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**McCabe and the MaCabre:
Portrayals of Madness in the Work of Patrick McCabe**

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I would like to thank my supervisor Clare Wallace, PhD for her help and support during my work on this thesis.

Abstract

The thesis “McCabe and the MaCabre: Potrayals of madness in the work of Patrick McCabe” analyses some crucial works of the Irish novelist in order to prove him a connecting link between the Gothic literature and the contemporary Irish fiction. Its main claim is that traditional Gothic and McCabe’s Bog Gothic stand on the same cornerstones and even though they communicate it in slightly different ways, their goals are the same.

In the initial chapters theoretical ground is covered, outlining the background and development of the contemporary Irish fiction in relation to its colonial past and the notion of Irishness. Also, a brief study on Gothic fiction and its role in Ireland is presented; followed by an analysis of McCabe’s Bog Gothic. The theoretical part is concluded by a brief insight in the history of the key concept of this thesis – madness and its place in the Irish fiction. The following three chapters deal each with one novel of McCabe’s: *The Butcher Boy* (1992), *The Dead School* (1996) and *Winterwood* (2006) and analyse them in respect to their affinity with the Gothic.

Although McCabe’s fiction does not on the first sight bear visible resemblance to the classical Gothic fiction, it uses its most characteristic motifs, namely *terror* and *madness*. It is one of the premises of this thesis that these two, especially their interaction since one causes the other, are the basic constituents of the Gothic and that all other typically gothic features are only logical consequences of this primary double-motif.

The source of terror in McCabe’s novels is identified as the clash between two opposing systems: the modern and the traditional, the old and the new; and the madness of its victims is an inevitable consequence of this “pathological interface.” McCabe’s “heroes” are not capable of adjusting to changing times or of inhabiting them in any meaningful way; instead they create a world of their own and alienate the society. Desperate and mad, in the end they either withdraw or, more frequently, try to get their way by means of violence and breaking social rules.

Transgression in its wide range of meanings and manifestations represents a crucial motif of McCabe’s fiction, linking it to the Gothic which also indulges in

all kinds of excesses. Since with McCabe it is performed by mentally ill characters, the author cunningly succeeds in undermining society's established truths and values as well as in questioning the official past. This being in its core also one of the aims of the traditional Gothic fiction, this thesis wants to prove the affinity between the two traditions in terms of their message and to point out that the motivations behind the end of the eighteenth century Gothic and the end of the twentieth century Irish postmodernism are not much different.

Abstrakt

Bakalářská práce „Portréty šílenství v díle Patricka McCabea“ se pokouší na základě analýzy několika klíčových děl tohoto irského prozaika dokázat spřízněnost současné irské prózy s gotickou literaturou. Jejím základním tvrzením je, že tradiční gotická fikce a „gotika“ v McCabeově pojetí, nazvaná „Bog Gothic,“ fungují na stejných principech, ačkoliv je navenek demonstrují různými způsoby.

V úvodních kapitolách se práce věnuje teoretickým poznatkům k hlavním tématům této práce. Představuje tak pozadí a vývoj současné irské prózy ve vztahu k její koloniální minulosti a irskému patriotismu nebo gotickou literaturu jako žánr a její pojetí v McCabeově díle či její vztah k Irsku. Teoretickou část uzavírá stručný nástin historie klíčového pojmu této práce: šílenství a jeho místo v Irské literatuře. Následující tři kapitoly se zabývají každá jedním autorovým dílem: McCabeovým debutem *The Butcher Boy* (1992), o několik let pozdějším románem *The Dead School* (1996) a konečně jednou z jeho nedávných fikcí, *Winterwood* (2006); a analyzují je z hlediska jejich příbuznosti s tradiční gotickou literaturou.

Ačkoliv McCabeova próza nenese na první pohled výrazné znaky gotické literatury, pracuje se dvěma jejími základními motivy: *terorem a šílenstvím*. Ústředním východiskem této práce je totiž tvrzení, že právě tyto dva motivy, a především jejich interakce, neboť jedno implikuje druhé, jsou primárními konstituenty gotického žánru a že ostatní typické znaky tohoto žánru pouze vyplývají z tohoto základního dvojmotivu.

Zdrojem teroru McCabeových románů je vždy spor dvou protikladných hodnotových systémů: nového a starého, modernity a tradice; a šílenství obětí tohoto teroru je pouze nevyhnutelným následkem patologického střetu takových dvou světů. McCabeovi „hrdinové“ nejsou schopni se přizpůsobit jakýmkoliv změnám v jejich známém světě, a tak v něm žijí dál, i když už dávno neexistuje, odcizeni od společnosti a reálného života. Šílení a plni zoufalství se buď stáhnou do ústraní, a nebo se ještě častěji snaží prosadit svou za cenu násilí a porušení společenských konvencí a pravidel.

Transgrese ve všemožných podobách představuje ústřední motiv McCabeovy fikce, pojící ji s gotickou literaturou, pro kterou je typickým výrazem. Jelikož v McCabeově tvorbě jsou jejími činiteli duševně choří lidé, může si autor dovolit jejich ústy a činy zpochybňovat společensky ustálené hodnoty a konvence, stejně jako demytizovat interpretaci dějin. Protože právě to je také jedním z cílů tradiční gotické fikce, tato práce chce dokázat příbuznost mezi oběma tradicemi v rovině jejich sdělení. Pokouší se tak dokázat, že motivace za gotickou fikcí konce osmnáctého století se příliš neliší od motivace irského podtmodernismu konce století dvacátého.

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1 Introduction

*“Being born, living and dying is
mayhem, chaos and madness.”¹*

(P. McCabe)

Horror, madness, oddity, schizophrenia and transgression appear to be the hallmarks of Patrick McCabe’s prose, constituting his unmistakably authorial signature as well as a trademark which has established him one of the key figures of contemporary Irish fiction. From almost complete obscurity, the present King of Bog Gothic, as some critics label him, was propelled into the literary limelight in 1992 with the success of his *The Butcher Boy* novel and since then has proved himself a strong and provocative voice in modern Irish fiction, producing a number of highly acclaimed novels which earned him two Booker Prize nominations and an *Irish Times* Literature Prize.

As if he was predestined to it by his name, the macabre penetrates whole of McCabe’s work. Starting innocently enough as sentimental memoirs of the romantic past, during its course each of his novels turns into a psychotic and disturbing narrative only to finally end up as a bleak, horrific tragedy. All of McCabe’s main protagonists are misfits. They are relics of “Old Ireland” who have never succeeded in transition towards “New Ireland” and thus got caught in time, dragging with themselves their realities which are of course out of date. Having lost the familiar and secure, they are trapped in dysfunctional relationships, desperately struggling to achieve harmony and peace which they, however, never really possessed. Socially unacceptable and marginalized they are forced to establish alternative identities that only lead to further estrangement manifesting itself in madness, schizophrenia and oddity, all of which must inevitably take a tragic end.

McCabe’s works, however, are not straightforward tragedies. The author’s genius lies in his capacity to create a provocative mix of humour and horror, thus producing a bizarre genre mingling features of black comedy, satire, burlesque and grotesque. Another dimension to McCabe’s artistry is the power

¹ John O’Mahony, “King of Bog Gothic,” *The Guardian* 23 Aug. 2003
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/aug/30/fiction.patrickmccabe>>.

of his voice and its immediacy which drives the narrative with an arresting vigour. The most peculiar and brilliant feature about McCabe's prose is nonetheless the author's ability to depict abnormal mental states and the process of a gradual disintegration of mind which will also be the main focus of this thesis. Before that, however, the author shall be set in the context of the Irish literary tradition.

Although McCabe has developed his own characteristic style, he is part of a generation of novelists who have all experienced and been shaped by events of the latter half of the twentieth century Ireland, a decisive time of its history, when, as Gerry Smyth puts it, it was changing from a being "a backward-looking, isolationist nation" to one "embrac[ing] the modern world – socially, economically, culturally."² Therefore, it is reasonable to apprehend McCabe as part of a current of artists that was conditioned by certain circumstances and which they also try to reflect on through their work.

The contemporary Irish fiction which some critics call "Robinsonian," "Post-national" or simply "New"³ is part of a large literary heritage. It demonstrates, however, "something fundamentally different" from previous literature as 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."⁴ As particular labels suggest, the new movement in Irish fiction is linked with the presidency of Mary Robinson, who became a symbol of a new and modern Ireland and whose 1990 election was perceived as "a triumph for those who supported modernizing, liberal agenda for Ireland, and as a defeat for those associated with nationalism and Catholic traditionalism."⁵ As opposed to once strictly patriarchal, conservative and undoubtedly nationalist country, Ireland of Robinson's vision "entailed not only a pragmatic acknowledgement of the changing circumstances" Ireland had formerly difficulties to come to terms with, but also "a re-emphasis upon most

² Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation; Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997) 79.

