

POST-CATHOLIC
IRELAND IN
LITERATURE AND
POPULAR CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes the concept of turn-of-the-millennium Irish culture as “post-Catholic”. It outlines how the Catholic Church had occupied so powerful a position in the post-independent Irish State, but recent decades have seen such profound changes in the moral and political authority ceded to the Church. This thesis therefore argues that the dissolution of the Church’s hegemony constitutes a paradigm sociopolitical and cultural shift, which it defines as the move from a Catholic to post-Catholic society.

It also argues that this shift has been both reflected in and effected by literature and popular culture, focusing in particular on issues of gender and sexuality in selected cultural texts. Chapter One examines how Marian Keyes uses the chick-lit novel to write back against conservative Catholicism and the maternalisation of Irish women, supplanting the “Irish Catholic Mummy” with a younger, sexually active generation of Irish women who do not define their subjectivity in terms of their maternal duties. It argues that Keyes’ hostility towards the Catholic Church affects, indeed directs, the sexual politics and frankness of her work and her treatment of topics such as abortion and divorce.

Chapter Two investigates how popular novelist Maeve Binchy explores female sexuality and desire in opposition to a traditional Catholic discourse of sin and virtue. It analyses the changes in socio-sexual mores throughout Binchy’s work, and evaluates Binchy’s attempts to find a continued role and relevance for the “good” clergy in post-scandal Ireland.

Chapter Three explores how television sitcom *Father Ted* satirises and thereby subverts Irish gender norms and Catholic doctrine on issues such as contraception and homosexuality. It argues that the sitcom format of *Ted* variously allows for satire, ribald farce and comic set-pieces, all of which undermine the Church’s authority further.

Chapter Four examines Aisling Walsh's television drama *Sinners* (2002), Gerard Mannix Flynn's dramatic monologue *James X* (2003) and Bruce Beresford's "family values" film *Evelyn* (2002). It explores how all three texts foreground and indict the role of the Irish State in both the Magdalene laundries (*Sinners*) and the industrial schools (*James X*, *Evelyn*). It also investigates the differing attitudes to Catholic iconography and archetypes throughout the texts, from *Sinners*' rejection of the Marian tradition to *Evelyn*'s recuperation of the figure of St Joseph.

Chapter Five turns to Arthur Mathews' *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O'Ceallaigh's memoir of a twentieth century Catholic life* (2001). It argues that this mock-lament for the Church's demise simultaneously parodies the late Nineties "memoir boom" and rejects the entire narrative of post-independence Irish identity in which, as indicated in the title of the text, Irishness and Catholicism were synonymous. It examines how "Catholic" does not operate in the title and body of *Well-Remembered Days* in the small-case "catholic" sense of wide-ranging and inclusive; in terms of the form of cultural Catholicism promulgated by O'Ceallaigh, "Catholic" is a byword for intolerance, prejudice and exclusion. The deliberate sexual hysteria of *Well-Remembered Days* is also examined, consolidating the argument that issues of gender and sexuality are key in cultural expressions of post-Catholicism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WORKS BY MARIAN KEYES

- A *Angels*. London: Penguin, 2002.
- BSS *The Brightest Star in the Sky*. London: Penguin, 2009.
- OSS *The Other Side of the Story*. London: Penguin, 2004.
- RH *Rachel's Holiday*. London: Penguin, 1997.
- TCM *This Charming Man*. London: Penguin, 2008.
- W *Watermelon*. Arrow Books: London, 2005.

WORKS BY MAEVE BINCHY

- CF *Circle of Friends*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1991.
- D4 *Dublin 4*. London: Random House, 1996.
- E *Echoes*. London: Arrow Books, 1984.
- HS *Heart and Soul*. London: Orion, 2008.
- MF *Minding Frankie*. London: Orion, 2010.
- WW *Whitethorn Woods*. Orion: London, 2006.

OTHERS

- JX Gerard Mannix Flynn. *James X*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2003.
- WRD Arthur Mathews. *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O'Ceallaigh's Memoir of a Twentieth-Century Catholic Life*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001.

INTRODUCTION

When attempting in 2004 to launch a solo career as a “serious” musical artist, Brian McFadden, a breakaway member of manufactured boyband Westlife, chose for the title track of his debut solo album a song entitled “Irish Son”.¹ The track, which was also released as a single, presents the Dublin of McFadden’s youth as constrained by a “holy book full of rules” and McFadden himself as “warped by the Christian Brothers ... made to get down on my knees on Sunday with the other fools”. “Don’t fill my head with sermons and force me to believe”, McFadden sings, having explained in interview that the song is “about growing up in Dublin and being forced to go to Mass and being told what your religion was going to be ... I know now it was all bullshit”.² McFadden also claims that the song was inspired by how “when I went to school as a young lad we got hit by the Christian Brothers and stuff like that”. In “Irish Son” he accordingly challenges the Brothers to “hit me now that I am twice your size”.³ Provocative and charged as his lyrics may have been, “Irish Son” did not, however, garner for McFadden the anti-establishment credentials for which he had perhaps aimed. There were aesthetic objections to the song — a bemused musical press wondered what to make of this “jaw-dropping diatribe against Catholic dogma served in appetising pop dressing.” Elton John described it as “the worst lyric on a record I’ve ever heard, I had to take it off in case I committed suicide”.⁴ But what also earned McFadden censure were his claims to have personally met with abuse at the hands of the Church. It was pointed out that not only had corporal punishment been abolished in Ireland in 1982, some years before the young McFadden (born in 1980) would have embarked upon his formal education, but that given the dwindling number and aging profile of the Christian Brothers, McFadden’s contact with members of the Order while at school would have been minimal. (The singer earned further ire for featuring in the music video for “Irish Son” a sign for St Fintan’s High School,

Sutton, an institution with which he had no previous connection, as the school's management tersely made clear.)

However, even if McFadden's claims to have experienced abuse were met with skepticism and disbelief, the many sexual and physical abuse scandals in which the Catholic Church had been embroiled in the years preceding the song's release, to say nothing of the 1998 public apology and expression of "deep regret" by the Christian Brothers to those who experienced ill-treatment or abuse in their care, meant that the description of the Christian Brothers as physically abusive was not regarded as unsubstantiated or outrageous in itself.⁵ "Irish Son" did not come as a particularly groundbreaking exposé or hard-hitting indictment of the Catholic Church. Rather, so traumatic had the abuse scandals proven to both the individuals involved and Irish society at large that McFadden's rendering of such events in jaunty pop-rock ballad format left him accused by figures such as Greg Daly of "belatedly jumping onto a cool bandwagon of pain".⁶

Nonetheless, for "Irish Son" to have been released in the first place — albeit to a slightly different reaction than that which for which McFadden and his management had presumably aimed — is deeply significant, in that it demonstrates how "the scandals" in the Catholic Church occupied a central place in the cultural consciousness of turn-of-the-century Ireland. In his study of Irish popular music, Gerry Smyth argues it is "with the wide range of practices that are developed in relation to late twentieth-century popular music — creative discourses, policy decisions, consumption trends and so on — that modern Irish identity has been, and continues to be, most actively negotiated".⁷ Throughout his exploration of Irish popular music as "a crucial site for the representation and continuing negotiation of Irish identity", Smyth describes manufactured pop, a genre of which McFadden is the quintessential representative, as "a form of ... music practice in which financial considerations are paramount", in that it "comes into the world as the result of largely non-musical decisions, and...manages to circulate by means of a network of multinational cluster corporations".⁸ Such a state of affairs is not unique to the Irish context, with musicologist Simon Frith similarly emphasizing that manufactured pop is "music provided from on high (by record companies, radio programmers and concert promoters) rather than being made from below ... not a do-it-yourself music but ... professionally produced and packaged".⁹ Frith outlines how the market-oriented and profit-driven pop music industry pursues "a strategy of risk avoidance" and that "these days as much money is spent on image making as on music-making: no one gets signed to a record label without a discussion of how they will be marketed": far from "Irish Son" being an impromptu protest song on the part of a firebrand McFadden, the decision to record and release it would have been the result of much

financial, marketing and publicity consideration.¹⁰ Because the pop industry must accurately gauge public mores and societal norms for its continued existence, this brand of music, whilst not celebrated in general for its socio-political commentary, therefore acts as a barometer of “the spirit of the age”. As Elizabeth Cullingford puts it, “those who live by the pen or the box office [or, in this case, the singles chart] are necessarily closer to their audience than most academics are”.¹¹ Evidently it had been decided that so widespread was disillusionment in Ireland with the Catholic Church that the moment, and indeed market, was apposite for a song such as “Irish Son” in which McFadden, having “seen so much that has changed me” and at twenty-four now being “old enough to know my own mind”, urges his listeners to similarly “break with your own past, feed your own mind” by repudiating Catholicism.

