

was banned under the Censorship act “for incorporating masturbatory scenes”³⁹, cost McGahern his position as a primary school teacher and the reaction it caused was also the main reason for his seeking exile in Great Britain. Nevertheless, the story, though drawing on the tradition of Joyce’s Portrait, paradoxically ends in reconciliation: “Good night so, Daddy” and “Good night, my son. God bless you.”⁴⁰ Despite the similarities--the son trying to define his place within the dysfunctional family resulting in his departure, the books conclusions underline the difference of approaches and perspectives characteristic of further tendencies in the Irish Bildungsroman.

These opposing conclusions illustrate the frictions and deviations present in the treatment of this form in the Irish context. It will be very useful to bear in mind when we look at the four novels of my interest since they all represent a unique approach and handling of the topic and its genre. As Denis Coffey noted in his dissertation in 1982, “Irish Bildungsroman is a story of Irish novelists continually ‘rediscovering’ the form as if unaware of the tradition, yet at the same time copiously following it”⁴¹.

As I have already suggested above through Denis Coffey’s quotation, the Irish Bildungsroman manages to both answer to those set expectations, as well as undermine and reject them. This occurrence has been addressed and analysed by Kristin Morrison in an essay “The Political Bildungsroman” and since it answers to the developments in the four novels – The Butcher Boy, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, Reading in the Dark and Angela’s Ashes; I would like to summarise it to close the chapter, as it is one of the more recent studies of the Bildungsroman phenomenon. Morrison argues, illustrating it by an analysis of the novels by

³⁹ Rüdiger Imhof, The Modern Irish Novel (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2002) 217.

⁴⁰ John McGahern, The Dark (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) 191.

⁴¹ Cahalan 311 n2.

William Trevor, John Banville, Brian Moore and Jennifer Johnston that “the central character’s final state involves separation from his group, his process of education and maturation returning him not to society and its politics, but to something deep within himself” thus “constituting a political statement”⁴². Though she connects it with the introduction of the political note through the usage of the historical material, according to my analysis it should also comprise the inclusion of the broader social issues such as the transformation of the society and the impact the modern aspects of life perform on communities and individuals. Both of these topics result in the “alienation not integration [as a] mark [...] of hard won maturity”.⁴³ I would like to look at the four novels from this point of view also, though I have found it necessary to broaden Morrison’s stance to be able to embrace the situation of the four novels, since, only one of them is “significantly”⁴⁴ interested in the historical background of the protagonist (Reading in the Dark), while the others are more attracted to the social environment shaping their heroes. Nevertheless, all four novels record the failure which Kristin Morrison accurately describes—“Family, country, beloved, all this has failed, no new acceptable society emerges, the young man finds he has only himself. And, as an old man recounting his story, he remains essentially solitary.”⁴⁵ I shall question the solitariness of some of the protagonists, yet the problem of the dysfunctional family, damaged community and deficient institutions remains as a strong leitmotif of the Bildungsroman representation in all of the novels.

⁴² Kristin Morrison, “The Political Bildungsroman,” Troubled Histories, Troubled Fictions: Twentieth Century Anglo-Irish Prose, eds. Theo D’haen and José Lanfers (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995) 141.

⁴³ Morrison 142.

⁴⁴ Morrison 141.

⁴⁵ Morrison 143.

3. THE BUTCHER BOY: A SOCIAL CRITIQUE

The Butcher Boy was the third novel published by Patrick McCabe, yet it is the one which brought him into prominence and which served as a starting point for his notable style in fiction writing. It won him the *Irish Times/ Aer Lingus* Literature Prize and was shortlisted for 1992 Booker Prize.⁴⁶

Since its publication The Butcher Boy has become an exemplary depiction of a ‘dysfunctional family’ and the world of thus effected boy. Moreover, the story has also voiced criticism of the social environment through the depiction of the community in an unnamed small town somewhere within walking distance of Dublin. The ‘dysfunctional’ is to be identified and dissected through the contrast with the ‘ideal’, nevertheless, the distinctions, as well as the understanding of the two are distorted and blurred by the one-sided voice, which is soon identified as psychotic with all the manifestations related to this illness (delusions, hallucinations, serious defects in judgement and insight, defects in the thinking process, and the inability to objectively evaluate reality⁴⁷). Nevertheless, it is this mixture of the seemingly uncommon, strange and disquieting, strengthened by it all being embodied in a boy, that gives the novel its undisputable energy and freshness. The above-mentioned aspects can be identified as characteristic of the Bildungsroman form of writing, meaning the story of a coming of age of a child connected to the search of one’s place in the society.

This chapter, therefore, will study The Butcher Boy in the context of the various aspects constituting the understanding of Bildungsroman and

⁴⁶ See autobiographical note in The Butcher Boy.

⁴⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica.

supplement it with a study of the role the narrative perspective plays in the representation of those themes, such as: the social context and the stereotypes it embraces; themes of the family, community and institutions; all projected onto the play of truth and fantasy of an unidentified and ignored psychotic boy.

In The Butcher Boy, Patrick McCabe answers to Coffer's claim of "Irish novelists continually 'rediscovering' the form [of Bildungsroman]"⁴⁸. McCabe employs an innovative approach and enriches it with a number of original motives, as well as incorporating subjects previously marginalised in serious literature.⁴⁹ Another aspect which seems to be peculiar to Irish contemporary Bildungsroman is what Kristin Morrison calls the "political Bildungsroman" in which the protagonist does not integrate into the society but rather connects with "something deep within himself"⁵⁰. Perhaps it might seem far-fetched to compare Francie's madness to "something deep within himself", he does move towards a certain "discovery and reconciliation with the self"⁵¹ as the closing lines of the book quoted further on suggest. Despite the story being told from the retrospect, anticipation of the ending is not possible though, it seems clear, that Francie's integration into the society is unlikely. Thus already negating the traditional definition of Bildungsroman describing "the formation of a character up to the moment when he ceases to be self-centered and becomes society-centered, thus beginning to shape his true self"⁵². Francie is cut off from the society already through the lives of his parents. After they die, he tries to

⁴⁸ Cahalan 311 n2.

⁴⁹ Linden Peach, The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 169.

⁵⁰ Morrison 141.

⁵¹ Morrison 142.

⁵² Roy Pascal, The German Novel (Toronto: University Press, 1956) 11.

become part of the 'ideal' Nugent family but fails to be understood and is transported to the margins of the society, first the reformatory and then through the work for Leddy, the butcher. "There was always jobs there for no one wanted to do it."⁵³ Finally, he secures the absolute outcast position by killing one of the members of the 'respectable' society – Mrs Nugent.

Already, at the beginning the Bildungsroman form is shifted by the disconnectedness of the narrative where the protagonist does not move forward through experience, as is expected in conventional Bildungsroman; but rather looks back. McCabe places the narrator at the end of his story which started to unravel "when I [he] was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago" (1). Already the first sentence disrupts the reader's perception of time which is never completely re-established. This 'letting loose' of the time structure corresponds with Francie's constant longing for the past and his reassuring of himself that "soon it would be all back the way it used to be" (108). Then the story is told again by a sole narrative voice, which we slowly discover to be haunted by his own understandings, explanations and even imaginings. Gradually, the reader finds himself entangled in a chaotic web of numerous voices speaking to and through Francie. Still, it is not altogether clear whether it was all initiated by Mrs Nugent who, on her one and only visit to the Brady's on behalf of the stolen comics of her son Philip, "started on about the pigs" (4). It remains unclear whether she has uttered the word, and if so in what context exactly, or whether there was a mishearing or misinterpretation on the behalf of Francie, though John Scaggs argues that the fact that the quotation of Mrs Nugent "calling back *Pigs - sure the whole town knows that!*" (4) is in italics

⁵³ Patrick McCabe, *The Butcher Boy* (London: Picador, 2001) 107. All subsequent references are edited in the text.

“clearly differentiates the speaker from the narrator”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, he continues to note that even this ‘lead’ is soon unsettled when the italics introduce “a supposition on Francie’s part” further on in the book.⁵⁵

Moreover, the trustworthiness of the narrative voice is repeatedly undermined throughout the novel by various visions, hallucinations and ravings Francie encounters and invents. Often it is hard to discern whether he is a receiver or a projector of them. As a receiver he hears the voice of his conscience sounding through crows ‘commenting’ upon his intrusion into the Nugent’s house: “He’s not supposed to be in there” (58). While the projector is apparent through his ‘use’ of the visions he claims to have of Virgin Mary and the saints in the field of the reformatory: “I went through Father Sullivan’s books and found out dozens of the fuckers” (78). However, the reader is invited to perceive Francie’s illness as the agent of all his thoughts and actions. Everything becomes weighed with suspicion and nothing is accepted at face value. The story turns into a stage act written, directed and performed by Francie Brady - the Butcher Boy. Nevertheless, McCabe manages to make Francie “a cute hoor”⁵⁶ which enables him to charm the readers. The reader is manoeuvred into liking and sympathising with Francie and this initial partiality for a poor, lost and victimised child lasts throughout, due to the ‘understanding’ of his actions thanks to the pathological perception of them. In addition to this, many positive and likeable aspects of Francie’s character are to be found in the novel. His sensitivity for the poetic tinged with the philosophical: “The beautiful things of the world, I had been wrong about them. They meant

⁵⁴ John Scaggs, “Who is Francie Pig? Self-Identity and Narrative Reliability in *The Butcher Boy*,” *Irish University Review*, 30.1 (2000): 55.

⁵⁵ Scaggs 55.

⁵⁶ Richard Kerridge, “Meat is Murder: an interview with Patrick McCabe,” *Reviewing Ireland*, eds. Sarah Biggs, Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells (Bath: Sulis Press, 1998) 293.

everything. They were the only things that meant anything” (74). His tender care after his dead father:

Da looked at me and when I seen those eyes so sad and hurt I wanted to say: I love you da.

They said to me: You won’t leave me son.

I said: I won’t da. I’ll never leave you. (119)

Though this might be read as a self-preserving tendency to pretend that nothing bad has happened and life can continue as usual, his delicate perception and approach to the irreparable injustice that saddened the sweetshop keeper Mary can be only interpreted as a remnant of his promise to his mother, however without any profit for himself.

Look at that Mary! The same old clove drops! I said but she still didn’t say anything just smiled if you could call it a smile. I knew who she was thinking about. She was thinking about Alo that’s who she was thinking about. Don’t worry Mary I said, your troubles are over Mary – Francie Brady the Time Lord is here! (198)

Francie’s capacity of compassion and care is used as a sharp contrast to the lack of these qualities in the community which surrounds him and which will be addressed later.

There are more instances of his affection for people and things, though many suffer damage as a result of the ‘Nugent’s curse’. Another lighter tone can be found in the comical, represented by Francie’s “deadpan sense of humour of the

blackest sort,”⁵⁷ which is often mingled with violence. This combination however renders the violence easily bearable, almost a by-product of the comical. The killing itself happens as if by the way in between his funny observances of town life going berserk expecting the arrival of Our Lady. It is one of many events in the life of various characters from pop culture he adopts signifying his confrontation of “the gap that always exists between representation and reality, but he cannot breach the gap, and his identity begins to crumble under the strain”⁵⁸. From these predetermined ‘scripts’ he follows and acts out, the killing was just one of the nuances of the role of the butcher boy he finally identifies with completely by playing it to its perfection. As Tom Herron points out in his essay in Irish Contemporary Fiction: “As he [Francie] kills Mrs Nugent he enters fully, expertly, into his role of butcher boy.”⁵⁹ However, to arrive at this point of ‘reconciliation’ with the role he ascribes to himself, Francie has to pass through a number of other roles he is either born into or condemned to. This brings us to the social criticism to be found in the undercurrent of the story which can also be read as the depiction of “the last moments of [that] community”⁶⁰.