³ The terms have been applied by Smyth, Patten and Smyth respectively, whose works are cited in this chapter.

⁴ Smyth 7.

⁵ Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993) 1.

radical elements of the revolutionary discourse from the earlier part of the century.”⁶

This re-emphasis or re-evaluation, according to Tom Herron, “aligns these authors with the revisionist attempt to debunk the nationalist meta-narrative”⁷ which is something rather new and very remarkable in the Irish context as the phenomenon of nationhood or nationalism, as Smyth argues, has always been special in Ireland due to the island’s peculiar history, quite different from continental nation-states.⁸

As England’s first colony, Ireland has for most of its history experienced systematic colonialism, so that it has never really established any uniform notion of identity.⁹ The long struggle for independence, especially its twentieth century conclusion have had a great impact on Ireland’s forming sense of nationhood which, nevertheless, was put under a test after the Treaty, when after 750 years of a thorough British guidance Ireland was to stand on its own two feet. As Gerry Smyth observes:

[I]t seemed that the different communities sharing Ireland could not, or did not wish to, shake off the legacy of the past. So traumatic was the rearrangement of relations with Great Britain, and so powerful the emotions and beliefs needed to negotiate those changes, that the revolutionary period maintained a hold on the Irish imagination long after 1922. As a consequence, the peculiar political formation of post-colonial Ireland [...] is characterized by insecurity and constant need for self-identification, conditions which are themselves left over from colonial times.¹⁰

This self-identification, structured in terms of rooted oppositions of “us” and “them” and “similarity” and “difference,”¹¹ proved to be especially problematic since 1960s when Ireland started to open itself liberally to the rest of the world,

⁶ Smyth 5.

⁷ Tom Herron, “Bright with Cosy Homesteads: The Butcher Boy”, *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, eds. Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan 2000) 171.

⁸ Smyth 174-5.

⁹ Smyth 174-5.

¹⁰ Smyth 3-4.

¹¹ Smyth 4.

especially to the USA.¹² The influx of foreign culture and new ideas resulted in a clash between the established and traditional and that which was formerly considered “alien” so that Ireland’s once already split identity from the colonial period was put under another scrutiny when renegotiating its relation to the rest of the world.¹³

The schizophrenia of this period projected itself, as Smyth argues, in “an amorphous and fluctuating array of physical and psychological states, operating at level of both individual and community”¹⁴ and it is the very same schizophrenia which has also become the point of interest of many contemporary novelists who use it as means for dramatising the controversy and insecurity of the time.

They are well equipped for this task as 1960s-1970s is the period when this generation was growing up and thus could fully experience what Eve Patten calls “the effects of the country’s failure to keep pace with modernization and secularization.”¹⁵ In their works they often go back into the time of their maturing (or even further) and by exposing “the pathological interface”¹⁶ between tradition and modernity, they try to express “the trauma of fractured and incomplete historical transition.”¹⁷

By doing so, they question inherited verities and pieties, thus “thoroughly deconstructing received accounts of political authority, historical authenticity and social accountability.”¹⁸ Even the untouchable Irish nationalism is not left unnoticed, as the authors challenge the established notions of Irishness and try to find its new/real limits and possibilities.

From this generation of New Irish Fiction, McCabe, according to Smyth, is the one who “most wickedly indicts the discourses which structured modern Ireland and their own lives.”¹⁹ By “wickedness” Smyth has in mind what Herron

¹² Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland; The Literature of the Modern Nation*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 565.

¹³ Smyth 79.

¹⁴ Smyth 174.

¹⁵ Eve Patten, “Contemporary Irish Fiction,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. J.W. Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 263-4.

¹⁶ Herron 168.

¹⁷ Patten 264.

¹⁸ Smyth 178.

¹⁹ Smyth 81.

describes as “pathologies of Ireland”²⁰ and Patten as “portrayals of a haunted and traumatized Irish society with deep-seated disturbances in the national psyche”²¹ On account this characteristic, McCabe has been labelled “the King of Bog Gothic.”²²

Taking Herron’s and Patten’s statements as a starting point, this thesis wants to explore McCabe’s world of madness and the macabre in relation to the tradition of Gothic fiction and to prove the author as a modern descendant of the gothic heritage. At the same time, it will try to identify the differences in approach to the characteristic themes between traditional and modern Gothic and analyze their function in particular McCabe’s works with regard to the New Irish Fiction and its aims.

For these purposes, the thesis will focus on three novels of McCabe’s, two of them stemming from the 1990s (*The Butcher Boy* (1992), *The Dead School* (1995)) and one being more recent (*Winterwood* (2006)), to prove McCabe’s consistent interest in the literature of terror since his debut up to now. On the basis of the portrayals of Francie “Pig” Brady, Raphael Bell, Malachy Dudgeon and Redmond Hatch, in respective chapters (3-5) this thesis will examine the central themes of madness, schizophrenia and transgression as products of terror. The very analysis will be preceded by Chapter 2, which will offer an insight into the realm of madness as a literary theme explored by post-structuralists, as well as its place in the Irish literary tradition from folklore to the Irish Gothic.

²⁰ Herron 168.

²¹ Patten 259.

²² John O’Mahony, “King of Bog Gothic,” *The Guardian* 23 Aug. 2003
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/aug/30/fiction.patrickmccabe>>.

2 The Gothic

If we talk of McCabe as of the King of Bog Gothic, it is necessary to elucidate what this label actually means and to what it refers. Therefore, this chapter will open with the genre of the Gothic. Afterwards, a link will be established between the Gothic and Bog Gothic, and finally, the history of their central motif – madness – will be explored.

As Siobhán Kilfeather explains, the term “Gothic” first appeared in the seventeenth century and it referred to the Goths and their language, meaning barbaric and crude. It was used as a derogatory descriptive term for medieval architecture which, however, became fashionable in the mid-eighteenth century in landscape gardening and painting, with the rise of Gothic revival.²³ The late eighteenth century England then witnessed also the emergence of Gothic in literature in form of a pseudo medieval fiction, which, being part of the Romantic Movement, responded to the eighteenth-century rationality and morality and replaced and these values by emotions and sensations, thus transgressing social proprieties and moral laws.²⁴ As Fred Botting explains,

[The Gothic] continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values. [It] condense[d] the many perceived threats to these values, threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption.²⁵

According to Botting, “Gothic signifies a writing of excess:” it is fascinated with “transgression and anxiety about social and cultural limits and boundaries,” crossing of which challenges established values and rules and enables new identification of their boundaries. Gothic fiction is thus “an examination of the limits produced in the eighteenth century to distinguish good from evil, reason from passion, virtue from vice and self from other.”²⁶

²³ Siobhán Kilfeather, “The Gothic Novel,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. J.W. Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 78.

²⁴ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) 1, 2.

²⁵ Botting 1.

²⁶ Botting 1-5.

Another fascination of the Gothic is the link to history and past, especially in a form of its “disturbing return upon present.”²⁷ As Jerrold Hogle points out, the Gothic setting is always in “an antiquated space” reminiscent of the time gone: castle, crypt, graveyard, old house, factory or some foreign place. From within these places hidden truths and secrets resurface to haunt and terrorize the characters, both physically and psychologically, reminding them of “unresolved crimes and conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view.”²⁸

This “return of the repressed,” to use Freudian terminology, is “a return of something which has always been there (in the unconscious) and whose sudden appearance calls up the feeling of the “uncanny” or the unfamiliar which is deeply familiar.”²⁹ The terror of its reappearance, which is executed mostly by “spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns” and later also by “scientists, madmen and criminals”³⁰ and whose victims are usually “virtuous maidens or metropolitan sophisticates,”³¹ will last until the “terrible destinies incipient in the [...] past” are fulfilled.³²

According to Kilfeather, the attractive “mixture of sex and power, dreams and history, costume drama and terror” of the Gothic fiction “fired the imagination of both writers and readers,” so that it became an extremely successful phenomena of the late eighteenth century.³³ Valdine Clemens, however, stresses that it was also the political state in England and abroad, especially the post-revolutionary France, that played a considerable part in the popularity of Gothic literature and to which the genre actually responded: England was irretrievably changed by the Enlightenment and industrial progress, having abandoned traditional ways and values which had had their place there for centuries. The Gothic obsession with past and attempts to re-

²⁷ Botting 1.

²⁸ Jerrold E. Hogle, “Introduction: the Gothic in western culture,” *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. J.E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 2.

²⁹ Misha Kavka, “The Gothic on screen,” *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. J.E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 210.

³⁰ Botting 2.

³¹ Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization, and Irish Culture* (Galway: Arlen House, 2004) 11.

³² Eric Savoy, “The Rise of American Gothic,” *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. J.E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 174.