Furthermore, both lyrically and visually it is stressed that McFadden’s turning away from the Church is not merely a matter of personal faith but forms part of a wider social transformation. The song’s repeated refrain is that having cast off Catholicism, “this Irish son has moved with the times”. This link to the wider context is also emphasized in the video for the track, in which McFadden moonlights as a Dublin taxi-driver, singing to camera as he ferries his various charges around the city.¹² Although McFadden’s taxi-ing takes him past iconic Dublin landmarks — such as the Poolbeg Towers, the Ha’penny Bridge, the Four Courts, and the front gates of Trinity College — and through the docklands, quays and Georgian streets betokening Dublin of the rare oul’ times, this is firmly Celtic Tiger Ireland, the building cranes in the background pointing to the construction boom on which the economy both prospered and collapsed. McFadden’s fares include not only an elderly priest blessing himself as he reads a devotional text, or a younger cleric shunted into the front passenger seat, but also young women returning from a shopping trip, laden down with purchases, teenagers absorbed in the music playing via their headphones, and a businesswoman attired in suit jacket and pinstripe shirt talking on her mobile phone. Similarly, the repeated shots of fast-flowing traffic around the city (a detail in which a touch of artistic licence can be discerned, given the gridlock by which Dublin commuters were habitually dogged during the boom years) highlight that this is a prosperous, dynamic and fast-paced urban landscape in which consumer capitalism has replaced Catholicism as the dominant cultural code, and not the city stymied by paralysis and “the tyranny of Rome” as depicted by James Joyce.¹³ The video’s final frames places particular emphasis on this point: the camera focuses on McFadden while he sings “this Irish son”, then cuts to an aerial shot of night-time Dublin, traffic flowing up and down the quays, before returning to the figure of McFadden for the words “has moved with the times”.

Such a repudiation amounts to a paradigm shift for a society in which the Church had previously enjoyed a uniquely privileged social position; as such, “Irish Son” provides an excellent introduction to and encapsulation of the central arguments on which this thesis is predicated: that contemporary Ireland has undergone a seismic shift in the perception of and status accorded to the Catholic Church, which this thesis defines as the move from a Catholic to post-Catholic society, and that this shift has been both reflected in and effected by literature and popular culture. A brief account of the Catholic Church’s changing position in post-independence Ireland will here prove germane in situating this thesis further. This in turn requires looking to the nineteenth century, as Louise Fuller explains in her magisterial *Irish Catholicism since 1950: the undoing of a culture* (2002):

Any attempt to understand the power and influence of Catholicism in Irish society must examine sociopolitical developments in nineteenth-century Ireland ... Firstly, the Catholic bishops and clergy became increasingly politicised in the course of the nineteenth century. Secondly, the bishops sought to build up the Church organisation in terms of its physical plant, personnel and discipline; and, thirdly, they set about improving the level and quality of the laity’s devotional practice.¹⁴

Of the politicization of the clergy, Leeann Lane explains how “in the nineteenth century, language, religion and nationalism became inextricably combined ... the link between Catholicism and nationalism was decisively forged in Daniel O’Connell’s campaign in the 1820s for Catholic Emancipation and in his later campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union”.¹⁵ Fuller similarly outlines how:

Following Catholic emancipation in 1829 ... the Catholic bishops agreed to back Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party in their agitation for a resolution of the land issue and for home rule in return for the party’s commitment to represent their interests in securing third-level education rights for Catholics.¹⁶

As well as increasingly aligning itself with the nationalist movement, the Church also took overwhelming control of the national school system in the wake of the 1831 establishment of a “board for the superintendence of a system of national education in Ireland” thereby not only cementing a steadfast “clerical-nationalist alliance” but also ensuring the widespread dissemination of Catholic ideology via the school system.¹⁷ Several other political developments were equally significant. The 1832 Reform Act widened the franchise, while equally important for Catholics was the Church Temporalities Act of 1833, which meant that

ten Church of Ireland bishoprics were abolished, as was the Church Rate. In addition, in 1834 Michael O’Loughlen was appointed Solicitor General, the first Catholic in Ireland to hold high office since the reign of James II. An Order in Council of 1834 also meant Catholics were no longer legally required to renounce transubstantiation or abjure the temporal and spiritual authority of the Pope to hold civil office.

In tandem with this strengthening of the Catholic Church’s political position, Fuller also points to Emmet Larkin’s influential thesis about “the ‘devotional revolution’ — whereby Catholics were socialised into a strong religious belief, practice and moral order — primarily [during] the latter half of the nineteenth century, after the appointment of Paul Cullen as Archbishop of Armagh”, whose emphasis on communal worship decorously organised around ritual and observance produced a powerful Catholic social imaginary:

With the benefit of their increased personnel [following establishment of a seminary in Clonliffe in 1859], more rigorous learning, better church facilities and a more receptive laity, the priests focused attention on the Mass, confession and reception of Holy Communion. The laity was encouraged by missions held in parishes all over Ireland and devotional exercises designed to encourage more frequent participation in the sacraments and to instill piety. These devotions included the rosary, devotions to the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Conception, the Forty Hours, Benediction, pilgrimages, shrines, retreats and processions. Practice was regularised by setting up sodalities, confraternities and altar societies which would be overseen by spiritual directors. This communal devotion was strengthened by means of devotional aids such as beads, medals, missals, prayer books, catechisms, holy pictures and scapulars ... Attendance at church and at school became the means whereby people were socialised into the routines, rules and regulations — the ethos of the Catholic way of life.⁸

Sociologist Tom Inglis also employs Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus to explain this process, explaining that “by habitus, Bourdieu means a lasting, general and adaptable way of thinking and acting in conformity with a systematic view of the world which, in our case, is that produced by the Catholic Church”, with Catholic ideology thus internalised and reproduced in everyday social relations.¹⁹

Moving into the post-partition independent State, this habitus and hegemonic position was consolidated further. To again turn to Fuller for explication:

In a joint pastoral letter in October 1922 the bishops formally declared themselves against de Valera and his republican followers. The church’s place in the political

consensus was, by now, guaranteed by a hundred years of history. With the founding of the Free State the Catholic Church, too, had arrived. It had fought a long, hard battle to consolidate its position during the course of the nineteenth century, and freedom now served to strengthen further its power and dominance ... [B]y means of several pieces of legislation through the 1920s and 1930s the Catholic moral code became enshrined in the law of the land. The prevailing discourse which dominated political, cultural and social life in the Republic was that of the Catholic church. The process culminated in the drawing up of a new Constitution in 1937, deeply influenced by Catholic teaching and in which Article 44 recognized the 'special position' of the Catholic Church.²⁰

Hence, though not an established religion as such, the Catholic Church "as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens" nevertheless enjoyed vast moral authority and temporal power in the Irish Free State and its successor the Republic as one way of expressing a distinct Irish identity. Inglis has coined the phrase "moral monopoly" to describe the extent of the Church's influence and sway.²¹

The Church's hegemony, however, was challenged from the 1960s onwards as a result of a number of social changes. In 1967, for example, free secondary education was introduced in the Republic. The Irish feminist movement, in its bid to legalise contraceptives, became, as Francis Mulhern notes, "the exposed vanguard in a prolonged struggle to end clerical usurpation of women's reproductive rights, and thus to open the way to a fully secular public domain", or as Roy Foster terms it, "procreation became politics".²² The rise of television and mass media exposed the Irish public to more secular mores and modes of living from abroad, as did cheaper and more frequent air travel, while domestic programs such as *The Late Late Show* also provided a forum for discussion and dissent. The Church itself underwent significant changes following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), liberation theology and the return of priests from South America also having unsettling effect, at odds with Church authority and political leanings as these returning clergy were. Additionally, Ireland's 1973 entry into what was then the European Economic Community (and which in due course became the European Union) meant that the Supreme Court was no longer the final court of appeal for Irish citizens. Rather, the EU provided an additional course of legal address to Irish citizens beyond the Catholic-inflected legislature of the Irish State. Combined, all these events and developments created a climate in which the Church's authority could be questioned and interrogated, rather than taken as given and absolute.²³

Indeed, the social change of the 1960s and 70s was such that Pope John Paul II's 1979 visit to Ireland has been interpreted as a sign not of Catholicism's cultural security, but

instead as “a symptom of and panic reaction to the gathering crisis. For no Pope had ever felt the need to secure the green island with a personal appearance in the past”.²⁴ By the 1980s, it is argued, the Catholic Church in Ireland enjoyed only a fraction of its former power, as indicated perhaps by the way Article 44 of the constitution had been removed in January 1973 following referendum.²⁵ “The symbolic achievement of Mary Robinson’s election as president” in 1990 has also been taken as evidence of this transformation.²⁶ Ailbhe Smyth, for example, emphasised in 1992 that “the electorate had overwhelmingly voted for a woman President, and, further, a woman whose own personal and political history publicly connected her with the ideologies and practices of feminism and socialism”, and who, further, was in a “mixed marriage” with a Protestant, which Smyth interprets as “a positive vote for a new force capable of breaking the strangle-hold of the historical narratives of Ireland and Irishness. It was a vote for disruption and disturbance of the myths on which we have fed ourselves for longer than we now want to remember”, one such cultural code being patriarchal conservative Catholicism.²⁷