The particular community of The Butcher Boy includes the Brady family, which might be described as “white trash”⁶¹ contrasted with the Nugent family--a local family returning after years of living in London and symbolising an ‘ideal’ family which, however, “caused all the trouble if [Mrs Nugent] hadn’t poked [her] nose in everything would have been all right” (2). In addition, there

⁵⁷ Imhof 290.

⁵⁸ Smyth 83.

⁵⁹ Tom Herron, “Bright with Cosy Homesteads: *The Butcher Boy*,” Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories, eds. Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan, 2000) 178.

⁶⁰ Kerridge 291.

⁶¹ Smyth 82.

are the women of the village led by Mrs Connolly, as well as Doctor Roche and Father Dom, all of whom might be summarised by Francie's exclamation towards the end of the novel claiming: "that's the trouble with the people in this town they can't mind their own business can they *they can't mind their own fucking business!*" (164) Here the reader is confronted with a number of stereotypes concerning the community. There is a typical atmosphere of a small town where everybody knows everybody and not one action of any member of the community goes unnoticed or unanalysed. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the object of the 'talk' will ever be confronted openly: "Mrs Nugent all smiles when she met us" while "what she was really saying was: *Ah hello Mrs Pig how are you...*" (5). Therefore, most of the content of such a 'talk' is based on the conjecture of the object himself, which draws on the supposition of his blame, thus forming a vicious circle of hypothesis and unspoken bitterness bordering on hate. Somewhere in this atmosphere begins also Francie's trouble with Mrs Nugent and the pigs. When Mrs Nugent came to complain about the stolen comics of her son Philip, Francie notes her speech as such:

She said she knew the kind of us long before she went to England and she might have known not to let her son anywhere near the likes of me what else would you expect from a house where the father's never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he's no better than a pig. [...] and the last thing I heard was Nugent going down the lane and calling back *Pigs – sure the whole town knows that!* (4)

The last sentence seems to be crucial because from that moment on Francie believes that everyone in the town considers his family in the same manner as Mrs Nugent does, though nobody ever seems to act according to that belief.

Certainly, there is looking down at the Brady family where nothing seems to fit the conventional expectations of the community, however there is always someone to bring the father home from the pub when his feet seem to fail him: “da had to be left home it was one of the railwaymen dropped him at the door” (6). Nevertheless, Francie has to face recurrent closing of the door at him from the family of his one and only friend Joe Purcell, which he fails to identify and understand. Again, nothing is spoken out loud, yet, after Francie’s return from the reformatory, whenever he calls: “Mr Purcell smiles and closes the door behind him it just happened he didn’t slam it or anything” (107). Or a few pages on we encounter Mrs Purcell “starting to close the door now too. [...] Very well, Francis she says looking out through a crack then the door closed softly with a click” (115). This imagery offers an alternative to the theme of closing of Francie in various institutions. Since the ‘closing in’ fails to cure and ‘normalise’ Francie, the community finds it necessary to protect itself and close Francie outside their homes and lives.

The ‘pig’ stigma brings about Francie’s longing for a ‘normal’ family which he perceives in the image of the Nugents, who are not only ‘normal’ but more an ‘ideal’ family glittered with a posh aspect underlying their material as well as social status. Despite Francie struggling in order to keep his promise to his mother, he is overcome by the visions of charming the Nugents into yearning for him becoming one of them or, rather, them becoming pigs. “He wants to be one of us. He wants his name to be Francis Nugent. That’s what he’s wanted all along! We know that – don’t we mother?” (60) But the session ends with Francie opening a “school for pigs” for both the mother and son aimed at making them his family. “Did you not hear me Philip Pig? Hmm?”

(60) The lack of any level between the 'dysfunctional' and 'ideal' family mirrors the struggle of the community to better itself, at least on the social ladder, registering only two extremes: the undesirable, represented by the Bradys and the desirable, embodied in the Nugents.

The only person who deserts and rejects Francie openly is Joe Purcell, but even he takes his time and speaks out only when pushed to the corner. The estrangement takes place gradually and it is interesting to follow its development. The first step is taken when Francie attacks Philip in the chickenhouse and where Joe betrays the general attitude towards Bradys saying "he didn't care what his ma or da said about me or my da or the Terrace but if I did things like that it would be all ruined" (49). Joe manifests an unparalleled power over Francie, he seems to be the only person Francie trusts and respects and who remains, throughout, the motivating power of most of his acts. As well as this, as long as Francie believes in Joe and their friendship, he is able to contain his violence, or his illness, and his mental state seems to deteriorate whenever this belief is challenged by Joe's denial which is usually followed by another stay in an institution. There seems to be a repeating pattern to this chain of events.

The first rejection comes after the attack of Francie by Mrs Nugent's brother Buttsy and his friend Devlin by the river, "then Joe said it: I'm not hanging around with him. I *used* to hang around with him!" (111) This leads to an escalation of anger on Francie's part who beats Buttsy almost unconscious. Afterwards, Francie is left alone with his father and therefore chooses to ignore his death and pretends to go on as usual or even a little better. Nevertheless, after the revelation of Joe's betrayal Francie is taken to the mental hospital from

which he returns only to find himself completely alone in the world:

I pulled at the grass along the edge of the bank and counted all the people that were gone on me now.

1. Da
2. Ma
3. Alo
4. Joe

When I said Joe's name all of a sudden I burst out laughing. For fuck's sake! I said, Joe gone! How the fuck would Joe be gone! (163)

From there ensues Francie's journey to Bundoran where Joe's boarding school is situated. Bundoran plays another significant role but that will be touched in connection to past and memory. In the present context it offers a setting of the final and most devastating rejection on behalf of Joe Purcell. When Francie invades the sleeping school and finds Joe, their exchange is both disturbed and accelerated by

the priest [who] came in between us and says: *Look this has gone far enough! Is this fellow a friend of yours or is he not Purcell?*

I looked at Joe please Joe I was saying but he wasn't looking at me he was just saying I'm tired I want to get back to my bed it's three in the morning.

Then Joe just shook his head and said: No.

Then he left and said something to Philip on the way out and Philip smiled. (190)

Maybe the additional humiliation caused by Philip's presence and his smile might have been responsible for the magnification of the final outburst of violence but perhaps it would make no difference. Nevertheless, Francie

immediately makes a connection of what has just happened to him with its 'source', Mrs Nugent. (190)

Another aspect of the social background as represented in The Butcher Boy is that of various institutions. Those attended by his parents seem to cast a haunting shadow upon Francie's life - the orphanage his father was brought up in or the mental hospital (the "garage" (8)) his mum is sent to a number of times to be treated for her depression. Nevertheless, Francie has a number of chances to experience these establishments for himself. First, he is sent to a reformatory run by priests, after he fouls the Nugent's house. He is pre-warned by Sergeant Sausage on their way there: "H'ho when the priests get their hands on you there won't be so much guff outa ye h'ho" (66). The persistent continuation of physical and sexual abuse does not seem to register on Francie who 'accommodates' himself to the situation and soon discovers how to make his way around in order to provide the best for himself. All it takes is a letter from Joe and Francie's resolution to win "the Francie Brady Not a Bad Bastard Any More Diploma" (70). In order to achieve it, and with it the permission to go home he compliantly performs his 'duties'. "So that was the way it went. Between being Tiddly's wife and keeping an eye out for the Black and Tans for the gardener I was doing all right in that old school for pigs..." (89) Nevertheless, it is essential to include the seemingly 'invisible' effects of the treatment Francie is subject to, among the catalysts of the escalation of his violence.

Francie visits two more institutions, the third one is an asylum for criminally insane which is the place from which the story is told, while the second is a mental hospital where he is taken rather as a victim than an offender

after the body of his father is discovered by Dr Roche. However, he seems to be out of his senses during his stay there and encounters nothing but his ravings about pigs, father and Joe. He is asked many questions by the doctors but he manages to fool them again, just like he used to fool Father Tiddly when asked about his home and family. Again Francie finds himself lost in his own imagination. He undergoes treatment and art therapy, is prescribed pills to keep “the bother” (155) off him and is dismissed.

[...] the warden shakes hands with the prisoner and says goodbye at the gates and goes back in smiling thinking how great his job is until he hears the next day the prisoner has just chopped up a few more people. But it wasn't like that for I had no intention of chopping up anyone. (155-6)

This commentary underlines Francie's belief that somebody else is at fault and he has no other way around it then to use violence. Nevertheless, since the attempt to beat Philip in the chickenhouse where he was stopped by Joe and asked never to do anything like that again by him, he keeps this resolution in his mind; nevertheless Mrs Nugent tends to undermine it.

Thus, violence seems to envelop Francie until it grows through him and becomes his means of expression, as well as the only apparently possible way of life. Francie is beaten by his mother, who is being humiliated and abused by his alcoholic father who suffered in an orphanage; a never-ending line going back the family history. Francie is threatened by beating constantly – by Sergeant Sausage on their way to the reformatory, by Buttsy and Devlin after coming back from reformatory, and finally this threat materialises when he

refuses to reveal where he has hidden Mrs Nugent's body.

The way they do it they put a bar of soap in a sock and I don't know how many times they gave it to me it leaves no marks. But it still knocks seven different kinds of shite out! (202)

The intensity of the violence Francie receives mirrors that which he performs. Finally, by killing Mrs Nugent he rids himself, and the memory of the loved ones, of the 'cause of all the evil' as well as his feeling of guilt. "You did two bad things Mrs Nugent. You made me turn my back on my ma and you took Joe away from me. Why did you do that Mrs Nugent?" (195). There is only one person to be blamed for all the things that Francie is unhappy about. He remains locked in this naïve, childish perception of the world which does not change with his age and experience and it is one of the symptoms signalling that something went wrong with Francie.

Not for one moment does he give up his hope for the good times returning and believes it can all be fine as at the beginning again.

I always met Joe at the bottom of Church Hill. There was no more talk about the school for pigs or anything that went on there, that was all finished now and soon it would all be back the way it used to be. (108)

This longing for the past is demonstrated by importunate memories, both his own and his father's. Sooner or later they all prove false. However, Francie seems to find his peace in the end at the asylum for the criminally insane where the memory loop of his only friend Joe comes full circle.

The first time I met him was in the lane at the back of our house. We must have been four or five at the most. He was hunkered down at the big puddle beside the chickenhouse. It had been frozen over for weeks and he was hacking away at the ice with a bit of a stick. I stood looking at him for a while and then I said to him what would you do if you won a hundred million billion trillion dollars? He didn't look up, he just went on hacking. Then he told me what he'd do and that kept us going for a long time. That was the first time I met Joe Purcell. (40)

As an active part of his longing for the past to return he continually revisits the puddle as if trying to get back to the beginning of the good days, yet the puddle is occupied by Brendy and a boy from a Christmas card (99). Until he meets a fellow patient with whom he might recreate the past:

One [bogman] of them comes up to me one day I was hacking at the ice on the big puddle behind the kitchens and says what's going on here or what do you be at with this ice? [...] Then he said give me a bit of that stick like a good man and the two of us started hacking away together beneath the orange sky. (215)

Another haunting memory is that of his parents' honeymoon in the town of Bundoran. This memory is inflicted upon Francie by his father who recounts how "the woman of the house, every night: I wonder could we persuade Mr Brady to give us another rendition? That's what she used to say. *You're my special guests! The lovebirds! Benny and Annie Brady*" (84). However, when Francie tries to recreate that memory after both of his parents are dead, he learns the naked truth "about a man who behaved the way he did in front of his wife. No better than a pig, the way he disgraced himself here" (181). So another

attempt at trying to recreate the better times fails, though this time the reason is that it never existed. Even though, again, there is the hint of what the lady of the house says might not be exactly true, because the reader, by this time, has become suspicious of the use of the word “pig”.