³³ Kilfeather 79.

establish links to it, therefore, Clemens believes, is a reaction to the cultural rootlessness, deeply felt in the period.³⁴

On account of the appeal of the Gothic fiction, Luke Gibbons adds, that its popularity was so huge, that it “spread into the recesses of everyday life, giving rise to a phantom public sphere haunted by fear, terror, and the dark side of civility.”³⁵ Applying this theory to oppositions British versus Irish and Protestant versus Catholic, in his provocative study *Gaelic Gothic* the author even goes so far as to establish a link between the racial theory and literary genre.

Gibbons argues that the anti-Catholic attitude of the Gothic genre which was initiated by the Glorious Revolution by “expunging the traces not only of feudalism but also its archaic Catholic remnants from the social order,” merged in the eighteenth century with new concepts of racial inferiority in order to demonize the Irish and justify the logic of cultural colonialism. He claims that

[A]s the arteries of modern racial discourse began to harden into notions of blood and belonging, the Gothic as a mode of sensibility took on board much of its cultural pathology, maintaining a series of deep-seated, troubled connections with wider systems of prejudice, paranoia and bigotry.³⁶

Gibbons tries to elucidate the role of the Irish as an inferior race in the eyes of the English by drawing lines between race and religion, not necessarily the colour of skin (which was the case in other England’s colonies). He says that while “Indians were vilified as tawny brutes and wicked heathens, the Irish were condemned as much for their degenerate savagery as for their Popish superstitions.”³⁷

The Irish being traditionally Catholic, the Gothic was in fact pointed against them. Later, however, the author argues, they managed by means of “acts of semiotic and narrative appropriation” to change its polarity and made it in the

³⁴ Valdine Clemens, *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from the Castle of Otranto to the Alien* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 25-27.

³⁵ Gibbons 10.

³⁶ Gibbons 10.

³⁷ Gibbons 10.

end their own weapon.³⁸ This counter-offensive against the conventional Gothic, according to Gibbons, was launched by Edmund Burke's *The Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) which swapped the roles between the terroriser and the terrorized, so that now "it was the remnants of the old order – including the Catholic Church – who were the victims of terror, thereby construing the aggrandizement of the Jacobins under the sign of modernity as the new monsters of the Gothic imagination."³⁹

Although originally referring to France, Gibbons claims that the theory was also easily applicable on Ireland, "identifying as the monster the oppressive Protestant Ascendancy [...] depriving the mass of the Irish population of their most basic liberties."⁴⁰ Through the inversion, the Irish thus made use of their fate and made the Gothic their affined genre, proving it very suitable for their condition.

As Kilfeather indicates in her chronology of Irish Gothic, up to 1798 it resembled its English sibling "in terms of its dual interests in early British and Irish history" (Thomas Leland, Anne Fuller, James White) and "in ghosts and sensational terrors" (Elizabeth Griffith, Stephen Cullen, Regina Maria Roche). It was also close to North American Gothic in that it led the reader to "allegorical readings emphasising the resemblance between the oppressed virtue of the characters and the fate of their nation." After 1798, however, as Kilfeather observes, "the terrors of the Gothic became much more explicitly related to those of contemporary life in Ireland, and the realism became much more horrific and dangerous than pervious fantasy literature had suggested."⁴¹

For the most of the nineteenth century, as Kilfeather further points out, Irish Gothic strikes attention by an extra dimension to the genre – namely that of an admixture of other genres, mostly of the national tale. This habit of "putting itself about," says Kilfeather, is characteristic of the genre, following the pattern of miscegenation, a frequent motif of the genre itself.⁴² This is more or less true for most prominent Irish Gothic writers, like Maria Roche, Sydney Owenson, Charles Robert Maturin, Maria Edgeworth, Michael Banim, Bram Stoker or

³⁸ Gibbons 15.

³⁹ Gibbons 14.

⁴⁰ Gibbons 14.

⁴¹ Kilfeather 81.

⁴² Kilfeather 83.

Sheridan Le Fanu. Despite the heyday of traditional Gothic being long gone, it nevertheless made its way also in the twentieth century when the Gothic became increasingly entwined with the Big House only to later leave behind even this and reinvent itself in the form of Bog Gothic.⁴³

2.1 Bog Gothic

There might be quite some time and space between the Gothic of 1790s and Bog Gothic of 1990s, nonetheless the legacy of the old in the new is still clear. McCabe in his work uses some of the prominent themes of the Gothic, such as terror, the macabre, decay, nightmares, madness, transgression, excess, deformity and violence but he employs them in quite a different way. They are not established from the beginning as a given set of features creating a standard gloomy atmosphere and allowing a fairly predictable plot, but appear only gradually and intervening with one another, it is only during its process that they sink into the macabre of the Gothic. Also, there is no villain that could be directly identified with the typical gothic monsters, nor are there any virtuous maidens. The opposition of the victim and the oppressor is established by an ordinary character in conflict with the modern era, which is, usually through a subjective choice of the former, also represented by another character and which is the agent of terror and the architect of madness.

McCabe comes from the premise, that not a collage of stereotypically gothic motifs “makes” the Gothic, but rather the relationship and interaction between terror and thereof springing madness. For the two interconnected phenomena are the corner stone of the Gothic, the core motif on which the genre is based and without which it would be only superficial, or as Botting puts it, “Candygothic.”⁴⁴ Thus all the gothic themes that McCabe applies are only logical consequences of the central motif: terror.

It is the intrusion of new times that causes insecurity and rootlessness, addressed earlier on by Clemens, or the return of repressed pasts that stand at the beginning of the trauma of McCabe’s characters. Their incapability of coping with these new situations makes them subject to terror which eventuates in madness and transgression, including, very often, violence. The clash of two

⁴³ Kilfeather 86-94.

⁴⁴ Botting 134.

opposing systems - past and present with all their attributes, is the epicentre of terror and the backbone of McCabe's Bog Gothic.

In *The Butcher Boy*, Francie Brady is confronted by the modern times represented by Mrs. Nugent whom he hates and envies at the same time. Being stuck in the past and terrorised by the present, his mind deteriorates which ends up in an act of violence. *The Dead School* presents a clash of two eras through portrayals of two teachers, one of whom is terrorized by the present, the other by the past and, in addition, each of them by one another. It is a non-violent portrayal of two madnesses. *The Winterwood* presents the greatest homage to the traditional Gothic in that it works with some of the themes in a more conventional way. It is an ode to the return of the repressed: Redmond Hatch is literally haunted and terrorized by his repressed past in form of a spectre of the perverse "Auld Pappie" Ned Strange, only to find out that he cannot escape it and that failure, madness and crime are his destiny.

It has been already stated that one of the main objectives of the Gothic is by the replacement of reason for emotions to reconstruct the limits of established rules and values. However, as Kilfeather points out, the Gothic also aims to do the same with the established view of history in that it presents itself as "an alternative form of history writing," as "one which questions official sources, excavates guilty secrets and pulls skeletons from the closet." To reach this, says Kilfeather, traditional Gothic often emphasises the fragmentation of the text and its mysterious origin by introducing the author as a finder and an editor of an old and incomplete manuscript⁴⁵.

The source of McCabe's texts is not really enigmatic, even though it presents itself often as a kind of a diary of the main character. The fragmentation, thus, is not reached by any incompleteness as a state in which the text was found, but by the fragmented minds and distorted perceptions of their authors themselves who are all insane, psychopathic or otherwise unreliable and who tell us their histories through a warped lens.

By the employment of mental illness which proves to be a connecting tissue of all McCabe's works, the author cunningly fulfils a double task of the Gothic: he seriously questions society's established values and truths, including the very

⁴⁵ Kilfeather 83.

reason itself; and challenges the official past. The latter one being also one of the objectives of the contemporary Irish fiction which tries to debunk the national narrative, McCabe proves a link between the anxieties of the Gothic and the end of the twentieth century Irish Republic postmodernism.

2.2 Madness and Ireland

When there was made the claim, that the Irish appropriated the Gothic, which was originally designed against them, for themselves it is necessary to acknowledge yet another reason why the Gothic should be so close to their nation both in the past and now – the Gothic with its interest in the supernatural and the fantastic is very close to folklore and the oral tradition, so intrinsic to the Irish culture, in that it uses the motif of madness as one of its favourite ones.

As Smyth points out, already “in the ancient Gaelic tradition of a non-realist narrative based on legend, myth and magic,” we find the prominent themes of madness and dreams. Scholars believe them to be a result of scepticism to the material world, also evident in the work of early Irish philosophers. The ancient literature, at the same time, demonstrates “a concomitant fascination with fantasy, dreams and vision” – the unreal or unearthly, which is evident from many mythological Cycles.⁴⁶ This ancient Gaelic tradition was exhumed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with popular Ossianism and antiquarianism⁴⁷ to be finally resurrected and reintroduced by W.B. Yeats who had established it “an important part of the Irish writer’s imaginative landscape [and made it] possible to incorporate elements of the tradition, as well as to experiment with its characteristic themes and forms” and thus significantly influenced its employment throughout the twentieth century.⁴⁸

There exists an image of the “Mad Irish” in the collective imagination. The notion of madness itself, however, has changed during the centuries with the dividing line in the Age of Reason. Until then, as Michael Foucault argues, madness had a positive connotation, meaning that one was possessed or touched by the secret powers of the world. After the Enlightenment, with Reason suppressing everything irrational, and with establishing of mental hospitals,

⁴⁶ Smyth 50.