Be that as it may, as mentioned in the opening discussion of “Irish Son”, the Church was embroiled in a series of highly-publicised scandals throughout the 1990s and beyond, meaning that any moral authority remaining to it at that point spectacularly collapsed. Major discrepancies emerged between its public pronouncements on morality — especially sexual morality — and the private behaviour of certain of its members. In May 1992, for example, it emerged that Eamon Casey, the Bishop of Galway, had fathered a child with American divorcée Annie Murphy and had drawn upon IR£70,000 of diocesan funds for child maintenance.²⁸ The story broke, Diarmaid Ferriter notes, only two months after the bishop had “denounced the rise in sexual activity and spoke of his work with unmarried teenage pregnant girls” by offering the reminder that “one cannot pick and choose with the Church’s teaching”.²⁹ It also emerged, albeit posthumously, in 1993 that Fr Michael Cleary, an equally high-profile cleric and equally vocal about the exigency of exercising “the proper restraint” over one’s sexual energies, had also fathered two children with his housekeeper Phyllis Hamilton, the relationship starting when Hamilton was only seventeen.³⁰

In 1979 Cleary and Casey had served as the “warm up acts” for Pope John Paul II’s papal mass in Phoenix Park (an event attended by over one million people), an image which, as more than one commentator has noted, took on an ironic tint in light of these later revelations. However, as John Littleton and Eamon Maher observe, “while dramatic at the time, Cleary and Casey’s scandals were mere trifles compared to what was in store for the Church in the following years”.³¹ For example, after being arrested on child abuse charges in Northern Ireland, Norbertine cleric Fr Brendan Smyth fled to the Republic, the controversy

over the delay in granting his extradition to the North leading to the collapse of the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition in 1994.³² It also emerged in the “Suffer Little Children” episode of UTV documentary *Counterpoint* (1994) that Smyth’s superiors in the Church (including the then Fr Sean Brady, now cardinal and Primate of All-Ireland) had been aware of the allegations of abuse made against him but rather than referring the matter to the police had instead moved the priest from parish to parish.³³ This was not the only case, it subsequently became apparent, of cover-up and obfuscation by diocesan authorities when faced with allegations of abuse. In 2002, in the wake of television documentary *Suing the Pope*, Bishop Brendan Comiskey resigned from his post in the Ferns diocese when called upon to explain his actions — or indeed, inaction — in dealing with Fr Sean Fortune, who was accused of sixty-six charges of abuse against twenty-nine boys in the parish of Fethard-on-Sea (Fortune committed suicide whilst awaiting trial). The subsequent Ferns Report (2005), a “non-statutory private inquiry [established by the Minister of Health and Children] to investigate allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse...made against clergy operating under the aegis of the Diocese of Ferns” found that “during the time of his episcopacy from April 1984 to April 2002, Bishop Comiskey received allegations in respect of ten priests who were living at the time of allegations. In addition, he received allegations against four further priests who were deceased”.³⁴ However, no priest was removed from active ministry and child protection measures were not implemented in the parishes to which accused priests were moved.³⁵

Similar findings emerged from elsewhere. The Report by Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin (2009), also referred to as the Murphy Report after chair Judge Yvonne Murphy, examined “the institutional response to complaints, suspicions and knowledge of child sexual abuse” in the Dublin archdiocese in relation to forty-six priests.³⁶ It too found that:

The Dublin Archdiocese’s pre-occupations in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse, at least until the mid 1990s, were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the reputation of the Church, and the preservation of its assets. All other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims, were subordinated to these priorities.³⁷

Abuse was also shown to have occurred in industrial schools, which were residential schools run by Catholic orders but funded by the State until widespread reform of the child-care system was instigated by the 1970 Kennedy Report. Documentaries such as Louis Lenten’s *Dear Daughter* (1996), in which Christine Buckley detailed her childhood experiences in St Vincent’s Industrial School, Goldenbridge, and Mary Raftery’s *States of Fear* (1999), in Luke

Gibbons' words, "relentlessly exposed the secrets of institutional violence and sexual abuse stifled under the bureaucracy of the Catholic Church in Ireland".³⁸

States of Fear in particular had a deep and immediate impact, particularly in the way, as evinced in its title, it directed attention towards the State's role in the industrial school system.³⁹ In *Suffer the Little Children: the inside story of Ireland's industrial schools* (1999), a book accompanying the series, Raftery emphasises that, although the schools were staffed and operated on a day-to-day basis by religious orders, they nonetheless remained "entirely the responsibility of the State, established by law, funded and regulated by the Department of Education".⁴⁰ It was the State, rather than the Catholic Church, which was ultimately responsible for any abuses which had occurred. An official response was both demanded and received. On 11 May 1999, the evening on which the third and final programme in the series was aired, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern issued "a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse...on behalf of the State and of all citizens of the State...for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue".⁴¹ The following week saw the establishment of a Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse "with functions including the investigation of abuse of children in institutions in the State", these institutions being predominantly — though not exclusively — religious-run.

The Commission heard testimony from more than 1700 people and issued its five-volume report a decade later in 2009. This report — commonly known as the Ryan Report (after Justice Sean Ryan, who chaired the Commission from 2003 onwards) — condemns the industrial school system as "a Victorian model of childcare that failed to adapt to Twentieth Century conditions and did not prioritise the needs of children".⁴² It details a "climate of fear, created by pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment, permeat[ing] most of the institutions", noting that "more than 90% of all witnesses who gave evidence to the Confidential Committee reported being physically abused while in schools or out-of-home care", while "sexual abuse was reported by approximately half of all ... witnesses".⁴³ Furthermore, not only was abuse systemic, but "documents revealed that sexual abusers were often long-term offenders who repeatedly abused children wherever they were working. Contrary to the Congregations' claims that the recidivist nature of sexual offending was not understood, it is clear from the documented cases that they [the Congregations] were aware of the propensity for abusers to re-abuse".⁴⁴ Nonetheless, "cases of sexual abuse were managed with a view to minimizing the risk of public disclosure and consequent damage to the institution and the Congregation", meaning "the interests of the institutions and the Congregations came to be placed ahead those of the children who were in their care", damning findings indeed for an institution which had positioned itself as the moral arbiter of

Irish society.⁴⁵ The Ryan Report also emphasised (as had *States of Fear*) that “the Department of Education had legal responsibility under the Children Act 1908 for all children committed to the Industrial and Reformatory Schools.” Furthermore, archival evidence revealed that “complaints of physical abuse were frequent enough for the Department of Education to be aware that they referred to more than acts of sporadic violence by some individuals. The Department knew that violence and beatings were endemic within the system itself” meaning that the State had to accept no small measure of responsibility for — or indeed account for the abnegation of responsibility which led to — this widespread abuse.⁴⁶

For all that McFadden and his marketing team got wrong with “Irish Son”, they were nonetheless adroit in identifying the cultural sea change which had occurred in relation to the status accorded to the Catholic Church, and a dark awareness of the consequences of so unchallenged an alliance of Church and State. Kevin Rockett argues that “the rupture into society of issues such as institutional abuse and migration indicated that the repressed had returned at the moment of celebratory capitalism in Celtic Tiger Ireland” to break up the party, as it were, by bursting forth with what had lurked beneath the surface of Irish social consciousness.⁴⁷ “Irish Son” is far from the only example of how the societal turn away from the church and a reconfiguration of the roles of Church and State, which was both expedited and intensified by “the scandals”, received imaginative retelling. Instead, these events permeated turn-of-the-millennium Irish culture across a variety of textual forms, ranging from films to drama, television sitcom to popular fiction. Perhaps this should not prove overly surprising. Cultural Studies “regards culture as political in a quite specific sense — as a terrain of conflict and contestation. It is seen as a key site for the production and reproduction of the social relations of everyday life” and stresses that “popular culture structures and organizes the everyday experience of people ... Far from being just a marginal or superficial cultural phenomenon, popular culture remains in fact at the very heart of how we live our lives and how we perceive society around us, how we think and feel about it.”⁴⁸ Culture is, in the words of Joe Cleary, “the decisive area where social conflicts are experienced and evaluated”, the means by which a society expresses and works through its anxieties, contradictions and concerns.⁴⁹ In line with the Cultural Studies’ tenet that “representational practices thus matter to the cultural studies critic because, contrary to common belief, representations do not describe but in fact actively construct reality”, and mindful of the oft-quoted reminder from Luke Gibbons that “understanding a community or culture does not consist solely in establishing ‘neutral’ facts and ‘objective’ details: it means taking seriously their ways of structuring experience, their popular narratives, the distinctive way in which they frame the social and political realities which affect their lives”⁵⁰, this

thesis therefore examines how the scandals and the attendant social change are reflected, refracted and reimaged in Irish literature and popular culture, across a variety of literary, filmic, televisual, dramatic and aural texts.