Last theme coming full circle is the pig changing into a butcher. First, there was Mrs Nugent calling the family pigs, followed by Francie changing himself into “Francie Pig” (13), then a song Francie’s ma identified with about a girl who hangs herself because of the betrayal of her lover—the butcher boy. Then Francie becomes the butcher boy both in reality and in the literal meaning of the song being identified as the cause of his mother’s suicide.

The Butcher Boy follows the coming-of-age of an unlikely Bildungsroman hero, a psychotic boy from a dysfunctional family. The story fails to meet the ‘classical’ requirements of the form, yet through the story of Francie it presents a vicious satire on Irish childhood and accordingly distorted image of the maturing of a child in the malfunctioning community. Francie collects various experiences and goes through different incidents which become reflected in his actions. Since he is a victim of the mistreatment and misunderstanding the outcome of his growing-up is a direct answer to the defects of the society which shaped him. Unlike the traditional Bildungsroman hero, Francie does not choose to leave his community to discover himself and understand his position within the society but is sent away in order to be ‘adjusted’ and ‘repaired’ so that he might become acceptable. Unfortunately, Francie ‘fails’ this task and does not become ‘normal’ and therefore cannot assimilate in the society and is perceived by it as an outcast. It is possible to

read his final stay in the asylum for the criminally insane as the finding of a proper community for Francie. Through the twisted use of the Bildungsroman form, McCabe achieves the shift of focus from the hero to the society and forces the reader, as a representative of the community, to reconsider his/her perception of normality and properness. As well as this, the reader is required to question the established practices used to protect the community from the 'deviants' and examine his/her personal position and impact.

Under the revised form of Bildungsroman The Butcher Boy seems to embrace a great number of topics and themes and the single person narrative, distorted and unreal as it may be, weaves it into a richly embroidered fabric of many colours and patterns. However, it is exactly this exclusive point of view which renders it solid, because it is all happening to the narrator or he is making it happen. Francie becomes both the receiver and the source of the themes and through his personal story a story of a universal community, our community, is being offered to us as a mirror steamed by the possible untruthfulness of some of Francie's claims, yet clear and human enough to strike.

4. PADDY CLARKE HA HA HA: AN IMAGE OF AN ORDINARY FAMILY

Roddy Doyle's Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha works as a precursor of a new approach or turning point in his style of writing. It was published after The Barrytown Trilogy, however, the story is of the generation preceding that of the Trilogy. The focus remains with the family, the centre of the attention is a 10-year old boy, through whom the whole book is narrated. This, naturally, affects the language, style and tone of the book which remains faithful to its narrator throughout and which, consequently, lacks the inherent comic dimension of the trilogy. This approach is repeated in Doyle's following work The Woman Who Walked Into Doors, where the story is narrated by an abused woman, Paula Spencer.

Since the story covers only a year of the protagonist's life, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha does not fully conform to the definition of the Bildungsroman. Nevertheless, it does offer an intriguing insight into the child's psyche when disturbed by the breakdown of his parents' marriage. Also, thanks to an associative or cyclical unfolding of Paddy's mind, the reader glimpses earlier stages of his life through the memories that spring up, triggered by recent events. The ending of the book marks a premature end to Paddy's childhood since he becomes 'the head of the family' after his father leaves. In addition, Paddy decides to accept this new role and shows it through his reaction to the childish teasing of his former friends:

Paddy Clarke –

Paddy Clarke –

Has no da.

Ha ha ha!

I didn't listen to them. They were only kids.⁶²

The book opens *in medias res*. The reader meets Paddy, the narrator, and all his friends and immediately learns about Liam and Aidan's dead mother in the straightforward manner that the children use to accept and handle such information. It is like their trademark, every child has some distinctive mark, springing mostly from their family situations – Edward Swanwick is singled out by the fact that his family is upper-middle class – “Nothing but the best for the Swanwicks, said my da” and him attending “Belvedere in town ” (16). The mode of narration is straightforward following the single narrator and his perspective, though arguably always confronted with the perspective of others, since Paddy “may be slightly more sensitive and aware than most children of his age.”⁶³ Thanks to his sensitivity and tendency to ponder things, the reader is offered also the opinions and perspectives of others as Paddy hears them. In a way, the character of Paddy functions both as the hero and the observer, most of the events concern him while those that do not are recorded by him and help the reader assemble a picture of the community. Since Paddy alone is not able to understand everything that goes on around him, there needs to be an input from characters who do understand more, like Paddy's parents, to complete the picture (““Slum scum.’ My ma hit me when I said that. [...] I didn't even know what it really meant. I knew that the slums were in town.” (118)) Moreover, Paddy has a vivid imagination and is prone to rash conclusions, therefore, the communication of the information obtained from the others is necessary to keep track of reality:

⁶² Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (Minerva: London, 1994) 281. All subsequent references are edited in text.

⁶³ Imhof 246.

Uncle Eddie was burnt to death in the fire; we heard that as well. Missis Byrne from two houses up told my ma. She whispered it and they blessed themselves.

Paddy's understanding of the information he deciphers from the behaviour of others is often tinged with the fantastic and the reality usually turns out to be more ordinary than a ten-year old boy would wish.

He wasn't dead at all. He wasn't even hurt. (14)

Brian Donnelly argues that “[t]he narrative voice [...] is a nice balance between the adult's recollection and the immediacy of childhood perceptions; only occasionally does the over sophisticated simile or an inappropriate phrase intrude upon this compromise.”⁶⁴ However, I am disinclined to agree since it seems to be impossible to judge the use of the words and even phrases by Paddy because he often mimics the adults and often admits not to be aware of the meaning they have (“Mekong delta. Demilitarised zone. Tet offensive. [...] ‘Why are the yankees fighting the gorillas?’” (227)). Furthermore, he is clever enough to use some words and phrases for his own purposes, mostly to prevent his parents arguing:

- Could I turn on the telly?

I wanted to remind him that I was there. There was a fight coming and I could stop it by being there. [...]

- What's on? She asked.

I didn't know. It didn't matter. The sound would fill the room. He'd look up.

- Something, I said. – There might be, maybe a programme about politics. Something of interest.

⁶⁴ Brian Donnelly, “Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO,” *Irish University Review*, 30.1 (2000): 25.

- Like what?

- Fianna Fail versus Fine Gael, I said.

That made Da look at me. (209)

Paddy is like a sponge absorbing everything of interest that he comes across. He learns words from his dictionary, or memorises encyclopaedia entries, as well as gathers the knowledge the school offers. He might not necessarily understand it all but he collects it and tests it by use. He is aware of the power the right word uttered at the right time may provide and therefore seems to store the knowledge for the time of need.

Another aspect of the narration is its disrupted chronology which is mainly due to the associative quality of Paddy's thought. He is not writing his story down, he is living it and therefore, many digressions into the past, triggered by memories occur, while the future remains obscure, too distant for the child's mind. Roddy Doyle describes this method in an interview with Gerry Smyth:

The story meanders for the first two-thirds, and people might like it but still be wondering what it's about. And that was deliberate as well. There are strong links between each individual segment, but it's not linear at all. I didn't want to make it too obvious, but it's more to do with a subject or a colour or something that leads him [Paddy] off on a tangent to another thing but is really tied in.⁶⁵

In addition, the book is divided into parts according to the event each part describes. These parts are almost accidental, recorded only in relation to the importance they are awarded by Paddy. The narrative is therefore disrupted, though some passages' contents are clearly interconnected: "Sinbad wouldn't put the lighter

⁶⁵ Smyth 107.

fuel in his mouth” (8). This passage is interrupted by another one which describes Paddy playing with fire and the burning of the barn until the next passage makes it clear that Sinbad’s mouth was, in fact, forced open and his mouth was burnt:

“Sinbad’s lips were covered in scabs because of the lighter fuel” (15).

Doyle uses these strategies as the means of capturing the disrupted quality of the child’s mind, as well as the means of establishing certain events through which the reader is invited to assemble Paddy’s character and psyche. The use of digressions, as well as brevity of the chapters and their snapshot quality accentuate the dissimilarity between adult’s and child’s perception of the importance of certain information or memory. The naivety and unconditional absorbability of information is well illustrated in the example of Uncle Eddie’s death above.

Out of these descriptions also comes a picture of the Clarke family. At the beginning, the reader observes nothing suspicious, the mother is at home looking after her four children and the household, while the father commutes to work. Curiously enough, we never learn his occupation. All we are left with is the fact that he owns plenty of ties suggesting he wears suits to his work. “I looked into the wardrobe. His shoes and ties were there, three pairs of shoes, too many ties, tangles of them” (266).

A relatively ordinary family of four children, only two of whom really enter the story. Catherine and Deirdre are basically too young to be of any interest to Paddy, they only seem to indicate the mother’s occupation at home. The Clarkes seem to fit in their environment of other ‘ordinary’ families living in Barrytown and only slowly do the discrepancies and distinctions begin to appear. First of all, the whole of the family is reading books – one of the first images of the father we get is when

he is reading a book – “My da’s hands were big. [...] He was holding his book with his other hand. [...] The Naked and the Dead” (24); later we learn that Paddy goes to the library regularly – “I went to the library in Baldoyle. I went with my da” (55), and finally – “My ma read books. Mostly at night” (61). Paddy even learns encyclopaedia entries by heart without need for context, the information is consumed:

If your pony was healthy his skin was loose and flexible and if he was sick his skin was tight and hard. The television was invented by John Logie Baird in 1926. He was from Scotland. The clouds that had rain in them were usually called nimbostratus. The capital of San Marino was San Marino. [...] (42-3)

As well as this, the father enjoys explaining new things to Paddy who memorises them and tries them out in practice:

He pressed his thumb down hard on the kitchen table.

- See if you can see the print, he said.

I wasn’t sure.

- The fingerprint, he said. – The thumb.

[...]

- Are they the same? he said.

- Yours is bigger.

- Besides that.

I said nothing. I wasn’t sure.

- They’re all different, he said. – No one’s fingerprints are the same as someone else’s. Did you know that? (10-11)

Gradually, Paddy describes the families of his friends and neighbours and through them differentiates and defines the position and situation of his family:

I thought about it: she was the best ma around here. She really was; I didn't just reach that conclusion because she was mine. She was. Ian McEvoy's was nice but she smoked; there was a smell of it off her. Kevin's one frightened me. Liam and Aidan didn't have any. I thought about Missis Kiernan a lot but she wasn't a ma because she didn't have any children. She was only Missis because she was married to Mister Kiernan. My ma was best of them and all the others as well. (257-8)

Stealthily, the idea of disruption of the family is introduced with the glimpses of the tension between mother and father represented by the uneasiness in the communication:

He waited before he answered, always he did, pretended he hadn't heard anything. She was always the one that tried to make them talk. He'd answer just when she'd have to ask again, to change her voice, make it sound angry. It was agony waiting for him. (222)

The family is clearly dysfunctional, though the reasons remain unclear to the reader as they are unclear to Paddy. We are told it is not drink: "I looked at him for a long time, trying to see what was different. [...] He was drunk. It hit me. [...] I was fascinated. He was drunk. It was new. I'd never seen it before" (243-4). Nor is it adultery: "I looked for lipstick on his collar; I'd seen it in *The Man From Uncle*. There wasn't any" (244). The family, or the relationship between the parents, seems to wear itself out on the father's side: "Why didn't da like ma? She liked him; it was him didn't like her. What was wrong with her?" (257). The reader gets the

impression that there are other families emotionally worse off than the Clarkes, but seem to be unable to face the social stigma of a broken family. For instance,

Mister O'Driscoll from the house at the top of the old road didn't live there any more. He wasn't dead either; I'd seen him. Richard Shiel's da sometimes didn't live in their house.