⁴⁷ Kilfeather 80.

⁴⁸ Smyth 51.

madness was perceived as a disease and became a subject of psychopathology.⁴⁹ It is also at this time, that Smyth indicates madness as a pathological reaction to colonialism, already addressed in the Introduction, which echoed in Gothic fiction and which emerged also later as a response to decolonization.⁵⁰ Madness in McCabe's fiction is madness in a modern sense, a pathology caused by social changes, their ferociousness and recklessness.

⁴⁹ Michael Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) ix – xii.

⁵⁰ Smyth 48-49.

3 *The Butcher Boy*

In the preceding chapter, the relation between the Gothic and McCabe's contemporary descendant of the genre, Bog Gothic, was outlined. It has been explained, why despite the apparent lack of the stereotypically gloomy and mysterious atmosphere pervading classical Gothic novels, a fundamental similarity in the structure, content and message to the gothic novel can be identified in McCabe's fiction. This chapter will examine the features of the Gothic in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* through the most central motif of all of his works – madness and its concomitant phenomena.

Francie Brady is mad, there can be no doubt about it. By the end of the story, he is a raving maniac ready to point a captive bolt pistol at a human. He is not, however, mad without a reason. An important question, therefore, is why his mind disintegrates and why in the end he reaches utmost violence? The answer can be found in what Herron calls “the interface between tradition and modernity” - between the old and the new, the familiar and the unknown which turns out to be “seriously pathological.”⁵¹ This clash of two opposing systems is where all of McCabe's Gothic begins, releasing a chain reaction of the typical Gothic motifs whose order is usually this: intrusion – terror – madness – excess – transgression – violence, where undesired intrusion is the trigger, madness the consequence and violence the end product.

In *The Butcher Boy*, the initial trigger and the later agent of terror is the Nugent family, especially Mrs Nugent. Francie repeats this many times throughout his story: “If only the Nugents hadn't come to the town, if only they had left us alone, that was all they had to do.”⁵² They are the returned exiles from London, embodying new and modern Ireland, possibility of success and of bright future. They are the ideal, happy family with a father being the breadwinner and a moral authority, a mother maintaining clean and cosy home, and a son being a diligent and obedient student.

With the Bradys, who are the exact antithesis of the Nugents, a basic opposition preparing the ground for a gothic conflict is established. If the

⁵¹ Herron 168.

⁵² Patrick McCabe, *The Butcher Boy* (London: Picador 1993) 167. All subsequent references are cited in the text.

Nugents symbolize modern Ireland, then we can view the Bradys as an embodiment of traditional Ireland, however dysfunctional it might be, as it embraces many a stereotypical vices and failures of an Irish family. The Bradys are the “white trash”⁵³: the lowest of the low, the unemployed, the poor, the drunk, the mentally instable - the desperate outcasts.

Francie is, in the gothic sense of a word, a hybrid. He is a product of traditional Ireland, yet he is still shapeable by modern innovations and ideas, choosing between the familiar and the new as it suits him. Therefore, also the Nugents are a subject of his ambivalent attitude since they symbolize a “renovated de Valerian fantasy of cosy homesteads.”⁵⁴ He resents them for their superiority and material success, yet he envies them because among all the comforts, they dispose also of one very basic thing Francie lacks most: a warm and happy home. His own home is a place of failure and decay: it is always messy and cold and witnesses only arguments, insults, beatings and cries, and finally - death. The Nugents, on the other hand are like a family from some adverts⁵⁵ and Francie often goes to watch them through the window, like TV:

Philip was sleeping in his mother’s bed. His head was tilted back on the pillow with his mouth open. She was sleeping soundly her chest rising and falling as if to say there’s no trouble at all in my dreams I have by son beside me and my dear husband will be home tomorrow. (44)

From voyeurism, there is only a short step to the illusion that Francie is a member of their family, which he imagines with mixed feelings of desire and shame as he cannot get rid of the feeling of guilt and responsibility for his mother’s death:

You know what he’s doing here don’t you mother? He wants to be one of us. He wants his name to be Francis Nugent. That’s what he’s wanted all along! [...] yes, Philip, she said. I know that. I’ve known it for a long time. [...] I cried out: *Ma! It’s not true!* Mrs Nugent shook her head and said: *I’m sorry Francis its too late for all that now. You should have*

⁵³ Smyth 82.

⁵⁴ Herron 157.

⁵⁵ John Scaggs, “Who is Francie Pig? Self-Identity and Narrative Reliability in *The Butcher Boy*,” *Irish University Review*, 30.1. 2000: 56.

thought of that when you made up your mind to come and live with us!
(60)

Despite her initially being an ambiguous object of Francie's "odi et amo", after his mother's death Mrs. Nugent is soon identifiable as the monster, as the primal agent of terror. For as he comes to believe, she engineered all the misfortunes that ever happened to him, especially the two great losses: "You did two bad things Mrs Nugent. You made me turn my back on my ma and you took Joe away from me." (195) This premise, as Clare Wallace points out, becomes the leading principle of Francie's manic logic by which all his ensuing actions are governed and from which nothing can stop him.⁵⁶

It all starts with Mrs Nugent paying visit to the Bradys on account of Francie and Joe stealing Philip's comics, and calling their family the Pigs: "*Pigs – sure the whole town knows that.*"(4) What initially seems to be an offense and a final nail in the coffin of Mrs Brady, Francie soon accepts with much vigour and starts to identify himself with, literally behaving like a pig and taking on himself a variation of Pig-roles, ranging from Francie the Pig and the Pig Toll Tax Man to Francie the Butcher Boy working in the Shooting Piglets University for Captain Pig. It is now that his mind starts to disintegrate and that the first signs of schizophrenia which will soon end up in gothic madness take over him.

Though fully enjoying his new identity, he hates it at the same time and tries to get rid of it by shaking it off onto those who put it on his shoulders: the Nugents. Thus a series of excesses follows which gradually escalate as Francie's warped logic progresses. First, he causes an unpleasant pig-scene in the hall of the Nugent's house only to later break into it during their absence and to write everywhere on the walls "Pigs." This act of renaming then reaches its climax with Francie imagining himself as a teacher in a Pig School forcing Mrs Nugent and Philip to act like pigs:

I want you all to stick out your faces and scrunch up your noses just like snouts. That's very good Philip. [...] And now you Mrs Nugent. I don't think you're putting enough effort into it. Down you get now and no slacking. So Mrs Nugent got down and she looked every inch the best

⁵⁶ Clare Wallace, "Running Amuck: Manic Logic in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*," *Irish Studies Review* 6.2 (1998): 160.

pig in the farmyard with the pink rump cocked in the air. [...] Then we went over it one more time I got them to say it after me. I am a pig said Philip. I am a sow said Mrs Nooge. (61)

Excess and transgression as crossing boundaries of what is assumed correct and appropriate are prominent motifs of the Gothic and they are also characteristic of Francie's behaviour in the process of him getting mad. In the novel, they take form of both physical and social transgressions, the former being, among others, the above mentioned "visits" to the Nugents and the latter being "trying on" various social and film roles and imposing them on others by modification or change of their names.

Renaming as a manifest of transgression is a characteristic feature of the whole novel. As Wallace reveals, for Francie it is a form of protection from the cruelty of life, or, to put it in gothic terminology, from the terror of new realities: Since the reality is harsh and far from Francie's idea of how it should be, he starts to invent a parallel universe in which he substitutes the names denoting the negative or unpleasant for more acceptable ones.⁵⁷ Thus his crazy mother becomes Ma Whizz, Mrs Nugent is Mrs Nooge, the abusing Father Sullivan becomes Father Tiddly, and a policeman is dubbed Sergeant Sausage. The number of personae he adopts for himself which derive from film, television and comics and between which he switches as it suits him, range from John Wayne, Adam Eterno the Time Lord, Algernon Carruthers or Francie Brady Not a Bad Bastard Any More. He even tries on a role of someone who is far from being a comical TV character or a hero of the Wild West – of Philip Nugent. When he breaks into their house, he puts on his school uniform and imitates him:

I looked at myself in the mirror. I say Frawncis would you be a sport and run down to the tuck shop for meah pleath? I did a twirl and said abtholootely old boy. I say boy what is your name pleath? Oo, I said, my name is Philip Nuahgent! (59)

Here, Francie speaks in three different voices, being all and none. None of his voices is uniquely his own. They are all replicas and mimicry; voices and

⁵⁷ Wallace, "Running Amuck" 159-160.

phrases Francie hears in the street or in film and which he mixes into a hybrid preventing him to find his own identity. As Gerry Smyth observes, “he never makes the move from being the object of others’ narratives to being the subject of his own; he never, that is finds his own voice, so his world degenerates into ceaseless role-playing.”⁵⁸ This search of identity and the impossibility of finding it is a clear metaphor of the post-colonial search for identity and echoes in the gothic rootlessness caused by the confusion and insecurity of the changed times.