In examining these processes and transformations, it takes its lead from Elizabeth Cullingford's exemplary *Ireland's Others: gender and ethnicity in Irish literature and popular culture* (2002), which, as Cullingford explains, "makes use of theory but it is not a book of theory. My subjects are texts (plays, novels, poems, films, television) within their historical and cultural contexts. I begin from and remain grounded in the experience of imaginative literature and visual media".⁵¹ It thus takes from Cullingford "the method of strategic and historically informed close reading", given what Gerardine Meaney identifies in her similarly excellent *Gender, Ireland and Cultural Change* (2010) as "the redundancy of divorcing textual analysis from historical understanding in seeking to understand cultural change".⁵² Nonetheless, this thesis also seeks to produce more than a disparate set of readings, instead aiming to situate and explore the coherent cultural narrative of social change that these texts constitute in their engagements with the Catholic Church. This in turn requires a theoretical framework within which to conceptualise the dissolution of the Church's hegemony. While aspects of those critical and theoretical frameworks currently offered by Irish Studies proved of use in this, none of them fitted the task wholesale as such in their existing formulations. Christine St Peter and Patricia Boyle Haberstroh explain that "postcolonialism ... and postmodernism have become increasingly popular lenses through which to view Irish culture and literature", but both proved inadequate as a methodology or mode of approach, in that Catholicism has been problematically absent in both.⁵³ "Much of what is written about the Catholic Church in Ireland", Inglis observed in 1998, "still comes from liturgical, pastoral and theological perspectives", he and a number of others adding valuable sociological and historical studies to this body of work.⁵⁴ But, as Linda Connolly, citing Alan Finlayson, notes, "the 'Ireland' of Irish Studies is vastly different from the Ireland of sociologists".⁵⁵ Connolly claims this disjuncture as evidence that "the canon of postcolonial criticism has clearly failed to bridge the gap that exists between social criticism and cultural criticism in Irish Studies", contending that "the term 'Irish Studies' has become almost exclusively associated with an identifiable group of literary critics associated with the Field Day agenda and postcolonial criticism", and asking in exasperation, "What is 'Irish Studies' now? Is it, in fact, just a shorthand term for the interdisciplinary/intercultural study of 'the Irish' and 'Irishness', or is it a paradigm that has become exclusively coupled with a grand postcolonial reading of Irish culture?"⁵⁶

The relevance of such a critique to this study is that Catholicism remained curiously invisible as a mode of analysis throughout the postcolonial vogue and attendant “theory wars” of Irish Studies, even as scandal after scandal was unfolding, and Irish society was undergoing such - often bitterly disputed - social change (the emotive divorce and abortion referenda of the 1980s and 90s will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One), meaning that either implicitly or explicitly Catholicism was to the cultural and political fore. Declan Kiberd’s *Inventing Ireland: the literature of the modern nation* (1995), by way of example, firmly places Ireland within a postcolonial paradigm, and whereas within the index a great spate of references to “colonialism” delineate it as a distinct causality in the shaping of twentieth century Ireland, “Catholic”, by way of contrast, appears a desultory twice, and then under the guise of “Emancipation” rather than examining the more recent and widespread impact, for good and for ill, of Catholicism upon Irish society.⁵⁷ In Bernard MacLaverty’s *Lamb* (1980), a Christian Brother who abducts a young boy from a remote industrial school and travels to England with the child is later able to re-enter Ireland unchallenged because the airport authorities are busy “looking for Provos and forgetting the rest”.⁵⁸ This is an admittedly flippant analogy (and one which perhaps brings to mind Colm Toibín’s incendiary remark that “there were times in the 1980s when it was hard not to feel that Field Day had become the literary wing of the IRA” given “the group’s refusal to accept that there was another Ireland with problems besides those created by the colonial experience”⁵⁹). However, if the relationship between nationalism and postcolonialism is in itself a thorny issue, and if postcolonialism does not automatically result in the championing of nationalist sentiment, but can also challenge and interrogate nationalism as a discourse itself, the postcolonial debate and intense theoretical wrangling (which at times appeared to degenerate into interpersonal mudslinging) nonetheless remained a natio-centric debate, in which the heightened sensitivity to the interlinked issues of nationalism, national identity and “the nation”, led to the occlusion of much else, not least of which was a systemic analysis of Catholicism. We would do well to heed Edna Longley’s caution that in examining the factors shaping Irish society, “one result of looking no further (or nearer) than ‘colonialism’ is to fudge the role of religion”.⁶⁰

Granted, a postcolonial reading of Irish culture and history can help explain why the Catholic Church was able to so solidly occupy a hegemonic position in the Irish State, and why Catholicism became so central to the national self-image; namely as a way of differentiating the identity of the emergent nation-state from that of the former colonial power. James M Smith explains that:

The project of national identity formation in the decades following independence mobilized Catholic notions of sexual morality ... Against the backdrop of partition and fueled by the desire to “create a new imagined community within the boundaries of the twenty-six-county state”, church and state fashioned a seamlessly homogenous society ... Working in unison, these two institutions closed off internal challenges and contradictions even as they represented society as pure and untainted by external corruption ... Marjorie Howes illuminates this alliance, arguing that “one method of defining and asserting the national character that enjoyed wide popular support, accorded with the Free State’s now legendary social and economic conservatism and marked a clearly visible difference between Ireland and England was the formal and informal enforcement of Catholic social teachings, particularly in the area of sexual morality” ... Catholic morality became at once a hallmark of Irish identity, differentiating the national community from its near neighbours, and an emblem of the uncontested political territory, enabling politicians to eschew party affiliation and seek unanimity through religious conformity.⁶¹

Gerardine Meaney also contends that “postcolonial theory offered feminist critique in Ireland a vital way of understanding sexual conservatism, the relationship of the Catholic Church and the state and the gendering of national identity as elements that it shared with a wide variety of postcolonial cultures”.⁶² But to understand is not the same as to exonerate, and as Meaney notes, “any evaluation of nationalism in the Irish context has to be conditioned at this stage by an understanding of the kind of state it produced and what that state and its dominant church were capable of perpetrating”.⁶³ Meaney cautions against “a crude political variant of a postcolonial understanding of Irish history [that] has become a recurrent alibi when the state seeks to avoid responsibility for either the Irish past or present”, elsewhere warning of “the danger ... that the history of the nation will once again become an alibi for the depredations of the state”.⁶⁴

Meaney’s differentiation between the state and the nation is significant, and as such, given that the latter decades of the twentieth century saw such fundamental changes in the relationships between Church, State and society in Ireland, this study places the state, defined as a “separate and recognisable set of institutions with dedicated personnel that is autonomous from the interests of various social groups [and which] ... has a monopoly over legitimate rule-making and enforcement ... within a bounded territory” rather than the nation at its theoretical core.⁶⁵ In this it draws upon the work of Ray Ryan. In seeking to explain Irish Studies’ critical sensitivity towards the nation, Ryan posits that “the Northern Troubles have produced a literature ‘authenticated by crisis’, writing whose immediate

political and cultural context facilitates the preoccupations of frameworks like post-colonialism and identity politics”.⁶⁶ However, keenly aware that “colonialism is not the single cause of the Irish predicament, any more than is capitalism”, Ryan identifies the challenge for Irish Studies being to incorporate “more alternative analyses and comparisons, histories and causalities, than can be produced under a single methodology like post-colonialism or a single notion like identity”.⁶⁷ And while, as Ryan notes, “the ‘South’ has been ... largely abandoned by Irish criticism, hidden because its writing did not address the conditions of violence”, he nonetheless contends that in “the canon now emerging from the Republic ... questions of identity, questions pertaining to the nation, are now subordinate to an examination of the structures of power, an investigation of the state”.⁶⁸ Irish Studies should thus correspondingly introduce the State, ie; the twenty-six county Republic, as an analytical and conceptual base, he argues, rather than continuing to focus on the abstracted concept of “the nation”.

Ryan’s approach is, Claire Connolly notes, “unusual in treating the Irish Republic (officially in place since 1949) as a new and distinct political and social entity, rather than as a timeless truth awaiting full territorial expression”.⁶⁹ Fintan O’Toole similarly explains how Irish political culture has been underwritten by “the feeling that the Irish state was a temporary arrangement, at best a mere way-station on the road to the true Republic of a United Ireland that would emerge at some time in the future”.⁷⁰ Indeed, Ryan is sensitive to the political implications of adopting the Republic as an analytical base, given how the partitioning by which the State was created also created deep and lasting discord, including the still-contested sovereignty of Northern Ireland. He is conscious that:

A study addressing the twenty-six counties as a mature, coherent entity might be accused of promoting a ‘partitionist mentality’, of prematurely accepting and naturalising provisional state borders, of acquiescing in a process which perhaps distorts the frameworks and periodisations available for critical debate. In so doing, it to some extent legitimises and naturalises the experience of that state, pushes it from the margins of Irish critical attention a little closer to the centre, makes the Republic canonical while, perhaps, marginalising the experience of smaller groups, such as Northern Nationalists.⁷¹

Nonetheless, he sensibly points out that “one aspiration of cultural analysis must be to address accurately the way things are” and accordingly argues that Irish Studies “must to some degree accept and address the Republic as a coherent cultural identity”, which means “analysing its various disciplinary formats and designations. Ignoring this dimension ensures

that the state remains a static, uncontested concept in Irish cultural debate — instead of being acknowledged as the active participant it is”.⁷² Such an approach is thus particularly apposite for this study, as one issue which has particularly focused attention on the operations of the State in contemporary Ireland has been that of institutional abuse, with Chapter Four examining the disputes about the active participation of the State in the industrial schools and Magdalene laundries alike.