Richard Shiel's said he had to go to a job somewhere –

- Africa.

But I didn't believe him. His ma had a black eye once. Edward Swanwick's ma ran away with a pilot from Aer Lingus. He used to fly low over their house. She never came back. The Swanwicks –

- The ones that are left, said Kevin's ma.

moved away, to Sutton.

We were next. We never saw Edward Swanwick again. We were next. I knew it, and I was going to be ready. (245)

The community itself seems unhealthy in its restrictions of the 'abnormal' and blind acceptance of the ordinary (Uncle Eddie, Kevin's father calling somebody a Tinker, Liam and Aidan's father howling at the moon). These types of behaviour are considered strange if not unhealthy. The parents and neighbours only seem to acknowledge each other while meeting on the street or in the shop, Paddy's mother, though, does not seem to have any friends. The children seem to be allowed to run wild with nobody attempting to direct them, the most attention they get only when they inconvenience somebody ("The gate jumped. Missis Whelan came out. – Get the hell out of it! She said. – Go on; break someone else's gate. [...] She went back in." (248)). The children seem to register this on an unconscious level, by marking

out parents who are nice to them and condemning the nasty ones (“I liked Mister O’Keefe. His first name was Tommy and he let us call him that.” (170)).

The community seems to reflect the situation of the environment it is surrounded by. Barrytown is undergoing a change due to a continuing construction of new houses and the inherent re-shaping of the space. What used to be the territory guarded and explored by Paddy and his friends, changes into a cultivated and so uninteresting suburb. The familiar places are gone and in their place emerge strangers and potential enemies – disruptors of the idyll and usurpers of the space – “Our territory was getting smaller. The fields were patches among the different houses and bits left over where the roads didn’t meet properly” (146). “It was one of the boys from the Corporation houses. [...] I pushed him away from the goal. – This is our field, I said” (120).

Paddy’s various apt observations serve to establish the position of his family and himself in relation to the community; where despite many semblances his family stood out: “There were a lot of venetian blinds in Barrytown but we were the only ones I knew that had them in the back of the house as well as the front. Me and Kevin went around all the houses and there were seventeen blinds in the front windows that were crooked” (163). The families seem to live almost identical lives, at least on the outside, and since they never get inside each other’s house and life, all the differences find their fulfilment in gossip. The children enjoy hearing and spreading the gossip around on their level. Nothing escapes them, they are as heartless and cruel as their parents only dare be behind their closed door.

The Bildungsroman quality of the story is strengthened by the various indications of Paddy’s sensitivity and other characteristics which make him stand out

from his peers. This may be due, as I have suggested earlier, to the fact that the story itself does not cover more than maybe a year of Paddy's life. That it is the 'decisive' and 'formative' year is made clear by a number of statements in which Paddy perceives himself as the protector of his mother and "the man of the house" (281) after his father's departure. Nevertheless, Paddy does not become an adult in the physical sense of the word, though, however he seems to lose his childhood innocence.

Patrick introduces himself as a member of a gang – "*We* were coming down *our* road" (1) (italics mine), as a part of his group of friends led by his best friend Kevin ("If you were going to be best friends with anyone – Kevin – you had to hate a lot of people, the two of you together." (182)). Despite Patrick acting according to the group he is acutely aware of the discriminations and injustices and slowly brings himself to name them and avoid them. He moves from the feeling that "It was good being in the circle, better than where Liam was going" (131) to being alone – "I felt good. I'd started. I looked across at Kevin. I didn't miss him. I was afraid though. I'd no one now. The way I'd wanted it" (253).

Patrick also slowly discovers his senses and they come to play an important role, though probably unconsciously, in formation of his ideas. He notices the world around very minutely and carefully. He defines his parents through their fingerprints (11), hands (24) and feet (103). Thanks to the story of the fingerprints he learns to see things through the magnifying glass and becomes aware of the significance of touch; later he tells us that "There was a smell of church on the desks in our school." and he also tries to taste it – "I licked the desk but it just tasted horrible" (61). Throughout the book he gives us details on the look, smell or feel of his world and that only adds to the image of his fragility and to his openness to every influence and

experience. His sensitivity is also underlined by his fascination with nature which he perceives as a source of entertainment and a natural part of his everyday life.

At the beginning he seems to be as ruthless as Kevin and it is only very slowly that Patrick sheds his self-conscious shell which becomes broken by the falling apart of his family. Though his sensitive part slightly shows in what he dares not speak aloud, it is not until the shift in his approach to Sinbad, that his change becomes apparent. Patrick begins to understand the hypocrisy and opportunism of his so-called friends.

No one had jumped in for me when Charles Leavy had been going to kill me; it took me a while to get used to that, to make it make sense. To make it alright. The quiet, the waiting. All of them looking. Kevin standing beside Seán Whelan. Looking. (186-7)

He starts to realise that he needs to look elsewhere for alliances. Since his family is falling apart due to the imminence of his father's departure, he will be the 'supporter' of his mother. Nevertheless, the other closest tie is revealed to him – that of his brother. "It was a new feeling: something really unfair was happening; something nearly mad." (212) Suddenly he feels the need to protect him from the world - "I was going to look after him." (224), while trying to bring him onto his side, trying to make him see what he sees going on between his parents, so that he is no longer alone:

- Francis?

- What?

- Can you hear them?

He didn't give an answer.

- Can you hear them? Francis?

- Yeah.

That was all. I knew he wouldn't say any more.

[...]

- Francis?

-What?

- That's what it's like every night.

He said nothing.

[...]

- It's only talking, he said. (223)

Finally, the brothers make peace: “– Francis, I said, – d’you want me to put milk in your mug? [...] – Thank you, Patrick, said Sinbad. I didn’t know what to say back. Then I remembered. – You’re welcome” (242-3).

Despite the brothers finding their way to each other, all Patrick’s attempts at saving his parents’ marriage fail. He stays awake all night, pouring water on his pyjamas only to fall asleep in school. He tries hard to discover the fault in either of his parents, tries to understand, until the end, when he comprehends the inevitable when his father hits his mother for the second time. Unlike traditional heroes of the Bildungsroman, Patrick does not need to leave his community in order to discover himself and return; his childhood community abandons him which enables him to see through the duplicity and falseness. This realisation allows him to accept his true self – the sensitive and caring boy. Again, the reconciliation between the returned hero and his abandoned community does not take place, proving the point Kristin Morrison made in her essay “The Political Bildungsroman.” Here, the political aspect of the book is much more subtle, than in The Butcher Boy. Patrick is a healthy boy, with a relatively ‘normal’ family. The only institution that has any influence on him is the school, which, however, does not seem to cause him any problems. On the

contrary, through his constant attempts at preventing the fights of his parents he does more school work than is needed: “I spent ages doing my homework so I could stay up longer. I wrote out passages from my English book and pretended I had to do it. I learnt spellings I hadn’t been given. [...] I came home at Friday lunchtime. – I’m in the best desk. It was true. I’d made no mistakes all week” (191-2).

Patrick’s family seems to occupy an equal place on the social ladder with the majority of the Barrytown – the middle-class. There is no social stigma attached to them, until the separation itself. On the smaller scale, however, the class distinctions appear with relation to the families living in the Corporation houses which represent the working class; while on the other side of the ladder are the Swanwicks who are an upper-middle class representatives. Another of Doyle’s social comments is obvious in the description of the community where the communication above the children’s level is non-existent. Adults communicate only on an everyday basis and their discussions do not reach beyond the local news and gossip. Paddy’s parents talk about their neighbours in terms of commenting upon their misfortunes or social position – “Liam and Aidan’s house was darker than ours, the inside. [...] It wasn’t dirty, the way a lot of people said it was...” (34). This is due to the fact that all the residents have moved into the Barrytown as adults with their families and therefore nobody is connected outside the context of the family and children.

Despite the sharp differences between Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha and The Butcher Boy, the two stories address a similar topic, though their authors choose approaches that are very distant, thus rendering the books seemingly incomparable. Nevertheless, both books are narrated from the child’s perspective and they form a certain mirror image of each other with Patrick remaining on the sane and ‘normal’

side of the spectrum and Francie crossing the border into insanity and abnormality.

The message, however, is the pointing out of the falsity and superficiality of the outwardly friendly (and even caring in the case of The Butcher Boy) environment.

Both stories conform to the notion of the Political Bildungsroman, with neither of the heroes assimilating into the original community, while, nevertheless, being able to define (to at least a certain degree) their own self.

5. READING IN THE DARK: A HAUNTING SECRET

Seamus Deane started as a poet in the 1970s, later established himself as a prominent literary critic and a General Editor of The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing. Reading in the Dark is his first work of fiction which was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize for 1996 and was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the same year.⁶⁶

Reading in the Dark, a fictional memoir with autobiographical origins, has been analysed from the post-colonial perspective (Liam Harte), from the feminist view of the subaltern (Lisa McGonigle), as well as, through Freud's principle of *Nachträglichkeit* (Linden Peach).⁶⁷ All these theories have in common the role which they ascribe to the idea of nationalism and nation underlined by the position of a Catholic boy living in Britain controlled Derry. Despite the undisputable worthiness of these approaches, none of them covers the theme I wish to study – the Bildungsroman quality of the narrative, though all of the critics note the fact that the narrator remains nameless, while Deane himself asserts: “My view of the novel [...] is that it's about a young child who never earns a name. He never achieves sufficient identity [...] to deserve the name or the sense of self he's looking for in relation to his parents.”⁶⁸ Two readings of this statement are possible, the post-colonial search for identity of the colonised and the Bildungsroman search for self and the place in the society. I would like to address the latter through the analysis of the motifs of family and community, with an emphasis on the narrative strategies used.

⁶⁶ “Seamus Deane,” Index of Irish Writers, 15 Aug. 2007
<http://www.irishwriters-online.com/seamusdeane.html>>.

⁶⁷ Liam Harte, “History Lessons: Postcolonialism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*,” Journal of Irish Studies, 30.1 (2000): 150.

⁶⁸ Carol Rumens, “Reading Deane”, Fortnight, July/August 1997: 29.

The story is narrated in retrospect by a first person narrative voice that is adult, therefore older than the protagonist. Despite this fact, the narrator succeeds in preserving many of the childlike qualities both in the manner of narration and the way its content is dealt with. Here, I disagree with Linden Peach who argues: “[...] the language of childhood is important to this novel because it is imaginative [...] However, [...] as the boy-narrator gets older, the language loses some of its figurative energy and generally becomes less vivid.”⁶⁹ In my opinion, the “loss of the figurative energy” is not due to the change of the register only but is closely connected to the maturing of the narrator himself. It is not a question of the “loss” of the childhood language but of the loss of the childhood in general. Also, as the narrator grows older, he becomes more elaborate in the use of language and does not need the imagery as much as a child who often does not know the correct term for what s/he perceives.