The blurring of the distinction between Self and Other marks the ever growing gap between fantasy and reality, another gothic characteristic, where the imagined world starts to take over the real one to such an extent that we cannot distinguish where the borders between the two worlds lie. Therefore, it is often difficult to decide whether what the characters do or say is really authentic as it is all filtered through Francie’s deranged and paranoid mind, executing a cunning censorship of reality.

As Wallace points out, McCabe supports this by employing textual strategies which follow the lines of the disintegrating mind, such as “polyphonic flow of commentary” with a minimum of punctuation and by “a fragmentary, repetitive and often disjointed” character of the narrative without any sense of chronology or understanding of time. These strategies, which clearly correspond to gothic fragmentation and disintegration, are, as Wallace adds,

[...] themselves also transgressive in that they involve a distortion of the distinction between what is assumed to be real and what is assumed to be imaginary. This corruption of the either/or of fantasy and reality, reason or madness, infects the boundaries between past, present and future [...].⁵⁹

The distortion of the perception of time becomes evident at several times during the process of narration. First, in the very opening, which starts confusingly enough: “when I was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago...” (1), then when Francie discovers a photo of Mrs Nugent as a baby and proclaims:

⁵⁸ Smyth 83.

⁵⁹ Clare Wallace, “Patrick McCabe: Transgression and Dysfunctional Irelands,” *Beyond Borders: IASIL Essays on Modern Irish Writing*, ed. Neil Sammells (Bath: Sullis Press, 2004) 145-46.

[...] I never knew Mrs Nugent had been young once as young as me. For a long time I thought she had been born the same age as she was now but of course that was stupid. [...] How many years ago was that, I wondered. Could have been a hundred for all I knew. (57)

Most striking is his conflict with time after he returns from the Reformatory. It is not clear how long he has exactly been there. When he finally comes back to town, however, he expects that everything would be just as he has left it, that time stopped and waited until he would be back again, which it of course has not. This is most clearly demonstrated on the relationship with Joe, his former best friend, who, in between, has grown up and lost interest in playing Cowboys and Indians by the river and, most importantly, who has found another friend taking Francie's place during his absence – Philip.

Francie's vain attempts to arrest the time finally end up only with himself being arrested by it. His obsession with past, with the ideal "pre-Nugent"⁶⁰ time when him and Joe were inseparable friends echoes what Botting describes as Gothic's "nostalgic relish for a lost era of romance and adventure."⁶¹ Despite the happy past being irretrievably gone, Francie still believes that everything is going to come back to normal. However, with the progression of time, which Francie is not willing/able to acknowledge, Joe gradually detaches himself from him until he finally denies him being a friend of his.

Completely uprooted by the terrorizing changes and losses that Francie cannot compete, he desperately tries to find peace and to re-establish harmony at his home, which however never really existed. Thus he ignores his father's death and pretends to run a happy household taking care of him and talking to him long after his body decomposes in the armchair. Friendly conversation and understanding is nevertheless something Francie has never experienced and which is in a sharp contrast to his last real speech with his father in the reformatory where Francie treats his him in a very rude way, assaulting him, cursing him and then telling him to "fuck off." (86)

It is only when his father dies that Francie realizes he has nobody else left - Ma dead, Da dead and Joe gone, and thus he tries to stop the process of loss by

⁶⁰ Wallace, "Running Amuck" 160.

⁶¹ Botting 1.

pretending that everything is fine and that nothing has happened. In their conversation, the father speaking through Francie often pleads: “You won’t leave me son,” (119) which echoes his mother’s “You would never let me down, Francie, would you?” (4) and which is reminiscent of his failure and betrayal.

In fact, in respect to his family, Francie has been ignoring things long before anybody was dead: He neglected his mother’s mental illness, nicknaming her Ma Whizz and the mental hospital “garage” and he even ignored or pretended not to have understood her attempts to commit suicide of which Francie was a witness several times. When she finally succeeds, he pretends not to miss her.

Neglecting and overlooking unpleasant things, just like renaming them, has always been a means for Francie to protect himself from the cruel reality and the only possible way to survive it. They are a metaphor of the gothic impossibility of accepting and fully adjusting to the changing circumstances.

Insanity as a central gothic motif, echoes throughout the novel in the form of numerous institutions which appear to be an inseparable part of Francie’s world and which he familiarly calls “houses of a hundred windows.” As Smyth observes, they relentlessly “crop up throughout the story to curtail the freedom which Francie believes he once possessed, and which in his arrested mental state so desperately desires to recapture.”⁶² It is the orphanage where his father and uncle spend their unhappy childhood, the “garage” where his mother is in and out on account of her depression, the borstal where Francie is sent after his excess in the Nugent’s house, the mental hospital, where he is treated after his father’s death, the boarding school which embodies Joe’s final betrayal and the ultimate end of their friendship, and finally, the institution for the criminally insane where Francie is confined after the murder and from which he narrates his story.

Every “house of hundred windows” symbolizes a sad and painful memory to Francie. As opposed to his father who has never managed to come to terms with his unhappy past, Francie after each comeback forgets and tries to start anew. Every such attempt, however, proves useless and even more desperate than the previous one as the world will not stop changing to the worse.

⁶² Smyth 82.

In the end, being deprived by the terror of both parents and his best friend, he tries to find consolation in the memory of the happy past: the good old days with Joe, Uncle Alo and Mary and of his parents' sojourn in the Bundoran guesthouse "Over the Waves." Every memory, however, turns sour, as he finds out the naked truth: that Alo "made a cod of himself with her [Mary]. Never even had the guts to ask her out straight till it was too late" and thus married a woman he did not love (33); and that the beautiful honeymoon of "*the lovebirds Benny and Annie Brady*" (84) in the West by the sea where Francie's father sang to his mother *I dreamt that I dwelt in Marble Halls*, which Francie re-imagines a thousand times, is a mere fabrication, the reality being "a [drunken] man who behaved the way he did in front of his wife. No better than a pig, the way he disgraced himself here." (181)

After this moment of irretrievable revelation, not only present is unliveable, but past, too, "has become a nightmare from which there is no relief."⁶³ Here emerges another prominent gothic motif, namely that of the return of painful past upon present causing disillusionment. The only way out of the madness and unhappiness seems to be violence, the end-product of madness and the final response to the gothic terror.

Before Francie must kill, he uses violence only as a defence from other attacks (even though they are not always physical and are often partly imagined), yet still attacks of the same terror of the changing times: after he imagines himself a member of the Nugent family, he attacks Philip in a fit of guilt for "letting down" his mother; and the same mental process makes him act the same with Father Tiddly after describing to him the Nugent family which he presents as his own.

However, it is also Francie himself who is beaten repeatedly – by Buttsy and Devlin down by the river and also at home by his mother, who is being abused by her husband who, again, was beaten and abused in the orphanage. Although Francie seems to reach to violence only as to the ultimate possibility, it becomes evident that it has always been part of his life and his inevitable fate.

When he kills Mrs Nugent, he finally gets rid of the feeling of guilt which has haunted him since the death of his mother. Disposing of the alleged seed of

⁶³ Herron 170.

all evil, he believes “the process of loss” to be “terminat[ed].”⁶⁴ By this final act of violence which is also the utmost form of physical, and gothic, transgression, his identity gets fixed – the Pig and the Butcher Boy are one; in both a symbolic and a literal meaning: He becomes the Butcher Boy from Mr Leddy’s abattoir slaughtering Mrs Nugent like a pig with a captive bolt pistol; and at the same time he is the Butcher Boy from his mother’s song, who betrayed her because of another woman/mother – thus entering into “a myth of failure and betrayal.”⁶⁵

In this conclusion mirrors another characteristic motif of the Gothic: family curse and the predestination to failure. This has been threatening Francie since the very beginning of his story and although he desperately tried to avoid it, he ended up with it. Being born in an unhappy, dysfunctional family of a madwoman and a drunkard, Francie accepts his family’s heritage and becomes both mad and a drunkard.