Rather than seeing Ireland as a postcolonial nation, this thesis therefore interrogates Ireland as a post-Catholic state.⁷³ Some clarification is necessary here. It might seem either premature, or quite simply inaccurate, to declare Ireland to be post-Catholic, when 84% of respondents to the 2011 Census identified as Catholic, 89% of respondents to a 2010 *Irish Times* poll declaring themselves likewise.⁷⁴ Indeed, the need for precision of definition in this matter was brought home to R  air   Quinn, then Minister for Finance, in 1996 when he described Ireland as a “post-Catholic pluralist Republic” while speaking in the US. In so doing he aroused significant controversy and was called upon to defend his choice of phrase.⁷⁵ Quinn explained that he had not sought to imply that there had been a diminution of personal faith, either quantitatively or qualitatively (however that might be gauged), but rather that “in a political sense ...    la the Mother and Child scheme, or other aspects of social policy ... the Catholic Church no longer had a veto over legislation”.⁷⁶ Revisiting his comments in 2009, he again emphasised that the description “post-Catholic” was “not meant as an insulting remark” but rather “it was a recognition of the change in the relationship between Church and State, compared to 1950s Ireland”⁷⁷ (The manner in which “1950s Ireland” is repeatedly invoked in Irish culture as the undesirable, regressive “other” to the modern, liberal present will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five.)

Similarly, Fintan O’Toole is unequivocal in his lambasting of the Catholic Church, as “lazy and intellectually weak ... not a radical challenge to the values of a self-satisfied society, but the bulwark of that self-satisfaction ... The grotesquely corrupting effects of its power are smeared across the pages of the Ryan and Murphy reports”.⁷⁸ However, he is at pains to emphasise of his unremitting rejection of institutional Catholicism that

The word ‘institutional’ should be emphasised. Generations of committed Catholics — both lay people and those in holy orders — gave dedicated and whole-hearted service to individuals and communities in need. Some of the best civil society organisations in Ireland today ... were founded by or are peopled with committed Catholics. What is at issue is not Catholicism itself or the contribution that people of faith can make to a dynamic republic. It is a very specific

institution that arose from the equally specific circumstances of nineteenth-century Ireland.⁷⁹

This is similarly how Catholicism is defined and critiqued in this thesis; as an institution. Accordingly, post-Catholicism under the terms of this thesis does not mean that Catholicism has disappeared entirely from Irish social, cultural and spiritual life, which would also require proving this thesis by negative evidence, as the most salient indicator of post-Catholic Ireland under this logic would be the absolute absence of Catholicism from literature and culture, as opposed to the Corkerian notion that so central is religion to Irish life that “genuine Anglo-Irish literature” can only be considered that upon which “at every hand’s turn ... religious consciousness breaks ... no matter what the subject”⁸⁰. Rather, post-Catholicism is here underpinned by the shift from “a country where ... close relations had existed between church and state since its very foundation, and in which legislation had propped up Catholic teaching”, to one in which the Church was called to account by official fora of inquiry.⁸¹ As Fuller notes:

Whereas heretofore the church was its own moral guardian according to the principles laid down in canon law, repeated allegations led to the government setting up the Laffoy Commission to inquire into Child Abuse in Religious Institutions on 23 May 2000. This was an ironic turn of events, because previously the church monitored the moral behaviour of the state. Now there was a reversal of roles, and the state was acting as moral policeman in areas that were the church’s own domain and in which formerly it would have brooked no interference from the state.⁸²

Furthermore, this detachment from Catholicism as an institution is not just a matter of its socio-political position, but is also apparent in terms of individual religious practice. To return to the *Irish Times* poll, in which 89% of respondents identified as Catholic, only one third attended religious service weekly, almost 80% were in favour of the ordination of women priests, 83% in favour of priests marrying, 67% supporting same-sex marriage, 79% not opposing sex before marriage.⁸³ These figures betoken a disregarding of official Church teaching, a version of Catholicism which Roy Foster has described as “Irish Protestantism without the name” in its continued religious faith but with recourse to individual conscience rather than taking moral guidance from the hierarchy.⁸⁴ As such, “post-Catholic” as the term is deployed throughout this thesis signifies, in a temporal sense, “after the wane of the control of the Catholic Church”. Observing how in “the affluent societies of Europe or countries such as Canada, Australia or New Zealand ... people’s religious ties have steadily or

rather quite dramatically lapsed in the post-World War II period”, Jürgen Habermas similarly contends that “public consciousness in Europe can be described in terms of a ‘post-secular society’ to the extent that at present it still has to ‘adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment’ ... The description of modern societies as “post-secular” refers to a change in consciousness”.⁸⁵ This is precisely the manner in which “post-Catholic” is utilised throughout this study: which the religious community of the Catholic Church continues to exist, and while a majority of Irish people may continue to self-identify as Catholic, the seismic change in consciousness means that morality, both personal and public, no longer derives from nor is dominated by Church teachings.

As well as examining this shift in authority, also to the fore in this thesis are issues of gender and sexuality. Given that the Catholic Church had been so vocal about matters of sexual morality, and so zealous in governing stringent sexual mores in the post-independent State, that so many of the scandals were sexual in nature intensified the disillusionment with the Church, evinced, for example, in Gerry Smyth’s vituperative description of the Church as “an institution which has for so long, and with such energy and with such apparent imperviousness to the realities of human life, worked to inculcate such a stringently curtailed vision of sexual identity, while all the time allowing its own agents to operate outside the legal parameters of normal society”.⁸⁶ This anger, and a perception of the Church as hypocritical can, this thesis argues, strongly be discerned throughout popular culture. This thesis explores how this anger and antipathy is expressed in a number of ways, ranging from direct attack and commentary in the work of Marian Keyes, to oblique irony in the novels of Maeve Binchy, to mischievous satire and destabilising “silliness” in *Father Ted* and Arthur Mathews’ *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O’Ceallaigh’s memoir of a twentieth-century Catholic life* (2001).

Furthermore, if exploring discourses and norms of gender and sexuality does not simply entail a focus upon female experience, as these also significantly shape men’s lives, it is nonetheless incontrovertible that the Church’s hegemony and the Catholic ethos of the Irish State had deeper, and more oppressive, import for women; Siobhan Kilfeather remarks that “if the Catholic Church did much to stifle potential feminism in the North, in the new Irish Free State its influence has been represented as devastating”.⁸⁷ Tom Inglis has also observed that “the issues on which the hierarchy has entered the public arena in Ireland, and which have caused the most division between Church and state, have been those that deal with the control of women’s bodies”.⁸⁸ This thesis explores cultural representations of Catholicism’s impact upon Irishwomen, including the debates about abortion and divorce (Chapter One),

the cultural archetype of “Irish Catholic Mammy” (Chapter One and Three, in the guise of Mrs Doyle), the primacy placed on female sexual purity (Chapters Two), and the Magdalene laundries as awaiting sexual transgressors (Chapter Four). Tom Inglis notes that “in the heyday of the Church’s monopoly over morality and sexuality, the deployment of sexuality, in Ireland as elsewhere, revolved around sexually promiscuous women who were seen as a threat to family and community, a silencing of sex particularly among children and adolescents, the promotion of unrestricted fertility and the castigation of any form of sex that took place outside of marriage as deviant”.⁸⁹ The consequences of this in its various manifestations are explored throughout this thesis. The feminist readings conducted in this thesis are thus ones attentive to the social and cultural realities of Irishwomen’s lives, affected (and curtailed) by institutional Catholicism.

In choosing texts for examination in this thesis, the methodology employed was as follows: firstly, I identified a wide range of popular novels, films, pop songs, television dramas and plays from the latter decades of the twentieth century and first decade of the new millennium which engaged with and provided commentary on the societal shift away from the Catholic Church, and which played their part in the move from a Catholic to post-Catholic mode of being. I then isolated those cultural texts which have been either highly popular, such as the novels of Marian Keyes and Maeve Binchy and *Father Ted*, or else have incurred censure or aroused controversy (such as *Sinners* or *Evelyn*, for differing reasons) for their depiction of the Church and associated institutions. By adhering to these selection criteria, the texts chosen were thus those which were most efficacious in conveying and contributing to the new social consciousness of post-Catholicism in its various manifestations, in which the strongest and most striking voices could be heard, or which provided the most salient commentaries on and engagements with the emergent post-Catholic habitus.

Once texts had been selected in accordance with this methodology, in then conducting my analyses, while I was mindful to situate the texts against the sociocultural context of the public shift away from the Church, I did not simply want to employ them as evidence of social change. Rather, I sought to interrogate their specific textual properties and features in their own rights. For example, I explored how the form and tone of the chick-lit novel operates as a vehicle for feminist critique in the work of Marian Keyes, how the television sitcom form functions as a strategy for comment on the Church in *Father Ted*, and how Arthur Mathews uses the memoir form to subvert the Catholic-dominated narrative of ‘Irishness’ in his mock-autobiography *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O’Ceallaigh’s memoir of a twentieth-century Catholic life* (2001).