Seamus Deane reveals that for him:

the novel [is] having two kinds of narrative. One is the narrative the boy is demanding all the time: *what really happened, what are the facts?* [...]. Then on the other hand [...] the previous generation [...] derived their stories from folklore, from legend, and these stories are very subtly coded ways of dealing with trauma and difficulty. He doesn't recognise at first how these stories actually deal with the very thing that he was trying to pursue...⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Peach 53.

⁷⁰ Rumens 29 (original italics).

This enables a certain polyvocality of the narrative through the number of different characters and the stories they have to tell, as well as, the way they tell them. The double-narrative is embraced through the use of the chapter titles which repeat (Crazy Joe, Grandfather, Katie's story/Katie, Sergeant Burke), while this method also underlines the unseen connection between the folklore stories and the stories of narrator's family secret. The first story in the pair is the "folklore story" with Crazy Joe telling the narrator Larry's story of meeting a banshee on his way home; Katie recounting the story of McLaughlin family; Grandfather's story of killing a policeman is related by a priest at school; while Sergeant Burke states and questions the general suspicion that Eddie is an informer. The second story reconnects the narrator with more hints at the answers to the questions suggested above by Deane.

The briefness of the chapters reflects the character of memories as concise events rather than continuous stories. In spite of this seeming separate existence of each chapter-memory, they are all interconnected by the theme of the secret. Each individual story is pervaded by the search for truth, interposed by the unwillingness of the other characters or the failure to face the truth by the communities in which the narrator moves. The narrator is impeded by the silences of his mother and father, neither of whom are willing to discuss matters connected with uncle Eddie's disappearance though this is changed when father reveals, the only truth he knows, that his brother Eddie was an informer.⁷¹ He is offered the truth encoded in half-stories and legends of Crazy Joe and Aunt Kate. On the community level, the Catholic school which he attends enables the representative of the British rule to fill the air with truth

⁷¹ Seamus Deane, Reading in the Dark (London: Vintage, 1996) 133. All subsequent references are edited in the text.

soaked in ideology (196-8) or the inability to explain “the facts of life” to narrator’s satisfaction (149-56). Even the apparently innocent chapter “Maths Class” ends without the teacher discovering the truth and so punishing the whole class (90-6); while “Religious Knowledge” demands the narrator “to believe [...] without attempting to understand [...]” (179-81). The representatives of the two opposing forces the Bishop and Sergeant Burke are manipulated by the narrator and his accomplice older brother Liam and their versions of truths dressed in the ‘appropriate’ language.

The community is embedded in the old legends and myths and seems to accept, unquestionably, the truth that gets more followers or is repeated more often. This is partly illustrated by the story of haunted families that the children are told by the adults (“Katie’s story” and “Haunted”), in which the whole generations are condemned to suffer for a mistake of their ancestor without any way out except “to die out” (165). The active role of the community, itself, in creation of these myths is obvious through the story of Rory Hannaway, a boy who got killed by a reversing lorry. The narrator is an eye-witness to the accident, however, later on, when he is told the widely believed version in which “young Hannaway had been run over by a police car which had not even stopped,” he fails to assert the truth: “[I] said nothing; somehow this allayed the sense of treachery I had felt from the start” (11-2). This incident seems to be exemplary of the narrator’s continuous failure to speak the truth of his family history.

Nonetheless, the community does not feel the need to challenge the general beliefs expressed in the stories they share. “Once an informer, always an informer” (99) states Sergeant Burke about the widely accepted truth

concerning Eddie. In spite of his delicate position within Eddie's story, he becomes the person to point the narrator in the right direction and makes him question and weigh everything he knows: "Maybe you should ask your mother, now her daddy's got sick – none too soon either" (99). This passage is probably the most complicated one in the book. Jennifer Jeffers asserts:

Burke purposefully wishes to keep the appearance of Eddie-as-informer alive because of his own part to play [...]. Yet, oddly enough, Burke gives the narrator clues to the past – admittedly dull, rough clues that once again lead him to read in the dark. Not only is the narrator facing darkness in terms of finding out information about his family, but he knows that it is considered shameful to believe a policeman.⁷²

The reasons for Sergeant Burke's 'help' with discovering the truth become clearer as the story proceeds. Towards the end, we learn that his two sons are training to be priests (195), information that contrasts with Burke's previous suppressed arrogance towards the Bishop's messenger (114), but which forecasts his later visit of the mother. The visit is catalysed by his plan to retire: "We've got a lot of things on file that I want to clear up and put away for good [...]" (201). He then goes on disclosing previously unknown information about Grandfather killing the wrong policeman, but since the mother "had no voice" and Burke was forced to continue his monologue, it becomes obvious that he also came to find out what remained unclear to him: "He often wondered who that was" (204, 205), hoping the mother would disclose the role she played in the story. It is apparent that he has taken his guess and does not really need her to confirm that it was her who warned the

⁷² Jeffers 125.

informer McIlheny. Despite his wooing her into talking about it, she does not succumb. Nevertheless, she finds herself able to talk about it to the protagonist, though it takes her four years:

It happened in December, 1957, when I was still at school; but it was four years later, when I was starting university, before she told me. And then, I think, it was only because I was going away to France for the summer vacation and she had this notion that I might never come back, or get killed in an accident. (202)

This is the only moment in the story where she shows any action in order to make the secret known. Nevertheless, her reasons remain unclear and the situation never repeats. On the contrary, she shuts herself off again and perseveres in watching the protagonist's actions with suspicion.

To understand the origins and incentives of the behaviour of the mother and the rest of the family, as well as, the impacts and outcomes and connect it to the use of the narrative; it is important to retrace the story to its beginning. The book opens with a chapter entitled "Stairs," though its more exact title would be the Ghost. The protagonist and his mother are introduced, while in the background the plot of the secret is foreshadowed by the presence of the ghost on the stairs that only the mother can feel. She tries to protect her son from being affected: "It's bad enough me feeling it; I don't want you to as well." The relationship between them is established by protagonist's words: "I loved her then" (5). The second chapter brings in the rest of the children in the family together with a revelation of the magician's secret and it concludes with the protagonist asking, as if in a premonition, "How could they all be so sure?" (8)

Finally, the third chapter finds the father surrounded by his own silence in the face of his brother's story. "There were great events they returned to over and over, like the night of the big shoot-out at the distillery between the IRA and the police, when Uncle Eddie disappeared. That was in April 1922" (9). This becomes the most important piece of knowledge as Eddie's story creates both the background and the central stage of the 'memoir.' Each of the enlightened family members (it is hard to establish how little the protagonist's siblings would be aware of, therefore I will only account for the father, mother, protagonist and his older brother Liam) is determined/shaped by his/her knowledge of various parts of the story and in the end the whole family is stigmatised and damaged by it.

The plot of the family secret is interwoven in the flickering memories of the child-narrator. Each chapter brings coded clues to the truth and possible explanations of the characters' behaviour in the light of what they know. Each chapter needs to be read in the context of the secret, there is no coincidence in what is being told, it all slowly comes together like an elaborate jigsaw puzzle. Not everything is clear immediately, only as the story unfolds and both the reader and the narrator learn more and more, do all the pieces begin to be vividly connected. The narrator collects the direct hints at the secret together with indirect implications of the more general nature usually granted by his older brother Liam. Liam is almost a more grounded second half of the narrator who is gradually blinded by the knowledge he possesses and is unable to share. Liam's knowledge of the secret is undoubtedly more shallow and probably based on assumptions, nevertheless, it allows him to come to rescue the narrator from the various dangers he finds himself in (the stigma of an

informer, beating by Grenaghan) (109, 161). He also becomes a quiet counterpart to the narrator when the parts of the story are revealed (“Field of the Disappeared,” “Father”) (52, 131).

At first, the everyday stories are the keepers of the clues and seem to form the thread of the secret. But, the more is revealed, the more the secret becomes formative and the stories that unfold are the direct results of the knowledge the characters possess. The secret eats away at those who know and so the narrator is affected, accidentally, when he gets into trouble with Sergeant Burke and becomes another informer of the family in the eyes of the community: “Just like your uncle, like the whole lot o’ ye” (98). He is also confronted by his parents who are ashamed of his conduct and the tension his confrontation with the father brings results in the destruction of father’s rose garden (104). Ostracism from all the members of the family follows. This attitude reflects the Bildungsroman structure where the protagonist struggles to find a place in his community and is forced to leave in order to discover his own identity in relation to others.

Nevertheless, it is the mother who suffers the most, as she had an active role to play in the secret story and in addition to that is the keeper of the entire truth, though not from the beginning. She chooses to keep her secret from her husband, presumably, in order to preserve the family peace. This attempt, however, fails when she learns the amount of blame that lies on her family’s side after her father confesses to be the dispatcher of the death sentence over Eddie. This information casts a spell on her and she begins to “move[d] as though there were pounds of pressure bearing down on her” (139). Slowly, she builds up a protective wall around her of silence bordering on madness. She

drives other family members away from her. Only the protagonist has an understanding of her reasons – “I could understand, but only in part. There was something missing” (141). What was missing is discovered a number of pages later – “She had been in love with someone else, not quite my father” (146). This realisation complicates the matter and itself becomes more complicated when the narrator finds out that the object of his mother’s love is the traitor McIlhenny. His mother’s secret and her knowledge of the other secrets makes the family dysfunctional. Her choice to preserve ‘the peace’ in the family by letting the father believe in Eddie’s guilt seems illogical until her feelings for McIlhenny are revealed. Though her relationship with the father seems to heal towards the end of their lives and the narrator wonders “Was it her way of loving him, not telling him?” (189); he is caught in a trap by his mother’s hostility since she perceives him as a threat to the hard-won stability she is suffering to retain. “[My mother] kept up a low-intensity warfare” (215). The father is “puzzled” (216) by the situation but unable to do anything about it. Since the narrator decides never to speak his mother’s secret his “loyal[ty] to my mother made me disloyal to my father. In case I should ever be tempted to tell him all I knew, I stayed at arm’s length from him and saw him notice but could say nothing to explain” (225). Thus, the protagonist is distanced from both of his parents, forever trying to find a way to reassure and console them both, and forever failing.

The father, on the other hand, is affected most by what he does not know. He is a passive and ignorant sufferer of the truths the others know, but he is unaware of. He cares for the mother with patience and love when she loses her voice. He seems to consider all the injustice that happens to him and the

members of his family as the price that needs to be paid for his brother Eddie's betrayal. Probably thanks to this submission and resignation he is the 'strongest' family member in the sense of coping with various situations that come up. Though, Deane himself noted: "The father is innocent, in a way, but I'm using that ambiguity: how much does he really know? Is that innocence of someone who preserved it by not asking?"⁷³ Father remains a mysterious figure hidden behind his unquestioning patience and resignation.

Like the protagonists of The Butcher Boy and Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, the hero of Reading in the Dark undergoes a Bildungsroman struggle to find a place in the family and community. Similarly, the book does not allow the reader an ending which would make the protagonist's position clear. Nevertheless, the various trials he is subjected to and the emotional development they bring, present an insight into the build up of the story itself and its use of the Bildungsroman material.