Yet, it is not only Francie who finishes his part as a maniac. His final act mingles with the communal madness caused by the alleged apparition of “Our Lady” to Mr Traynor’s daughter and the expected end of the world, which satirically mirrors in the visions of Virgin Mary and “dozens of the fuckers” (78) Francie pretends to have in the reformatory. As Wallace points out, this presents a satire on the “sane” society pointing at the paradox that “religion can legitimise thinking and behaviour which might otherwise be considered mad” and revealing that “the assumed distinction between reason and unreason is purely arbitrary.”⁶⁶

The shortcomings of reason, become evident also from the conduct of the institutions which are supposed to make “sane” of the “insane” and which Francie manages to fool all down to the last one, so that he is always released as “cured.” The ridicule of the authority of reason is evident also in the final pages of the novel when a doctor speaks thus to Francie:

There’s no sense in you being stuck up in that wing all on your own. I don’t think you’re going to take the humane killer to any of our patients, are you?

⁶⁴Wallace, “Running Amuck” 161.

⁶⁵Herron 173.

⁶⁶Wallace, “Running Amuck” 163.

Humane killer! I don't think Mrs Nugent would be too pleased to hear you calling it that, doc, I said. Oh now now he says that's all over you must forget all about that next week your solitary finishes how about that hmm? I felt like laughing in his face: How can your solitary finish? That's the best laugh yet. (214)

By the mockery of fanaticised society, as well as the dysfunctional institutions, McCabe concludes his novel with a gothic virtuosity: he not only questions the very reason and the values and limits imposed by it, but also attempts to reconstitute them, trying to find their new limits and boundaries.

4 *The Dead School*

Similarly to *The Butcher Boy*, *The Dead School* enacts a study of gothic psychopathology, albeit a less morbid one. The chain of sequential gothic motifs established in the previous novel is nearly the same, excluding, however, the final stage of violent transgression and ending up in “private” madness. In terms of the Gothic, nevertheless, the three stages – intrusion, terror, madness – fully do for the absent violence, presenting a fairly macabre view not only of the 1970s Ireland.

The elementary opposition of terror and madness is established by two teachers, Raphael Bell and Malchy Dudgeon, who represent two eras - old and new, traditional and modern; and whose interface at the institution for education becomes destructive. Destructive it is, however, for both as the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is binary, functioning in both directions so that the traditional is terrorized by the modern while the modern believes to be terrorized by the traditional. This double-edged relationship corresponds to Herron’s theory of a “difficult cultural transition” expressed by reciprocal “contamination” of past and present where “neither is settled or secure”⁶⁷ and it is the basic gothic motif of a question of inheritance between past and present on which *The Dead School* stands.

Raphael Bell becomes the symbol of traditional Ireland. His history is a happy one, from his early childhood of “bucolic bliss”⁶⁸ with his loving parents, to his adolescence of great scholarly successes, to his adulthood working as a dedicated teacher and later as a headmaster of his own renowned school. He is a proud patriot, worshipping “all things Gaelic and Irish,”⁶⁹ most importantly its history, Church and culture. His patriotism and all his life is constructed on the values of the revolutionary Ireland whose reminder is the death of his father, a hero of the War of Independence, who was killed by the Black and Tans.

Malachy Dudgeon, with his relaxed manners, wild life fuelled by beer and rock music and his interest in foreign culture generally, is presented as the

⁶⁷ Herron 168.

⁶⁸ Herron 179.

⁶⁹ Patrick McCabe, *The Dead School* (London: Picador, 2002) 107. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

embodiment of modern Ireland. In fact, however, he is also a product of traditional Ireland, which was, nevertheless not as idyllic as Raphael's and from which he therefore escaped. His childhood in a small town is stigmatized by his parent's dysfunctional relationship where his father tolerated his wife's infidelity, making of himself "the biggest bollocks in the town" (1) and finally drowning himself.

Thus, McCabe draws two family histories bearing many resemblances, one of which is ideal and the other corrupted. Raphael's father is a hero; and Malachy's is a coward. Raphael's mother mourns for the tragic loss of her loving husband, whereas Malachy's weeps for her adultery causing her husband's suicide. Raphael looks up to his parents, is adored by all and chooses the career of a teacher since he feels being predestined to spreading enlightenment. Malachy despises his parents, is laughed at on account of them and becomes a teacher merely on a whim.

Therefore, for Raphael, the past is something he wants to continue with, whereas for Malachy it is something he wants to get rid of and leave behind. That is why he deserts home and tries to start anew in an urban area, so different from the community of his upbringing, that he can forget it and immerge himself in the new. His life is however a very superficial one, consisting only of his (also superficial) love relationship with Marion, Hollywood films and rock concerts. Being formed by the traditional and now absorbing the modern, Malachy in fact very much resembles Francie in that he becomes a hybrid of two social systems, leaving his old but not finding a new identity. He lacks his own self. Even his relationship is based on a false identity of being a funny imitator of film stars. His old, repressed self resurfaces only when his teaching troubles begin which has as a consequence the breaking up of his relationship. In Malachy's escape which proves to be unsuccessful, thus echo two gothic motifs: return of the repressed in a form of an obsession with the image of "love in the grave" and a family curse – a destiny to be doomed to failure.

Whereas Malachy is terrorized by the memory of his unhappy past, since his early childhood, Raphael does not know terror until his old age. This experience, however, becomes fatal for him. The first intrusion into his world of peaceful and harmonic order of traditional ways and values and the initial one in the

following process of terror and insecurity, is the appointment of Malachy a teacher at Raphael's prestigious school, which, ironically enough, is approved by Raphael himself. His proclamation "I think this is the man for us" (128) proves to be a fatal mistake as Malachy is going to be the man who destroys him and who will be himself destroyed by Raphael.

Another irony of this tragedy is that Malachy, whose name, as Herron points out, is an anglicized form of Maolseachlainn, a name Raphael intended to give his first born but still-born son, is a symbolic son of his, yet one whom Raphael fails to recognize:

Raphael reads the younger man as the embodiment of all things foreign, of everything that is presently contaminating the purity of Irish education in particular and Irish life in general. Though he expels the implications of Malachy as a foreign body, Malachy is, as his name suggests, Raphael's own progeny, albeit in disguise.⁷⁰

The pitiful relationship between Raphael and Malachy is what Patten calls "a failure of inheritance between father figure and son" and what is a metaphor for the "breakdown of continuity" and "incomplete transition"⁷¹ between traditional Ireland and modern Ireland. Also this is a prominent gothic motif marking the horror of insecurity and rootlessness of changing times.

Malachy's teaching incompetence becomes the crucial conflict between him and the headmaster who perceives it as terrorization and an attempt to destroy his school which has the best reputation in Ireland and to which he has devoted his entire life. St Anthony's school is Raphael's personal realm, something he has built in his own image and which symbolized and embodied everything traditional and Irish to him. This is clear also from the description of his headmaster office:

Behind the door hung a map of Ireland and upon the wall stood the Pope blessing the multitude in St Peter's Square. Above the window, a St Brigid's Cross fashioned from rushes and beside it the charcoal head of the seven men who had taken on the might of the British Empire and

⁷⁰ Herron 181-2.

⁷¹ Patten 264.

struck for Ireland's freedom. And looking down over all, little St. Anthony standing on his plinth with two chipped fingers upraised and sadness in his eyes as Mr Bell shone his glasses and looked away from Malachy [...]. (134)

Trying to prevent Malachy from damaging his school, instead of dismissing him Raphael "terrorizes" him by constantly controlling him and discrediting him not only in front of his colleagues but also in front of his pupils which is of little help for Malachy who has problems with authority in his class and who is already terrorized by the ever ominous image of "love in the grave." He does not give up his job even though he never really wanted to do it, but he tries his best in order not to prove an idiot in front of his girlfriend, also a teacher, who cannot understand that one could have any difficulties managing 9-years-old children. However, this resolution finally destroys him as his immense effort not to fail professionally, which is a basic proposition for a personal success, all the same ends up with a break-up, as it changes his character and lets his old and inferior self resurface.

Malachy feels that he is losing Marion and this makes his work at school even more difficult. He is daydreaming, imagining their "happy past" at the teaching college, falling in a similar lethargy his father did, "[sitting] in the half-light of the kitchen with the shine in his eye, dreaming of a love he'd once known, now buried deep in a grave." (178) Malachy feels this end looming in the form of his own failure. Although he has sworn to himself never to let happen what his father pretended not to see and accepted silently, Malachy is never able to talk to Marion until it is too late and their relationship cannot be recovered. Thus he does not manage to escape the Gothic of the family curse and ends up repeating the "sins of the fathers." Marion leaves him on the very same day as one of his pupils accidentally drowns himself on a trip, on which account he finally "gets the boot" which marks his complete failure in both professional and personal life.