In accordance with the above selection criteria and methodology, the thesis is thus structured as follows: firstly, Irish “chick-lit” writers such as Marian Keyes, Cecilia Ahern, Cathy Kelly and Sheila O’Flanagan have enjoyed tremendous commercial success both domestically and abroad. Their work is often held up as the thoroughly depoliticised product of a celebratory and confident new Ireland which has wholeheartedly discarded old anxieties and concerns. Gerry McCarthy, for example, describes Celtic Tiger chick-lit as “free-spirited and hedonistic, post-feminist and post-ideological”.⁹⁰ Chapter One of this thesis, however, examines the work of Marian Keyes, and instead argues that Keyes’ hostility towards the Catholic Church affects, indeed directs, the sexual politics and frankness of her work. The articulation of female desire in Keyes’ work is examined in light of Keyes’ remarks that she deliberately wanted to challenge the “madonna/whore” dichotomy and “Irish Catholic Mammy” stereotypes she felt to be prevalent in Irish culture. It situates Keyes’ work via Kaye Mitchell’s description of “popular fiction as a route to the subversion of gender and sexual ideologies. Popular fiction is ideally suited to such ideological revisioning primarily because of the large and diverse audience that it is able to reach” and explores how Keyes negotiates between her feminist politics and the demands of the chick-lit form.⁹¹ This chapter also examines Keyes’ novels *Angels*, which moves towards the revelation that the central character had an abortion at the age of seventeen; her novel *Rachel’s Holiday*, which lampoons “Right-wing Catholic Mothers Against Pleasure, or whatever they were called”; and her short story “Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon”, which is set against the closely-contested 1995 Divorce Referendum. Keyes was selected over other contemporary Irish chick-lit writers in that while a degree of sexual overttness is common throughout chick-lit as a genre, what is particular to Keyes is the degree to which this affects the plotlines and narrative arcs of her texts. This is apparent, example in *Angels*, in which Maggie’s sense of self is inextricably linked to Catholic-dominated notions of “good” female behaviour which her younger self had internalised, and by which she felt constrained.

Having focused on the urgency of the present moment with chick-lit in Chapter One, Chapter Two turns to popular novelist Maeve Binchy, whom Keyes has spoken of as a predecessor, in examining the “bigger picture” for Irishwomen’s fiction over the past number of decades. David Glover and Scott McCracken explain how “a feminist-inspired concern with women’s experience has led to research into those forms of popular fiction where that experience is represented and contested ... In the cases of both class and gender formations, popular fiction offers not so much an authentic account of people’s everyday lives, but an example of the interaction between that experience and the dominant (or hegemonic) social and cultural structures and ideologies”; in Binchy’s case, this dominant cultural structure is

Catholicism.⁹² This chapter analyses the changes in socio-sexual mores throughout Binchy's work via Dennis Carlson's identification of "four different discourses or perspectives about sexuality — that is, four different ways in which people in Western societies have written, spoken, understood and learnt about sex".⁹³ It also evaluates Binchy's attempts to find a continued role and relevance for the "good" clergy in post-scandal Ireland. While Binchy's work may not have found favour with all, she enjoyed immense popularity, as evinced by the widespread mourning and widespread coverage of her work following her death in July 2012, the description of her as a "national treasure" by Taoiseach Enda Kenny also upon that occasion, and an entire supplement, "Remembering Maeve", being issued by the *Irish Times* on 30 July 2013 to mark the first anniversary of her death.⁹⁴ Her work occupies a particular centrality to the public consciousness and merited examination.

Issues of gender and sexuality remain to the fore in Chapter Three. Arthur Mathews and Graham Linehan, the co-writers of television sitcom *Father Ted* (1995-98), seek to downplay the notion that *Ted* constitutes a critique of the Church, contending that the programme should be looked upon as "silly rather than satirical. It did play up to clichés, but it was basically berserk. You can't scrutinise it in any serious, political way".⁹⁵ This chapter, however, examines how, in direct opposition to its creators' claims, *Ted* in fact directly satirises events such as the high-profile Bishop Casey affair, as for example in the episode "The Passion of Saint Tibulus". Furthermore, it also examines, how, despite Mathews' and Linehan's claims to political disinterest and disengagement, the "silly" and the "satirical" are not such dichotomised modes as proposed above, in that both in fact serve to destabilise the Catholic Church. As such, this chapter explores how *Ted* undermines and destabilises Irish socio-sexual formations and Catholic doctrine on issues such as homosexuality, making these appear "silly" through comic absurdity and exaggeration. As with the work of Keyes and Binchy, *Ted* has similarly enjoyed enormous continued popularity, and, as discussed in Chapter Three, phrases and signifiers from the show have permeated Irish discourse, media and post-Catholic cultural consciousness alike. However, it has received little concerted critical attention, which this thesis sought to redress. In addition to its huge popularity, *Ted* was also chosen over other television series of the time, such as *Ballykissangel* (1996-2001), which followed the transfer of a young English priest to the Irish village of the title, because of the manner in which the sitcom form and laughter operate as subversive tools in *Ted*, whereas *Ballykissangel's* far gentler, less interrogative and more sanitised depiction of the clergy meant it has had less of an impact on public consciousness.

Chapter Four examines Aisling Walsh's television drama *Sinners* (2002), Gerard Mannix Flynn's dramatic monologue *James X* (2003) and Bruce Beresford's "family values" film

Evelyn (2002). Though heterogeneous in tone, timbre and form, all three texts foreground and indict the part played by the State in the institutional regime, *James X* and *Evelyn* emphasising that the industrial schools formed part of what James Smith terms the State's "architecture of containment", and *Sinners* depicting the Magdalene laundries as, if not the direct responsibility of the State, then nonetheless State-sanctioned and endorsed.⁹⁶ This chapter also investigates the differing attitudes to Catholic iconography and archetypes throughout the texts, from *Sinners*' rejection of the Marian tradition to *Evelyn*'s recuperation of the figure of St Joseph. Richard Kearney argues that although "dispossessed" of temporal power, Irish women received "compensatory elevation in the realm of myth and mystery" with "the cult of female virginity" of particular importance in this respect.⁹⁷ *Sinners* depicts such mythical elevation as not merely scant compensation for female disempowerment within the Magdalene context, but as an underlying reason for it. This heterogeneity of engagement strategies was particularly important when selecting texts for Chapter Four. *Sinners*, *James X* and *Evelyn* were chosen as much for their differences as their similarities in screening and staging responses to the Magdalene laundries and industrial schools, and are pointed to as emblematic of how Irish society's response has to the institutional traumas and the renegotiated role between Church and State has been diverse rather uniform.

Personal testimony proved key in the revelations of clerical and institutional abuse, in both television documentary and throughout a large body of autobiographies and memoirs. Chapter Five examines how the mode of the autobiographical operates in Arthur Mathews' mock-autobiography *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O'Ceallaigh's memoir of a twentieth-century Catholic life* (2001). It examines how "Catholic" does not operate in the title and body of *Well-Remembered Days* in the lower-case "catholic" sense of wide-ranging and inclusive; in terms of the form of cultural Catholicism promulgated by O'Ceallaigh, "Catholic" is a byword for intolerance, prejudice and exclusion. The deliberate sexual hysteria of *Well-Remembered Days* is also examined, consolidating the argument that issues of gender and sexuality are key in cultural expressions of post-Catholicism. *Well-Remembered Days* was selected over the other numerous memoirs and autobiographies of the period because it provides the shrillest commentary on the Catholic past out of this body of work, so deeply critical is it of the Catholic-dominated version of 'Irishness' hegemonic in the post-independence State. Furthermore, while autobiography proper assumes a degree of authorial authenticity and reliability, O'Ceallaigh is deliberately constructed so unreliable a narrator that his narrative of Irish Catholic identity is undermined further.

While the selected texts have much in common, the same themes and tropes appearing again and again — for example, the shift in how sexuality is presented and discussed, or the

keen focus on the entity of the State — that is not to say that there is a uniformity of approach in Irish society’s reappraisal of the Catholic past and present or in intention or effect of the socio-political efficacy of what is presented. Equally significant as the similarities and overlaps between the texts examined in this thesis are their many discrepancies, for example the stridency or otherwise of their critiques, or what they present as the future (if any) of the Church in Irish life. This thesis also examines how these variances are not simply a question of genre, as evinced in the differences between, say, the popular novels of Marian Keyes and Maeve Binchy or films such as *Sinners* and *Evelyn*. By comparing and contrasting texts both within and across genres and narrative forms, this thesis thus examines how events and episodes are configured and retold across contemporary Irish culture in a variety of ways. As such, the analyses that follow point to the contradictory as well as complementary ways in which post-Catholic Ireland is manifested and negotiated throughout the pages, stages, airwaves and screens of a society in which the Catholic Church occupies so strikingly different a position to that which went before.

Equally, the texts chosen are those which appeal to the various demographics that constitute Irish society to demonstrate how the move towards a post-Catholic consciousness has not simply been restricted to certain groupings, but has been experienced across society as a whole. For example, while both Marian Keyes and Maeve Binchy explore the intersections between the Catholic habitus and the lives of their female protagonists, Keyes writes for the younger female metropolitan reader, while Binchy’s work is tailored for the more conservative and older audience. The texts selected for this thesis also play off against one another in the complex conversation that arises from deconstructing the traditional hegemonic Catholic habitus; *Father Ted* and *Well-Remembered Days*, for example, share a degree of common authorship in the form of Arthur Mathews, but the different genres and appeals to different audiences mean that similar cultural material is approached differently in both.