The protagonist believes that the success depends on the uncovering of the family secrets. He relies on the past to resolve his future. He fails to notice the warning signs provided by the stories of other haunted families. He seems to become a scapegoat for the family, the chosen one in whom the truth shall be preserved and possibly used for betterment of his own life, though he undoubtedly does not succeed in that. We do not learn how much his siblings are affected or even aware of the troubled history of the family, though the fact that they all are named might serve as an indication of their absolution. Nevertheless, the question remains whether it was at all possible for the

⁷³ Rumens 30.

narrator to untie the knot and deliver the family from its burden though “he could only have done what he did, given his sensibility, given his training, given the way in which he was taught, given his eagerness to know the family history so that he could situate himself and his parents in it.”⁷⁴ He succeeds in pinning his mother down, but he never manages to do so with his father. He is obsessed by collecting information, but he has no knowledge of how to handle it further on. In the Bildungsroman sense he is undergoing a formative struggle with his environment. Instead of leaving the community which becomes restrictive and hostile to him, he tries to escape into the family past in order to establish a place on his own within that history. Blinded, he walks straight into the trap, the more he learns the more trouble it brings. Even though he remains living inside his family, he no longer belongs to it. He is singled out and branded by what he knows and the resolution not to say anything does not bring redemption:

My mother was increasingly distant from everyone; slowly slipping out of our grasp, slick with hostility. Her anger stayed in her eyes when she was speaking, but when she was silent an empty panic took its place. I stole for her a golden iris from a flower stall in Chamberlain Street and walked into the kitchen, handed it to her and said to her, ‘Don’t worry any more. I’ll never say a word. Don’t worry about it. It’s all past.’ She took the flower with its three heads and three petals on each. ‘Look,’ she says, tearing the petals off, one at a time, and letting them drop on the floor:
‘If you want to, you can tell,’
One petal dropped off.
‘If you don’t, that’s just as well.’

⁷⁴ Rumens 30.

Another swirled on to the linoleum.

'Get it over, get it done,

Father, lover, husband, son.' (216-7)

There is no escape for the mother and the same is true for her son. He may try to get around the secret, but it will always be there, his life has been infected by it once and for all. He may try and run away from it to the university but when he comes back he only discovers a reminder of that secret in the body of a young British soldier who dies on his parents' doorstep. "Not so long after, a second heart attack killed my father in his sleep" (232). Thus, the possibility of letting him know the truth and liberating him from the stigma he carried all his life is over. Though, the image of a young gipsy boy on a horse might be read as a symbol of father's final liberation, the ultimate atmosphere is that of a shadow hanging over the protagonist forever: "I went down the stairs to make tea. In the hallway, I heard a sigh and looked back to the lobby window. There was no shadow there." Yet the paragraph and the book conclude with the image of the mother who "would climb to her bedroom in silence, pausing at the turn of the stairs to stare out at the spire [...]" (233). Despite the only person who could in any way benefit from the disclosure of the secret being dead, there is no liberation for those who are left behind. No reconciliation between the protagonist and his mother takes place, he does not manage to earn a name. He fails forever to find and define his place and role in either the community or his own family. A certain stasis remains behind, the secret is neither forgotten nor revealed and the protagonist is arrested in this in-between space of knowing yet being unable to tell.

The protagonist comes from a family which is marked by its past, thus is both formed and deformed by it, finds himself branded by the society and misled by the school and religion. His fate is predetermined by the 'faults' of his ancestors and he, either because or thanks to his sensitivity or need for justice, finds himself trapped in a punitive circle. Since he fails to find his way out, as that would imply telling the secret and hurting his mother and potentially his father too, he does not fulfil the Bildungsroman aim of finding his own place in the society/family and remains a shadow in the window hanging over his mother and unable to find the courage either to speak or to forget.

6. ANGELA'S ASHES: A CLICHÉD MEMOIR

Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes is the only book of the four analysed in this thesis which openly declares its authenticity and factual value. It is a story of Francis/Frank, born in New York in 1930, to Irish parents, with whom he returns to Ireland at the age of four and where he spends his whole childhood trying to return to the United States. The family goes through innumerable hardships, deaths and humiliations from which the only escape is Francis' return to America which closes the book leaving the reader wondering what the title itself means. Nevertheless, the title gets explained in the follow-up 'Tis published three years later.

With regard to the known facts of Frank McCourt's life in the United States where he earned a degree from New York University and later from Brooklyn College and spent his life teaching English,⁷⁵ Angela's Ashes offers a formation story with an ending of success

attached to it. Thus, from the point of Bildungsroman the story will stand apart from the previously studied books, though the fact that it offers two possible readings problematise the seemingly obvious connections with the traditional forms of Bildungsroman.

From the angle of the narrative, it is necessary to address the autobiographical perspective and study it in relation to the fictional, or liminal works of the previous chapters in order to establish the points of contact on which further study can be based. Similarly to Seamus Deane's Reading in the Dark, not even Angela's Ashes can be simply classified as 'pure'

⁷⁵ "Frank McCourt," Wikipedia, 14 August 2007
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_McCourt>

autobiography and this problematisation has been noted by Roy Foster in his essay, where he remarks: "...the volume was at first alternately identified as fiction and as autobiography, but by the time of publication it had settled down as 'a memoir'."⁷⁶ McCourt himself never opens up the question of authenticity and whenever he answers questions concerning his life, they come out of the book. Nevertheless, through various discrepancies and contradictions in the storyline the absolute factual value is undermined. As well as this, on the level of premeditation of the story structure Angela's Ashes works similar to the previously studied books, with the only difference being in the announcement of the contents.

When I look back on my childhood [...]. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood.

[...] nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.⁷⁷

Thus, already on the first page the reader is informed about what to expect and what will form the storyline of the book. McCourt makes sure not to leave anything out what, however, becomes reflected in the fragmentary nature of the narrative and brevity of multiple incidents. Many, if not all, of the characters serve a particular purpose, usually to allow for a certain characteristic of Francis' to show. This also enables McCourt to construct many of his characters as 'types', which enter the story, enrich it with their

⁷⁶ Roy F. Foster, "Selling Irish Childhoods," The Irish Story (London: Penguin, 2001) 166.

⁷⁷ Frank McCourt, Angela's Ashes (London: Flamingo, 1999) 1. All following quotations are indicated in the text.

peculiarities, interact with Francis and disappear. Such is the role of Mr. Timoney a Buddhist and an avid reader who introduces Francis to Jonathan Swift and ends up in a City Home where Francis meets him a couple of years later broken and lonesome (196-201 and 260). Apart from the role of the ‘enhancers’ of Francis’ character, the ‘type’ characters also fulfil an important role as possessors of formative experience. Mr. Timoney establishes Francis’ love of books while. For example, Theresa Carmody, the tuberculosis-stricken Protestant girl, provides the first sexual experience and through her death, also, connects it with guilt (378-81). These narrative tools come to underline the Bildungsroman form of the story through their formative qualities.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to take a look at the use of the narrator and the language. Due to the autobiographical claim of the book, the personalities of the narrator, protagonist and author should be undifferentiated. This postulation, however, is weakened by the modification of the use of language, which is particularly blatant in the opening pages, where the storyline is introduced by an openly adult and retrospective voice. The tone, however, suddenly changes after the introduction of protagonist’s parents and their respective destinies.

I’m in a playground on Classon Avenue in Brooklyn with my brother Malachy. He’s two, I’m three. We’re on the seesaw.

Up, down, up, down.

Malachy goes up.

I get off.

Malachy goes down. Seesaw hits the ground. He screams. His hand is on his mouth and there’s blood. Oh, God. Blood is bad. My mother will kill me. (11)

From this point on the language of the narrative follows the age of its protagonist. Thus, the narrative also follows the naïve perception of a child which chooses only some aspects of life as ‘important’ and follows them with avid interest. The repetitive quality of descriptions is connected to the chamber pots, lavatories, the act of defecating, male sexual organs, girl’s naked bodies, “the excitement” (293). Through this combination of a child’s naïve voice and themes usually considered taboo, or, at least sensitive, McCourt introduces a particular humour into the book which is often mixed with ‘familiar’ Irish jokes. For example, the use of somebody’s being dropped on the head as an excuse and explanation for any strange behaviour: “you must remember that people dropped on their heads can be a bit peculiar” (2). It is necessary, however, to identify many of the humorous devices as cliché serving to enrich the texture of the story, as well as, answer to the expectations of its primary audience in the United States. This perspective offers to read the whole book as a metanarrative of the American-Irish **heritage**.

The McCourt family meets the ‘standards’ of the previous families discussed and is easily definable as dysfunctional. Nevertheless, despite obvious resonance with the Brady family, where the father is an alcoholic and a musician while mother is psychologically disturbed and in the end unable to cope, the use of this theme in the two books is strongly discordant. In *The Butcher Boy* the image of the family serves as an instrument of social critique and one of the means of deepening the characteristic of the protagonist. While in *Angela’s Ashes*, the depiction of the family presents the type-cast group of characters meeting the standards announced in the opening passage quoted

above. The McCourt family conforms to the stereotypes attached to the representation of an Irish family of that particular era.. There are no surprising twists and everything is directed towards one goal, the sympathy of the reader. The introduction of his parents' destinies shows two 'good' people caught up in unfavourable circumstances, whether they be meant as a joke, certainly Francis seems to use them as an excuse for their failures; which forced them into the situation they find themselves in later in the book. "[A]s a wee lad [my] poor father was dropped on his head. It was an accident, he was never the same after, and you must remember that people dropped on their heads can be a bit peculiar" (2). In addition to that, he is from the North and thus liable to an "odd manner" (7). The mother was born "a time straddler, born with her head in the New Year and her arse in the Old" (5). This recurrent motif of predetermination finds its climax with Francis discovering that he is a "bastard" and "[a]ll bastards are doomed" (294). Thus, the family is caught up in a circle of constant and worsening misfortunes which seem to be beyond their influence. The dysfunctionality, then, may only be circumstantial and were their situation different, their lives may have been as well. Linked with the theme of the family is the motif of 'home' which seems to remain associated with "a place with a decent lavatory [where] [w]e'll have electric light and why shouldn't we? Weren't Frank and Malachy born to it in America where everyone has it?" (252). The dream of returning to America becomes the only driving force behind Francis' actions after he leaves Laman Griffin's house and finds himself stealing food to survive. "If I starve I'll never have the strength for my telegram boy job at the post office, which means I'll have no money to put back all that bread and milk and no way of saving to go to America and if I can't go to

America I might as well jump into the River Shannon” (349). America also provides for the circular structure of the story which begins and ends there after Francis manages to save enough money for the transfer and fulfils his dream of leaving Ireland for the American ‘paradise’ embodied in Uncle Pa’s prediction: “He’ll come back in a few years with a new suit and fat on his bones like any Yank and a lovely girl with white teeth hangin’ from his arm” (420). America embodies the paradise place which, when reached, will take care of Francis and everything will be just as it should from then on. Therefore, it serves as an antipode to the miserable conditions of Ireland which could be read as a purgatory phase, preceding the arrival to paradise. This opposition also underlines the author’s point of departure concerning the desired readership and the sentiments the story was supposed to arouse. It is beyond dispute that the book was primarily directed at the North American market drawing on the long tradition of warm relationships and strong diaspora. Thus, it sets out to meet the expectations of that particular group of the readers with the “top of the morning” clichés. Nevertheless, it also answers to the Irish American identity of Frank McCourt, who, in the course of the book, never really stopped to perceive and be perceived as an American, though singing Irish rebel songs into the bargain and ready to die for Ireland. “One of the boys said, God, are they Americans? and Mam said, They are” (56).