Malachy's dismissal is a big relief for Raphael. However, great damages have happened to him in the meantime. Most importantly, "Miz Evans, Batchelor of Abortion" (208) has intruded into Raphael's school as a spokesperson of the Parents Committee, imposing new ideas and changes in the

running of the school, such as relaxation of uniforms, abandonment of rosaries and prayer books, forsaking competitive sport, etc. These are changes which mean for Raphael the loss of the traditional, the Irish, the sacred – of everything he has ever believed in. Although he tries desperately to prevent these changes, he cannot win. The gothic horror of the “encroachment of the new upon the traditional”⁷² which has as a consequence destabilisation of established order and loss of coordinates ending up in alienation and madness, is crowned when the annual trip to Kilmainham Gaol “to honour the dead who had fallen in the 1916 rebellion” (210) is replaced by the Waterworld with “slides and skating rinks and fountains and adventures and fun-packed excitement of all kinds.” (210)

Father Stoke’s excuse that “it’s changed times” (175) will not do for Raphael and he condemns the old friend as a betrayer and collaborator. He even grows to be convinced that also his wife plots with Stokes and Evans against Raphael, which is evident from his rude treatment of her after the dispute with Stokes and an interview with a bottle of whiskey:

He squeezed her arm again, even harder and bellowed, “Do your hear me? Listen to me when I am talking to you! Whose side are you on? Whose side are you on, Nessa Conroy?” (212)

His suspicion of her turns into a conviction after Father Stokes suggests him an early retirement. Even when she denies all conspirations, he does not believe her:

“You’re telling lies,” he said through thin lips. When she began to cry, he was on the verge of melting when it dawned on him that what he was witnessing was another ploy. He had seen such behaviour in the classroom hundreds of times. To think he had almost fallen for it! “It will be a long time before you or any of your duplicitous colleagues ever force me to do anything against my will!” [...] “I deeply regret what you have done here today, Nessa. I want you to know that.” (246-7)

⁷² Herron 168.

Raphael repeatedly fails to understand – the sense of loss as a result of terror is so strong that he becomes paranoid and his mind starts to disintegrate. As a result he treats his beloved wife as a cheeky pupil, imposing the language of school onto home life where it is misplaced and where it makes only damage. From then on he grows cold to her and starts to ignore her, even failing to notice that she is dead, misapprehending the mess and disorder in the house as a kind of protest against his detachment. When in some kind of epiphany above a glass of whiskey which has now become his only friend he realizes that he might have been too cruel on her, it is too late. Like Francie, Raphael has lost everything that ever meant something to him. After his school, now also his beloved wife.

It is not, however, only in the connection with school that Raphael is confronted with the modern times and the consequent loss. Newspapers, radio and television, too, appear to be polluted by the immorality and decay of the new era. In the newspaper, he is shocked by “a woman wearing heavy eye shadow and a nightdress that barely concealed her body, directly beneath her, the words, ‘Peyton Place – the sensational, saucy secrets of suburbia.’” (141) On TV, he is disgusted when seeing a woman boasting openly that she has left her husband, “a silly old fool” (141) and even more so when he happens to spot there Ms Evans publicly promoting abortion. The embodiment of this corruption becomes the Terry Krash Show, “the show that is different” (138) and in which the indecent moderator cheerily discusses women’s underwear and sex before marriage. Raphael hates it and promotes at school his anti-Kerry Krash and even anti-TV agenda in a fear of corrupting effect the young pupils and of poisoning their minds.

The changes of the 1970s are, however, uncontrollable and not even the once so highly respected and recognized headmaster can stop them. This is obvious when his favourite radio programme, *The Walton Programme*, “the weekly reminder of the grace and beauty that lie in our heritage of Irish song – the songs our fathers loved” (143) is cancelled as obsolete and stupid. Kerry Krash’s victory over Leo Maguire thus bears resonances of the Waterworld’s replacing the Kilmahain Gaol. Both the school and everyday life are stricken by the disease of the modern times that “contaminate”⁷³ and terrorize the present.

⁷³ Herron 168.

Raphael therefore, analogous to Francie Brady, seeks consolation in the past which, however, is revealed as equally corrupted. With growing terror, Raphael often has a dream, or later rather a night mare, which, once again, signals “the return of the repressed.” In this repetitive dream, he over and over witnesses his father’s death. Each time, however, the previous account is altered to worse, so that what was first a heroic death is now a revenge on a terrorist:

The Black and Tan had a gun in his father’s mouth. “You murderer! You fucking murderer!” he was snarling. “You and your murdering Shinner mates crippled my best friend! You blew his legs off! He can’t walk, you bastard! He can’t even shit by himself! And *you* did it!” Raphael waited for his daddy to say, “No!” To cry out, “It’s a lie!” But he never did. All he did was smile at the Black and Tan. All he did was smile and the smile didn’t mean, “No, I didn’t. You’ve got it all wrong!” It meant, “So what if I did?” (150)

Raphael’s dreams which are definitely influenced by the atrocities of IRA and the beginning of the Troubles in 1970s are a cunning device of McCabe to question the pieties of Irish nationalism and excavate old myths which is on the one hand an aim of the contemporary revisionists’ movement; on the other hand also a characteristic motif of the Gothic “pulling skeletons from the closet.”⁷⁴

For Raphael, the consequence of this revelation/acknowledgement is destructive and eventually ushers him into the realm of insanity. As Herron remarks, “the noble purity of the preferred version of his father’s death [is] a version which informs virtually every action Raphael makes.” However, since the national past including his father’s death is now viewed as “unheroic or even inconsequential,” the very foundations of Raphael’s life are shattered.⁷⁵ Outlawed by the present and betrayed by the past, he retreats into the world of madness, barricading himself in his house and running “Dead School” where he teaches imaginary students among his detritus and bottles of empty whiskey.

Malachy also withdraws from society, at least from functional society. He escapes to London, surviving among drug addicts and alcoholics, intoxicating himself not only by various drugs but also by the memory of Marion and

⁷⁴ Kilfeather 83.

⁷⁵ Herron 182.

fantasies of him being a rock star beating her new boyfriend and winning Marion back. She, however, gets married in the meantime, and has a baby, which is a shock for Malachy, as in his oblivion he lost any sense of time and got stuck in the short but happy period of their relationship which he hoped would never end.

After a treatment, however, Malachy comes to senses and although in a state of resignation, returns back home to take care of his disabled mother and to accept the hereditary role of “the biggest bollocks in the town,” a part that was written in his destiny.

Thus it is Malachy, the hybrid and the loser - the one with early experience of terror and insecurity, who manages to survive it. For Raphael never comes to senses after the drastic changes take over him. For the most of his life, he experienced harmony and peace. When terror finally came in his advanced age, he was not prepared for it and proved incapable of coping with it. Thus, the only way out was suicide.

Before their paths definitely part, the two meet once again in the Dead school only to find out that they have both been agents and patients of their reciprocal terror, thus destroying each other's lives:

“You! After all you've done you come back here to my house! You come back here to my house!” he screamed. “I'll kill you! I'll destroy you like you destroyed me!”, which he did his best to do as he sent poor Malachy flying across the room with a belt of the heavy iron tongs and brought them down on top of him again and again. “You made me lose my wife!” he screamed. “You made me lose her and you ruined my life!”

“No! No, you fucker! You ruined mine!” were the words that Malachy, more than anything wanted to utter [...] (327-8)

5 *Winterwood*

If *The Butcher Boy* and *The Dead School* work with the Gothic in a specific, McCabe-way, then *Winterwood* returns more to the roots and pays honours to the original genre. Whereas in the two previous novels the macabre of the Gothic revealed itself only during the well-advanced process, in *Winterwood* its daunting presence is tangible from the very first page. A pervasive atmosphere of gloom and mystery saturates the whole novel, signalling an inevitable horror at the end.

If the Gothic in *The Butcher Boy* and *The Dead School* sprang from the clash between the old and new, between tradition and modernity, where the new is perceived as the unsentimental tyrant, then in *Winterwood* this opposition has inversed polarity and it is the traditional that terrorizes with tenacious persistence. The gothic-evoking clash, which is the starting point in all three novels, is a result an abrupt transition between the old Ireland and the new Ireland, leaving some things unresolved and unclear and which, sooner or later, must re-emerge to be dealt with. This is exactly the case of *Winterwood*, which operates on the central motif of “the return of the repressed.” In this novel the matter of heritage is violently ruptured by an escape to the modern era, thus leaving the legacies of the past unresolved. The repressed however, returns to haunt and terrorize and to pull the skeletons from the closet until it gains its point – at all costs, even with madness and crime.

What is repressed in *Winterwood* is the history of Redmond Hatch and his painful memory of it. His childhood was not the luckiest one, consisting of an alcoholic and abusive father beating his wife to death and, later, a life in an orphanage where he is regularly abused by his uncle. His past, however, is not told as a chronological history – it is gradually revealed with new details and/or revision of the previous ones in the moments of mental weakness in forms of dreams and spectres or as a story told by Ned Strange.