Another important aspect of this post-Catholic collective consciousness is the multiple temporalities at play, in that as well as establishing a post-Catholic identity in the present moment, the “scandals”, abuse revelations and governmental enquiries have also meant that Irish society has also had to reassess and reevaluate its Catholic past. This thesis also therefore seeks to strike a balance between examining those texts which conduct a post-Catholic reassessment – indeed revisioning – of the Catholic past (such as Maeve Binchy’s novels set in the 1950s, *Sinners*, *Evelyn* and *James X*) and those which present various pictures of contemporary Ireland as it has come to terms with and expressed its anger,

disillusionment and indeed sadness and dismay as the Catholic Church underwent its demise (such as the novels of Marian Keyes and *Father Ted*).

Finally, it should be acknowledged that figures such as Anne Enright, Colm Tóibín, John Banville, Sebastian Barry, and Kevin Barry have also contributed to and interrogated this post-Catholic habitus through their literary fiction. A study of how these more 'established' authors have negotiated post-Catholic Ireland and how the cultural shift from Catholicism to post-Catholicism has affected and directed their work would prove timely and apposite. Nonetheless, the focus of this particular thesis remains on chick-lit and popular culture, as these fields have received disproportionately little attention within Irish Studies, certainly far less than what they demand, and the objective of this thesis remains to redress this critical lacuna in its exploration of the post-Catholic state.

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- 1 Brian McFadden, *Irish Son*, (Sony Music UK, 2004).
 - 2 Tina Calder, "Slapped and Punched by the Christian Brothers," *The People*, 3 October 2004.
 - 3 Ibid.
 - 4 Yeow Kai Chai, "Rising Son," *Straits Times*, 14 January 2005. Tom Corcoran, "Who Said What, and Why, in 2004," *Sunday Independent*, 2 January 2005.
 - 5 No byline provided, "This Week They Said," *Irish Times*, 4 April 1998.
 - 6 Lara Bradley, "Cbs Probe into Mcfadden's 'Beatings'," *Sunday Independent*, 31 October 2004. Moynagh O'Sullivan similarly describes *Irish Son* as "a formulaic fist shaken at the disabling environment of Ireland represented by the Church, the authority of which would have been only nominal during the years in which McFadden was educated", Moynagh Sullivan, "Boyz to Men: Irish Boy Bands and Mothering the Nation," in *Irish Postmodernisms and Popular Culture*, ed. Wanda Balzano, Anne Mulhall, and Moynagh Sullivan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 190-91.
 - 7 Gerry Smyth, *Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005), 7.
 - 8 *Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005), 7: 134: 4-5.
 - 9 Simon Frith, "Pop Music," in *Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Will Straw Simon Frith, John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 96.
 - 10 "The Popular Music Industry," in *Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Will Straw Simon Frith, John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46: 35.
 - 11 Elizabeth Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 4.
 - 12 Video available at BryanMcFaddenVEVO, "Brian Mcfadden - Irish Son - Youtube," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsW8wiWDaoA>.
 - 13 James Joyce, "Island of Saints and Sages," in *James Joyce: Occasional, Critical and Political Writings*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125.
 - 14 Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2002), xiv.
 - 15 Leeann Lane, "Ireland: Identities and Cultural Traditions," in *Palgrave Advances in Irish History*, ed. Mary McAuliffe, Leeann Lane, and Katherine O'Donnell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 229.
 - 16 Louise Fuller, "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones," in *Turning Points in Twentieth-Century Irish History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 167-68.
 - 17 Cited in *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, xxii; *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, xxxiv.
 - 18 *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, xxvi. *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, xxvii. For a counterargument to Larkin's thesis, however, see for example Eugene Hynes, "The Great Hunger and Irish Catholicism," *Societas* 8, no. Spring (1978).
 - 19 Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 11.

- 20 Fuller, "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones," 168.
- 21 Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. See also Fuller, "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones." *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, Article 44.1.2, removed in January 1973 following referendum.
- 22 Francis Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 155. See also Roy Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000* (London: Penguin, 2007), 37; *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000* (London: Penguin, 2007), 47. Linda Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009). Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 43; *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 42.
- 23 For a discussion of these various changes, see Tom Inglis, "Individualisation and Secularisation in Catholic Ireland," in *Contemporary Ireland: A Sociological Map*, ed. Sara O'Sullivan (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007). *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 374. Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution*. Louise Fuller, "New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy: Looking Back to the Future," in *Irish and Catholic? Towards an Understanding of Identity*, ed. Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006).; "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones." With regards to the Late Late Show in particular. Charles Townshend argues that the Late Late Show "acted as a focus of collective self-analysis, and perhaps even an accelerator of change", quoted in Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution*, 8. Ferriter describes the Late Late Show as "the bane of upholders of 'traditional' values in relation to sexual morality", Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 374.
- 24 Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 283. John Littleton and Eamon Maher similarly contend of the Pope's visit that "the Church leaders realised that trouble was brewing, which prompted an invitation to the charismatic John Paul II to come and reignite the religious fervour of the Irish people ... while allegedly providing a concrete sign of the good health of Irish Catholicism, in essence this visit marked the end of an era", John Littleton and Eamon Maher, "Introduction," in *The Dublin/Murphy Report: A Watershed for Irish Catholicism?*, ed. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Columba, 2010), 7.
- 25 See, for example, Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 61; Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: Revised and Updated Edition* (Dublin: New Ireland, 2000), 271. Gerry McCarthy, "Don't Look Back in Anger," *Sunday Times*, 30 May 2004.
- 26 Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 48.
- 27 Ailbhe Smyth, "'A Great Day for the Women of Ireland...' The Meaning of Mary Robinson's Presidency for Irish Women," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 18, no. 1 (1992): 62. Joe Cleary challenges this reading of Robinson's election, Joe Cleary, "Introduction: Ireland and Modernity," in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16.
- 28 "The Bishop Still Seeking Sanctuary from His Past," *Sunday Times*, 4 December 2005.
- 29 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 528.
- 30 Quoted from Peter Lennon, "Rocky Road to Dublin," (Soda Pictures, 1968).
- 31 Littleton and Maher, "Introduction," 7-8. see also Paula Murphy, *The Shattered Mirror: Irish Literature and Film 1990 - 2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008), xx.
- 32 See Chris Moore, *Betrayal of Trust: The Father Brendan Smyth Affair and the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Marino Books, 1995).
- 33 The revelations about Cardinal Brady emerged in 2010.
- 34 Francis D Murphy, Helen Buckley, and Larain Joyce, "The Ferns Report, Presented by the Ferns Inquiry to the Minister for Health and Children," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2005), 1; "The Ferns Report, Presented by the Ferns Inquiry to the Minister for Health and Children," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2005), 247. See also Catriona Crowe, "The Ferns Report: Vindicating the Abused Child," *Eire-Ireland* 43, no. 1&2 (2008): 51.
- 35 Murphy, Buckley, and Joyce, "The Ferns Report, Presented by the Ferns Inquiry to the Minister for Health and Children," 248. See also Tom Mooney, *All the Bishops' Men: Clerical Abuse in an Irish Diocese* (Cork: Collins Press, 2011).
- 36 "Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2009).
- 37 "Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2009), 4.