Because of this peculiarity attached to Francis and his brothers, with added value of his father being from Northern Ireland, they fail to fit into the community, which, on its own, is neither inviting nor helpful. Thus, answering to its traditional Bildungsroman role of a driving force behind protagonist’s desire to leave. The community of Limerick is strictly divided according to a

hierarchy that the people themselves invent and observe. There are different classes of poverty following the type of assistance the concerned receive and the shame which is attached to it.

Mrs. Meagher is in a constant state of shame over the rags they wear and so desperate she goes down to the Dispensary for the public assistance. Mam says that's the worst thing that could happen to any family. It's worse than going on the dole, it's worse than going to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, it's worse than begging on the streets with the tinkers and the knackers. (256)

Though the McCourts climb down that ladder of poverty, steadily, the mother reassures her children, as well as herself, that "there are always people worse off and we can surely spare a little from what we have" (317). The relationships within the community are also strained, despite numerous mentions of borrowing food or tools people are marked by envy, pride or shame which often results in open hostility. "In every lane there's always someone not talking to someone or everyone not talking to someone or someone not talking to everyone" (147). The community as a theme does not get beyond the role of the background against which Francis' adventures take shape. The characters seem to come and go, stay only as long as there is something interesting to be told about them in order to keep the colourfulness of the story and later be mentioned as if by the way to inform the reader of their end. Thus, they come to represent certain types, as was illustrated above through the example of Mr. Timoney.

Religion and school offer another theme on the background of which the lives of Francis and his family take shape. Again, these institutions serve as

stereotypical representations of the situation in Ireland unavoidably recorded in contemporary Irish fiction due to their influential power in Irish society. Religion, interestingly enough, becomes an issue only after the family moves to Ireland and suddenly both the parents, though father in particular, make it part of their everyday life. “There is a picture on the wall by the range of a man with long brown hair and sad eyes” (56). Though Francis sees a picture of Jesus Christ for the first time at the age of four and, according to the story, his parents have not been to church since his christening, he is soon to catches up with religion and at the age of eight his father decides to make an altar boy out of him. “He takes the part of the priest for he has the whole Mass in his head and I have to know the responses” (165). Unfortunately, Catholic Church proves to be an elitist organisation and Francis lacks the ‘appropriate’ background to be either an altar boy or a secondary school student with the Christian Brothers despite him “have[ing] a mind for the priesthood” (336). Inevitably, Joyce’s Portrait comes to mind and which can be identified as one of a number of remnants from what McCourt called “a James Joyce phase, A Portrait of the Artist phase.”⁷⁸ Later on Francis considers becoming a missionary, “of the White Fathers, missionaries to the nomadic Bedouin tribes and chaplains to the French Foreign Legion (338). There are many humorous accounts of confessions and religious education, First Communion and Confirmation.

The school strengthens the image of class system, poverty, religious and nationalist bigotry. Different schools serve different social classes. “We go to school through lanes and back streets so that we don’t meet the respectable boys who go to the Christian Brothers’ School or the rich ones who go to the Jesuit

⁷⁸ “Frank McCourt Interview,” Academy of Achievement, 19 Jun. 1999, 15 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/mcc1int-5>>.

school, Crescent College” (316). The teachers’ children belong to the “respectable” and even when Francis is recommended to the Christian Brothers, in order for him to continue his education, the answer he receives is: “We don’t have room for him” (337). This event is a climax of a number of occasions in which the reader is reminded of his outstanding brightness and, though the practice of corporal punishment is common, Francis does not mention it even once. On the contrary, he is complimented by master Hoppy O’Halloran: “You have a mind for the priesthood, my boy, or politics” (336). And he continues by “tell[ing] the class it’s a disgrace that boys like McCourt, Clarke, have to hew wood and draw water. [...] You must get out of this country boys. Go to America, McCourt. Do you hear me?” (338). Hence, Francis’ fate is anticipated so that it answers to the overall bearing of the story which does follow an announced structure and therefore puts emphasis on the fulfilment rather than a gradual accomplishment through play of suspense and surprise adopted in Deane’s Reading in the Dark where nothing except for the revelation of the secret is anticipated. Thus, it is possible to study Angela’s Ashes as reaching its climax through Francis’ arrival to America, while the protagonist of Reading in the Dark goes through the catharsis of uncovering the secret without any releasing impact on the family’s life.

The process of education is based on repetition and memorisation of what the teacher says. Questions are not welcomed and the teachers do not care whether the pupils understand anything they are trying to teach them or not; the focus is on having the poorest children in school as some form of formal charity since they are lost cases anyway:

He (the master) tells us we're hopeless, the worst class he ever had for First Communion but as sure as God made little apples he'll make Catholics of us, he'll beat the idler out of us and the Sanctifying Grace into us. [...] You're here to learn the catechism and do what you're told. You're not here to be asking questions. There are too many people wandering the world asking questions and that's what has us in the state we're in and if I find any boy in this class asking questions I won't be responsible for what happens. (130)

The masters are bored, moody and irritable, therefore, it is of essence to learn their 'weak points' as soon as possible, in order to avoid them.

One master will hit you if you don't know that Eamon de Valera is the greatest man that ever lived. Another master will hit you if you don't know that Michael Collins was the greatest man that ever lived. [...] If you ever say anything good about Oliver Cromwell they'll all hit you. (85)

The quotation might also serve as a brief excursion into the Irish history covering the Treaty and anti-Treaty parties in the Civil War and naming the personification of all 'evil' Oliver Cromwell. Introducing another familiar quality of Irish reality bridging the theme of education to that of nationalism which, however, can be said to a similar pattern and therefore will only be touched upon it briefly. It is the father who is the representative of this sentiment constantly repeating "I did my bit" (49) and asking his sons to sing the patriotic songs and asking them "[y]ou'll die for Ireland, won't you boys? (37). This representation, again, answers to the expectations and stereotypes of Ireland and the Irish.

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, the theme of Bildungsroman is particularly strongly developed in this book, since it is encoded in the circular structure with the departure and return to America. Also, the story is rich in various formative experiences and encounters, which however, are too brief and too clichéd to register fully in the sense of the ‘traditional’ Bildungsroman and get lost among other incidents (Mr. Timoney, Theresa Carmody). The United States of America, the city of New York in particular, provide the driving force of the protagonist’s actions. This perception, however, allows for two distinct readings of the Bildungsroman theme. The first opens the possibility of comprehending his leaving of America at the age of three as corresponding to that of a classical Bildungsroman hero leaving his home in order to mature; there are some obvious similarities coupled with obvious dissimilarities. The main dissimilarity being Francis’ constant longing for return to America and disregard for leaving his family behind, thus does not fulfil the condition of ‘returning’ to the community the hero is coming from, though this may be arguable since Francis was born in America and his early community was that of the Leibowitz and MacAdorey family (34), a multicultural society as opposed to the homogeneity of Limerick. This reading embraces his ‘stay’ in Ireland as the main formative power which enables Francis to grow up and become a man. The stories of gaining various knowledge and skills, as well as, those of discovering things and being able to understand them would serve to support this reading. The fact that Frank McCourt, the writer and the autobiographical part of Francis – the protagonist,

succeeds in finding his place in American society and becomes a teacher and a writer, also supports this reading.⁷⁹

The second reading, however, would need to dismiss the first three years of Francis' life in New York as separate from those following in Limerick and consider them as part of his 'childhood' within his community. Accordingly, his departure for America would be the act of abandoning his community in order to become an adult and thus the Bildungsroman formative experience would be comprised in the last six pages and the second volume of the memoir *'Tis*, which, however is not part of my study. Nevertheless, accepting this reading would facilitate the perception of this story (with the help of the factual knowledge of McCourt's ensuing life) as a Political Bildungsroman since Frank/Francis does not return to Ireland and thus deserts his own community. The acceptance of *Angela's Ashes* as a Political Bildungsroman, is problematic, since, according to Kristin Morrison's definition, in it: "[f]amily, country, beloved, all this has failed, no new acceptable society emerges, the young man finds he has only himself."⁸⁰ Francis/Frank, however, finds, not only an "acceptable" but a 'perfect' society which enables him to discover and affirm him self.⁸¹ Thus, McCourt seems to transcend the 'boundaries' of Political Bildungsroman and flirt with utopia through his idealistic and idyllic perception and representation of United States and anything connected to it. The words 'idealistic' and 'idyllic' suggest the overall inclination of the story itself, ironic as it may sound since it is concerned with poverty and suffering in general. Still, the story follows the life of an 'ideal' character, a boy which manages to come through unmarked person, in the moral sense, despite his many mistakes and

⁷⁹ See autobiographical note in *Angela's Ashes*.

⁸⁰ Morrison 143.

⁸¹ Morrison 141.

faults. Francis is an ultimately likeable character, he gradually manages to embody a high number of virtues, as well as, becomes a prototype of an ideal US citizen. Literary devices are used to serve this goal, to display Francis as a troubled and beleaguered individual who strives and succeeds against the odds in becoming a talented and generous man. The narrative strategies used follow the pattern of enabling his various virtues and formative experiences to come through the many obstacles, injuries and injustices thrown in his way. This, also, seems to shape the approach to the autobiographical memoir which gives way to a more fictional version, since that shift enabled McCourt to present himself, through Francis – the character, as an ideal and close to perfect individual. The reason for McCourt to reshape the boundaries of Political Bildungsroman lies in its requirement of the hero to “remain[s] essentially solitary,”⁸² which would go against the general likeability and humanity of Francis. Both mentioned qualities demand a community in which they can be exercised.

Angela's Ashes serves as a counterpoint to the entire study, thanks to its unparalleled popular success seconded by the Pulitzer prize in 1997, both confirming the successful accomplishment of the initially embraced orientation towards the American audience. The main difference between Angela's Ashes and the other books is apparent in the approach to the commonly addressed themes which are subjected to different treatments. While, The Butcher Boy, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha and Reading in the Dark, each introduce specific innovative approaches Angela's Ashes draws upon the ‘traditional’ in the shape

⁸² Morrison 143.

of stereotypes and clichés, which, undoubtedly, does not effect its readability nor humour, but, nevertheless, sets it apart.

7. CONCLUSION

The approach and use of Bildungsroman in the context of Irish contemporary literature is subject to lively development and invention on the behalf of the writers, thus offering an interesting and wide field of study for the literary criticism. This study of four representative works serves only as an introduction into the subject and does not, by far, cover the whole area. Nevertheless, Patrick McCabe's The Butcher Boy, Roddy Doyle's Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, Seamus Deane's Reading in the Dark and Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes manage to cover and demonstrate the variety and richness of this genre in Irish literature. Each of the writers tackles the subject with distinctive innovation, each picking a different theme as the centre of their respective novels.

In the narrative domain, the main unifying point would be the uncompromising use of the first-person narrative which serves to render the story convincing through the direct connection between the protagonist and the narrator. Also, the use of the retrospect narration is common and announces the hinted at continuation of the story and life of the protagonist, beyond the scope of the narrative itself, thus strengthening the veracity for the second time. This, of course, does not mean that the writers aim at presenting their fictional stories (with the exception of Angela's Ashes) as true, however, the believability of the narrative and the capacity of the reader to empathise with the protagonist depends on the tools mentioned above. Another reinforcement of the storyline can be found in the themes addressed in all four books: the family, community and institutions; which seem to become characteristic trademarks of an Irish

coming-of-age story. Yet again, the use of the same themes does not affect the contrasting approach to them, quite the contrary. Each of the writers chooses to address those themes for different reasons, be it a social critique (The Butcher Boy), carrying of the plot (Reading in the Dark), underlying of the ordinary (Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha) or inducement of sympathy readers (Angela's Ashes); thus, ensuring original and dissimilar outcomes.