It becomes evident that Redmond has escaped the rural place of his upbringing to erase the depressing memory of it and to seek refuge in urban and modern Dublin. He seems to succeed in that, working as a journalist and marrying a beautiful woman who bears him a child. His happiness, however, lasts only until he gets the task “to do an article on folklore and changing ways

in Ireland”⁷⁶ for which reason he after many years comes back to his home and which fact sets off a chain of memories being released from the confines of his censoring mind and awakens his “mountain-blood” – with tragical consequences.

The delight and pleasure with which he presents his return signal his ambivalent attitude to his roots which will many times during the course of the novel change its polarity. He hates it because of all the terror and harm it has done to him in the past, yet it is his one and only home. During his long absence from the place he has managed to censor his memory, revising or even deleting certain passages, so that he now returns with a warm nostalgia for the romanticised past of unspoilt rural life on the mountain with drink and ceildh and everything traditional.

Part of this tradition, which Redmond comes to adore again, is also Ned Strange, a great fiddler and story-teller dwelling in his mountain cabin above the valley. He is a literal relic in the fast changing place, extremely popular with local “modern” parents and their children, enjoying the reputation of a friendly, open-hearted old-timer, familiarly nicknamed “Auld Pappie.” (12)

Auld Pappie, however, is not as virtuous as he pretends to be which Redmond soon reveals during his interviews with him in his cabin where between fits of charity and venom, Ned tells his horrifically cruel stories of the past which are however manipulated to suit his own ends, fixing Redmond with his devil eyes and enjoying with an evil grin and “flashing incisors” (242) the effect they have on him. Thus he tells him about his unfaithful wife whom he drowned or maybe knifed and about his parent’s loveless relationship and himself being a product of rape. He even tells him stories about Redmond’s childhood, purposely causing him pain; about the orphanage and the violent death of his mother which Redmond revises as an angelic death in the church, despite it being a consequence of haemorrhage:

Like your father, for example, God bless us but he gave that poor mother of yours an awful life. Matter of fact, I seen him kicking her one night. Hitting her a kick right up the backside, and Florian there doing

⁷⁶ Patrick McCabe, *Winterwood* (London: Bloomsbury 2007) 1. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

nothing, only laughing his head off, on account of she didn't bring him his drink quick enough. And then, be the hokey, what do you know but she goes and dies and her still a young woman! Not that he went kind of odd or anything like that. Oh no. We're made of much hardier stuff than that about here. Anyhow, it meant he could devote all his time now entirely to the cards. Isn't that right, Mr Hatch? (6-7)

Redmond is utterly intoxicated by his stories, paralyzed to such an extent that he tolerates Ned's offenses on his past, patiently listening to his evil stories of crime and violence and paying him regular visits. All is crowned when Redmond publishes a series of praising articles about him where he completely disregards the reality, drawing a flattering, romanticized portrait of the old perverse mountainer. For Redmond, again, this is a way of his censorship of reality, of suppressing the negative and unpleasant, replacing it by the very opposite to secure that the "bad" stays hidden in the casket.

The first "return of the repressed," however, happens when Ned rapes and murders one of the local children, his "bestest friend" Michael Gallagher (12). This is the moment when Redmond finally conceives his aversion to Ned and begins to dissociate with the whole place again. Unfortunately, it appears to be too late, as in the meantime Ned has managed to poison his mind and to re-establish his bond to his native place which ends up in his marriage being broken and him left alone without a wife and his beloved daughter.

The initial abhorrence of Ned, however, soon turns into sympathy again, as he tries to win his family back, especially his daughter Immy, realizing that this was, too, what Ned had always wanted – a happy family and most of all a son. Knowing that it will not work in a natural way, he must, like Ned and like Francie in *The Butcher Boy*, transgress the rules of sane society, and "take" what he wants by means of violence. This final resemblance with Auld Pappie is however preceded throughout the novel by a gradual move towards both mental and physical resemblance to the old mountaineer.

This fate, which Redmond tried to escape from, and memories which he suppressed is what Ned constantly reminds him of, warning him that "the mountain and the pines will always be with you" (107) and that memories last

“till the winter snow whitens the high hills of hell” (9). The inevitability of his fate he supports by his theory of blood bond:

[...] you were reared right here, were you not? So it'd be in you. Mischief and double-dealing might just be in your blood too. Is it, Redmond? Are you at heart a manipulative twister? Tell me, Redmond, might you be – or are *you* – a *snake*? (98)

Ned even claims that Redmond must be like him because they are themselves related which he proves by their surnames denoting the same thing in English and Irish, “which really ought not to come as a surprise – not in a place where, like they say, every man is his own *grandmother!*” (221)

What Redmond initially refused to accept, he soon starts to pick up voluntarily, as it proves the only way out of his unhappy and miserable life. His mischief and double-dealing become evident after he pretends a suicide and consequently changes identity in order to spy on his ex-family, especially his daughter from whom he is banned, to kidnap her in the end and plant her in their imaginary kingdom of Winterwood.

He has his schizophrenia under complete control. As Patrick Tiernan, which is his new, assumed name, he performs with an absolute calmness and convincingness, especially in his later years when he even gets married again and makes a great career in TV. Redmond Hatch, however, is not so easy-going and self-assured. He is haunted by a spectre of Ned Strange who repeatedly re-evokes his memory of child abuse and who threateningly prophesizes his fate: “Something dreadful is going to happen. And when it happens, you will know.” (234)

His psychosis deteriorates with his second visit to Slievenageeha, again, in order to make a documentary, which he calls romantically *These Are My Mountains* and which, ironically, win him a few awards. This return after once again many years awakens his once again successfully suppressed memories and ultimately ruins any possibilities to lead a “real/sane” life as it, again, ends up in the break-up of his otherwise “blissful” second marriage. This time, however, Redmond, or rather Patrick does not mind as he creates an imaginary world of his, working as a taxi driver, making an aura around himself of being the most

devoted husband and father and the most friendly and charitable old man, letting himself be called “Auld Pappie” just like Ned used to, and even looking like him with his long red beard and curly copper hair.

However, his regular “visits” to his dead daughter and now also wife in the kingdom of Winterwood, which is nothing else but a “copse of pine on the outskirts of the city,” (240) in order to present them with little gifts and to read to them *The Snowman* and *Where Wild Things Are*, does not last very long. Before he is finally detected, which he feels looming and thus commits suicide, he writes a letter with his last will to be buried home in Slievenageeha.

Which may seem to some cynical, when you think of the things I’ve said about it in the past. But there still is to be found there a peace and a sense of belonging, which I have succeeded in finding in no other place. A blissful peace and a sense of place that no city on earth will ever be able to provide. (218-19)

By this final act of recognition and acceptance of his destiny, the return of the repressed and with it the question of heritage and inheritance is solved, Redmond continuing with the sins of his fathers. At last, the prophecy of Ned Strange, echoing gothically throughout the novel in form of a song thus comes true; the two lying in graves right next one another:

Well don’t we look sweet as here we both lie

My partner for ever just him and I

Like lovers betrothed in the cold stony clay

From peep of the sun until the end of the day (4)

How long will we lie here O Lord who can tell?

Till the winter snow whitens the hills of hell.

Till the winter snow whitens the hills of hell! (9)

6 Conclusion

This thesis tried to establish a link between the Gothic and contemporary Irish fiction. Through the portrayals of McCabe's "pathologies of Ireland," being a result of the binary relationship "terror-madness," the thesis attempted to prove the author as the joint between the two traditions and thus a rightful representative of what he himself coined "Bog Gothic."

The central conflict in all of the discussed novels proved to be the clash between tradition and modernity. Their interface constituted the locus of all subsequent terror and the pillar of McCabe's Gothic. Its agents have been alternately both the traditional and the modern, as the transition between the two antagonistic systems happened to be too violent and abrupt, for which in McCabe's view not only the new but also the old were responsible. This ill-transformation caused hybridity producing madness which was therefore established as the connecting tissue between the individual novels as well as the point of departure for other gothic transgressions such as schizophrenia, manic logic or violence in McCabe's work.

The Gothic is often hard to detect on the first sight in McCabe's fiction. This is because he does not work with it in a stereotypical way. Rather than to produce the sublime through terror, his interest in the use of terror and other gothic motifs is to express a critique of the second half of the twentieth century-Republic, which he portrays as dysfunctional, hybrid, pathologized, unhealthy and undoubtedly unliveable: none of his characters manages to adjust to it and inhabit it in some meaningful way, but all end up as madmen incapable of social coexistence.

Through their warped view and manic logic which are characteristic and very cunning tools of McCabe's, the author succeeds in challenging established rules and values and in questioning official pasts. This connects the overriding philosophies of both the traditional Gothic and contemporary Irish fiction which are alarmed by the state of affairs and try to provide a critical reflection through work of art.

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