As well as, the diversity of the narrative techniques, the classification of all four books as belonging to the Bildungsroman genre proves problematic. Despite them dealing with the transformation of a child into an adult, the perception and the understanding of that transition differs, thus challenging the traditional requirements of the genre and necessitating formulation of new ones. Here, in particular, the theory of a Political Bildungsroman articulated by Kristin Morrison, has proved relevant, identifying the main shift from the 'classical' Bildungsroman in British context to the specific circumstances of the contemporary Irish form. Interestingly enough, even with the differences of approach, all four novels prove liable to the definition of the political Bildungsroman, thus offering another point of interconnection. However, it would be impossible to ignore the inherent distinctions which might be the results of the difference of approach in more general terms. These distinctions require the broadening and adjustment of the definition of the Bildungsroman, in order to cover all the aspects of the four novels.

I would like to conclude by stressing the importance of taking into account the differences, rather than the similarities of the subject works, to prevent the possible narrowing down of the variety of aspects, or even removing those which do not follow the definition. Through the acceptance and

analysis of the variety, the indisputable qualities of the cotemporary Irish Bildungsroman can be identified and distinguished, thus opening up new areas of study.

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APPENDIX: ČESKÉ SHRNUÍ

NARATIVNÍ POSTUPY A TÉMATA ROMÁNU FORMOVÁNÍ VE ČTYŘECH SOUČASNÝCH IRSKÝCH DÍLECH

Současná irská literatura nabízí nepřeborné množství námětů ke studiu jak v kontextu západní literární tradice jako takové, tak i v úzce specifickém kontextu jednotlivých literárních žánrů. Přestože se irský román vyvíjel souběžně se svým britským protějškem, je snadné identifikovat a vymezit prvky, které jsou mu přednostně vlastní. Motivy rodiny, komunity, náboženství či nacionalismu jsou nepostradatelným tématem značného množství děl, a proto tvoří základní skupinu analýzy narativních postupů. Souběžně s těmito motivy se ve své práci zaměřuji i na používání vypravěče v první osobě a jeho propojení se žánrem románu formování, který je zkoumán ve světle teorie Kristin Morrisonové, která ve svém eseji Political Bildungsroman vyčleňuje irský román formování 80. a 90. let s ohledem na specifika týkající se jeho zakončení.

Zatímco „tradiční“ Bildungsroman končí hrdinovým nalezením a přijmutím svého místa ve společnosti, z níž odešel kvůli potřebě objevení sebe sama, Morrisonová tvrdí, že hrdina irského románu se odmítne začlenit do své komunity a místo své role ve společnosti dává přednost napojení se na „něco hluboko uvnitř sebe“¹. Její předpoklad ale vychází z románů, které pracují s historickým pozadím a fakty, a tak bylo nutné tuto pozici obohatit o sociální a

¹ Kristin Morrison, “The Political Bildungsroman,” Troubled Histories, Troubled Fictions: Twentieth Century Anglo-Irish Prose, eds. Theo D’haen and José Laners (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995) 141 (můj překlad).

společenský rozměr, který nachází vyjádření právě ve mnou zkoumaných dílech.

Pro pochopení inovativního rozměru teorie Kristin Morrisonové je potřeba definovat i „tradiční“ román formování. Ten „zachytává formování hrdiny do momentu, kdy přestává být zaměřený na sebe a začne se orientovat na společnost“.²

I přes množství styčných bodů, které byly uvedeny výše, každý ze zkoumaných románů s nimi pracuje svým vlastním způsobem, a tak je nutno přistupovat k nim individuálně.

Patrick McCabe – Řeznický kluk

Příběh řeznického kluka je od začátku komplikován časovou roztržičností. Vyprávění začíná na konci příběhu a odvíjí se retrospektivně, navíc je zpochybněn jak věk vypravěče, tak i období, které od popisovaných událostí uplynulo. Vypravěčem a hlavním hrdinou v jedné osobě je kluk Francie, jehož důvěryhodnost je neustále podryvána skrze postupné projevy psychopatické poruchy. McCabe zároveň využívá Francieho rodinu a prostředí malého městečka a nesčetných institucí k vyjádření společenské kritiky, která staví Francieho postavu společně s jeho činy do jiného světla. Podobným způsobem funguje i Francieho vnímavost vůči jiným lidem i věcem, která se často projevuje v poetickém jazyce. Všechny tyto prostředky mají za následek, že čtenářovy sympatie se bezvýhradně kloní na stranu nemocného, násilnického a okouzlujícího řeznického kluka.

² Roy Pascal, *The German Novel* (Toronto: Toronto Univeristy, 1956) 11.

Z pohledu románu formování Řeznický kluk nabízí originální zpracování; Francieho postava ani vzdáleně nepřipomíná tradičního hrdinu, a tak nabízí možnost nových interpretací. Francie neopouští svoji komunitu za účelem objevování své identity a místa ve společnosti, ale je ze společnosti vykázán, jelikož neodpovídá jejím představám, a stává se tak pro ni nepotřebným až nežádoucím. I přesto je ale možné Francieho úděl interpretovat jako hledání sebe sama a závěr knížky jako nalezení „něčeho hluboko uvnitř sebe“³.

Roddy Doyle – Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

Na rozdíl od Řeznického kluka se příběh Paddyho Clarka neodvíjí na základě retrospektivních vzpomínek, ale probíhá ve stejné době, v jaké je vyprávěn, což mu přidává autentičnost a energii. Vypravěč a hrdina Paddy je desetiletý kluk z napohled obyčejné rodiny, která se ovšem v průběhu vyprávění rozpadá. Na pozadí této skutečnosti je divák vtažen do dění skrze specifické vnímání a chápání kluka. Tento prostředek, podobně jako Francieho psychóza, určuje a přetváří čtenářův postoj, který nemá k dispozici žádný jiný úhel pohledu. Rodina, komunita a škola dokreslují prostředí, které se má na první pohled jevit téměř idylicky obyčejně, ale na pohled druhý je sterilní a neosobní.

Podobně jako Francie ani Paddy nesplňuje předpoklady tradičního hrdiny románu formování. Jeho příběh se odehrává v průběhu jednoho roku, Paddy komunitu opouští symbolicky až na konci knihy, kdy se na základě rozpadu vztahu jeho rodičů stává - opět podobně jako Francie - zvláštním a vyčnívajícím z norem. Paddy ovšem tuto novou identitu přijímá a akceptuje jak

³ Morrison 141.

odvržení svými bývalými kamarády, tak novou pozici „hlavy rodiny“. Opět se tedy naplňuje podstata politického Bildungsromanu, kde se hrdina nezačlení do společnosti jako její plnohodnotná součást, ale naopak - identifikuje se se svojí nově objevenou postatou.

Seamus Deane – Čtení ve tmě

Čtení ve tmě obohacuje narativní rozměr o autobiografickou vrstvu, a to i přesto, že sám autor kategoricky odmítá možnost čtení tohoto příběhu v kontextu vlastních memoárů. Jelikož ale připouští autobiografické motivy, které - ve spojení s postavou vypravěče a hlavního hrdiny beze jména - vytvářejí atmosféru pro čtenáře umocňující autentičnost, není možné tuto vrstvu úplně obejít. Příběh je vystavěn kolem rodinného tajemství, které hrdina odkrývá a které zároveň ničí rodinnou pohodu i hrdinovu pozici v rodině a komunitě. Tajemství je odhalováno postupně a na několika úrovních, zatímco v jeho popředí se nepřetržitě odehrává každodenní život. Příběhy ze života se střídají s příběhy týkajícími se tajemství, ale také s příběhy-legendami, které podtrhují mnohvrstevnatost a propletenost jednotlivých světů. Komunita, rodina a škola slouží jako zdroj příběhů a dešifrátor jednotlivých odkazů.

Motiv románu formování se zdá být v tomto příběhu nejsilnější, nesporně i díky časovému pokrytí vývoje hrdiny od dětství až po dospělost, ale také díky tématu hledání svého místa ve vztahu k rodině, komunitě a její minulosti. Fakt, že se hrdinovi nepovede začlenit do komunity, a navíc si ještě zkomplikuje i pozici ve vlastní rodině, je zvýrazněn neuvedením hrdinova jména. Jelikož se místo začlenění vyčlení, nestane se hodným svého jména a zůstává bezejmenným jedincem mimo společnost. Na druhé straně je jediným

nositelem úplného tajemství, které ovšem nemůže předat nikomu dál a které tak postaví bariéru mezi něj a okolní svět. Hrdina tím, že dává přednost poznání pravdy před pohodlím nevědomosti, dostává definici Morrisonové politického románu.

Frank McCourt – Andělin popel

McCourt představuje svoji knížku jako autobiografickou, což ji předem vyčleňuje z řady již zmiňovaných děl, která jsou (až na diskutabilní výjimku Čtení ve tmě) vystavěna na fiktivnosti příběhu. Nicméně i Andělin popel splňuje kritéria beletrie vzhledem k předem promyšlené struktuře a využití narativních prostředků figurujících převážně v žánru fikce. Je nutno také zmínit orientaci díla na americké publikum, čímž se vymezuje například přístup k využívání „tradičních“ irských obrazů a klišé. Již první stránka slouží jako nástin témat a také celkové atmosféry a nálady vyprávění. Příběh využívá různé postavy-typy a klišé-situace jako pozadí k zobrazení hrdiny v žádaném rozměru. Příběh nabízí velké množství témat a s nimi souvisejících situací, jako jsou rodina, komunita, škola či náboženství. V jejich popředí pak probíhá dospívání a formování Franka.

Z tohoto ohledu je Andělin popel nejzřetelnějším představitelem žánru románu formování, který ovšem nabízí dva rozdílné přístupy. Na jedné straně je možné vnímat jako opuštění společnosti za účelem nalezení sebe sama odjezd z New Yorku a Frankův návrat jako začlenění do společnosti, což by odpovídalo tradičnímu zakončení románu formování; zatímco na straně druhé je možné interpretovat Frankův odjezd z Irska jako odmítnutí „své“ společnosti a snahu najít sebe sama v jiné zemi.

Všechny čtyři knížky tak přistupují k žánru románu formování z nových směrů. Autoři jsou si vědomi tradičních námětů a nástrojů, zároveň ale i jejich omezení a nedostatků ve vztahu k novým, moderním tématům, jichž se ve svých dílech dotýkají. Proto každá ze zkoumaných knížek nutně přetváří tento žánr za pomoci osvědčených narativních metod. Důraz je kladen na získání důvěry a sympatií čtenáře, a proto je upřednostňován vypravěč v první osobě, který slouží jako přímé spojení mezi děním v realitě příběhu a samotným převyprávěním tohoto děje skrze hrdinu.

I přes veškeré rozdílnosti v tématech a jejich zpracování všechny čtyři knížky odpovídají definici politického Bildungsromanu tak, jak byla uvedena na začátku s ohledem na rozšíření o společenský rozměr. Tímto tedy McCabeův Řeznický kluk, Doyleův Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, Deanovo Čtení ve tmě a McCourtův Andělín popel potvrzují nové směřování irského románu formování a nastiňují možnost jeho dalšího zkoumání jako samostatné větve.