- 38 Luke Gibbons, "Projecting the Nation: Cinema and Culture," in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 215. Kevin Rockett contends that "the major catalysts for the radical transformation of the public perception of the church and its agents was a series of documentaries and current affair programmes on the histories of institutional abuse made for television between 1996 and 1999, the two which made the most impact being *Dear Daughter* (1996) and *States of Fear* (1999); Kevin Rockett, "Contesting the Past in Irish Film and Television," in *Exhuming Passions: The Pressure of the Past in Ireland and Australia*, ed. Stuart Ward and Katie Holmes (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 133-34. See also Eoin O'Sullivan and Ruth Torode, "The Impact of *Dear Daughter*," *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 3, no. 2 (1999). Lindsey Earner-Byrne, "Child Sexual Abuse, History and the Pursuit of Blame in Modern Ireland," in *Exhuming Passions: The Pressure of the Past in Ireland and Australia*, ed. Stuart Ward and Katie Holmes (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 54. James Smith, "Remembering Ireland's Architecture of Containment: 'Telling' Stories in *the Butcher Boy* and *States of Fear*," *Eire-Ireland* Fall/Winter(2001).
- 39 In 2001, James M Smith termed *States of Fear* "to date, the most significant representation of the nation's containment infrastructure", and a decade later it still stands out as an important cultural and political watershed. "Remembering Ireland's Architecture of Containment: 'Telling' Stories in *the Butcher Boy* and *States of Fear*," *Eire-Ireland* Fall/Winter(2001): 112.
- 40 See also Bruce Arnold, *The Irish Gulag: How the State Betrayed Its Innocent Children* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2009).
- 41 Ronan O'Reilly, "Ahern's Sorry to Sad Victims of Child Abuse," *The Sun*, 12 May 1999.
- 42 Executive Summary, "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2009), 2.
- 43 Executive Summary, "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2009), 20: 13.
- 44 "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse," 22.
- 45 "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse," 21: 27.
- 46 "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse."
- 47 Kevin Rockett, "Cinema and Irish Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 553.
- 48 John Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 2. Chloe Avril, "Special Issue: Popular Culture - Introduction," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9, no. 3 (2010): 3.
- 49 Joe Cleary, "Misplaced Ideas? Colonialism, Location and Dislocation in Irish Studies," in *Theorizing Ireland*, ed. Claire Connolly (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 104.
- 50 Avril, "Special Issue: Popular Culture - Introduction," 4. Within the Irish context, particularly influential has been Luke Gibbons' argument for "the transformative capacity of culture in society, its power to give rise to what was not here before. Cultural representations do not simply come after the event, "reflecting" experience or embellishing it with aesthetic form, but significantly alter and shape the ways we make shape of our lives ... cultural identity, therefore, does not pre-exist its representations or material expressions, but is in fact generated and transformed by them — whether they take the form of the mass media, literary genres such as the novel and drama, visual representations, or other cultural or symbolic practices", Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 8-10. Cleary, "Misplaced Ideas? Colonialism, Location and Dislocation in Irish Studies," 97.
- 51 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 3.
- 52 *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 4. Gerardine Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), xvi.
- 53 Patricia Boyle Haberstroh and Christine St Peter, "Introduction," in *Opening the Field: Irish Women, Texts and Contexts*, ed. Patricia Boyle Haberstroh and Christine St Peter (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007), 5.
- 54 Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 4; "From Self-Denial to Self-Indulgence: The Class [Sic] of Cultures in Contemporary Ireland," *Irish Review* 34(2006). *Lessons in Irish Sexuality* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998). "Religion, Identity, State and Society," in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). "The Catholic Church, Religious Capital and Symbolic Domination " in *Engaging Modernity: Readings of Irish Politics, Culture and Literature at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Michael Boss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 2003); "The Media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting Clerical Child Sex Abuse," *Journal of Contemporary Religions* 25, no. 1 (2010). Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*.
- 55 Cited in Linda Connolly, "The Limits of 'Irish Studies': Historicism, Culturalism, Paternalism," *Irish Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2004): 156.
- 56 Ibid. For a discussion of how "for so long, the disciplines that occupied pride of place in Irish Studies were history and literature", see Michael Cronin, "Minding Ourselves: A New Face for Irish Studies," *Field Day Review* 4(2008): 178. Connolly, "The Limits of 'Irish Studies': Historicism, Culturalism, Paternalism," 139.

- 57 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).
- 58 Bernard MacLaverty, *Lamb* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), 135.
- 59 Colm Toibin, "On the Literary Wing," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 28 1995. Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland, for example, have challenged the assumption that postcolonial theory must necessarily affirm the newly emerged nation, arguing "much suspicion of post-colonial criticism in Ireland is based on the mistaken notion that its application assumes and underwrites the triumph of the independent post-colonial nation", Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland, eds., *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 4.
- 60 Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), 32.
- 61 James M Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 3.
- 62 Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, Nation*, 6.
- 63 *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, Nation*, xv.
- 64 Ibid. "Race, Sex and Nation," *Irish Review* 35(2007): 56.
- 65 Erika Cudworth, Tim Hall, and John McGovern, *The Modern State: Theories and Ideologies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4.
- 66 Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.
- 67 *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10-11.
- 68 "The Republic and Ireland: Pluralism, Politics and Narrative Form," in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999*, ed. Ray Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 83.
- 69 Claire Connolly, ed. *Theorizing Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 209.
- 70 Fintan O'Toole, *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 30.
- 71 Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000*, 8.
- 72 *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000*, 7-8. "Introduction: State and Nation: The Republic and Ireland, 1949-99," in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-99*, ed. Ray Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 8. *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000*, 8. Fintan O'Toole calls into question whether the Irish State can validly be considered a republic. He details the confusions and ambiguities about the official name of the state, noting that while "for well over half a century now, it has been normal for most people living in the twenty-six counties to say that they come from 'the Republic' ... The constitution declares the name of the state to be Ireland or Eire. There is no mention of a republic. The Republic of Ireland Act of 1948 declares the name of the state to be Ireland or Eire. There is no mention of a republic. The Republic of Ireland Act of 1948 declares that 'the description of the state shall be the Republic of Ireland', but the constitution has never been amended along these lines ... The official government website nowhere refers to the Republic of Ireland or even states that Ireland is a republic". He argues that this semantic confusion is indicative of greater unclarity about whether the Irish State fits the criteria of a republic: "In the sense in which most people use the word — a liberal democracy without a monarch — Ireland obviously is a republic. But a broader notion of republicanism raises basic questions about the reality of Ireland's democracy. Using the definition articulated so powerfully in the work of Philip Pettit, we can ask whether Ireland is 'a state that can operate effectively against private domination, helping to reduce the degree of domination people suffer at the hands of other individuals and groups ... a state that is organised in such a way that it will not itself represent a source of domination in people's lives a state that is conducted for the public interest, that pursues its policies in the public eye, and that acts under public control — a state that truly is a 'res publica, a matter of public business'. The short answer to those questions is 'not really'. Far from operating against 'private domination', the Irish state has itself been run — with disastrous consequences — on behalf of private groups: bishops, professions, banks, developers". O'Toole, *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, 24-26. Regardless of the efficacy, ethicality or otherwise of the Irish State as a political entity, this thesis nonetheless treats the Republic of Ireland and the Irish State as interchangeable terms.
- 73 In this, this thesis follows the approach of James M Smith who explains that "Benedict Anderson famously defined the nation as 'an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'. The 'state', as I use the term in this book, refers to the 'political organisation or management which forms the supreme civil rule and government of a country or nation' (OED)", Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 204.
- 74 "Census 2011 Profile 7 - Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers," (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2012), 6. My attention was drawn to this poll via O'Toole, *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, 4. which also cites these figures. "Sex, Sin and Society," *Irish Times*, 18 September 2010.
- 75 Patsy McGarry, "Labour Leader Explains 'Post-Catholic' Remarks," *ibid.*, 20 April 2000.
- 76 *Ibid.*

- 77 Ruairi Quinn, "Primary School System Has to Change with the Times," *Irish Independent*, 14 July 2009.
- 78 O'Toole, *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, 107.
- 79 *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, 95.
- 80 Daniel Corkery, *Syngé and Anglo-Irish Literature* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), 20.
- 81 Fuller, "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones," 179-80.
- 82 "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones," 183.
- 83 Lest the impartiality of the Irish Times survey be queried, it is explained that "A total of 1,006 Irish adults were surveyed in-home, in strict accordance with Aimro (Association of Irish Market Research Organisations) and Esomar (European Society for Opinion and Market Research) guidelines. Fieldwork was conducted at 100 different locations across the country, with the sample controlled by region, age, working status and socioeconomic status. The survey findings can be said to be accurate to within approximately plus or minus three percentage points. Interviewing was conducted between August 3rd and 15th, 2010." "Poll Details: How It Was Compiled," *Irish Times*, 15 September 2010.
- 84 Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 56. Tom Inglis similarly argues that it is not that Irish society is becoming less religious, but that the practises and expression of this religion has evolved. "From one perspective, Catholic Ireland is becoming increasing [sic] individualist and secular ... An increasing number of Irish Catholics are becoming more detached from the institutional Church, are selective about the teachings, rules and regulations which they follow, are devising their own paths to salvation and are finding alternative ways of being spiritual ... From another perspective it is not so much that Ireland is becoming secular but that there has been a move away from institutional forms of religious belief and experience to more individual, alternative forms ... What is happening, then, in Ireland at present is that religion is becoming less institutional but this does not mean that Irish Catholics are becoming less religious, but rather that they are developing alternative, more personal, paths to meaning and transcendental experience. Inglis, "Individualisation and Secularisation in Catholic Ireland," 81-82.
- 85 Jurgen Habermas, "Secularism's Crisis of Faith," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
- 86 Gerry Smyth, "Irish National Identity after the Celtic Tiger," *Estudios Irlandeses* 7(2012): 136.
- 87 Siobhan Kilfeather, "Irish Feminism," in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 105.
- 88 Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 63. Edna Longley also observes that "church-state politics ... bring feminism into the foreground, since control over women's minds and bodies is central to the argument", Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, 34.
- 89 Tom Inglis and Carol MacKeogh, "The Double Bind: Women, Honour and Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland," *Media, culture and society* 34, no. 1 (2012): 74.
- 90 Rebecca Pelan, *Two Irelands: Literary Feminisms North and South* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), xiii. Gerry McCarthy, "Women on the Verge of a Big Shake-Up," *Sunday Times*, 7 March 2004.
- 91 Kaye Mitchell, "Gender and Sexuality in Popular Fiction," in *Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, ed. David Glover and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 126.
- 92 David Glover and Scott McCracken, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 8.
- 93 Inglis, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality*, 16.
- 94 Nicola Anderson and John Spain, "Maevé Binchy Was a True 'National Treasure' Whose Work Touched Lives of So Many," *Irish Independent*, 1 August 2012.
- 95 Peter Stanford, "Land of My Fathers," *Observer*, 25 March 2001.
- 96 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*.
- 97 Richard Kearney, "Myth and Motherland," in *Ireland's Field Day*, ed. Seamus Deane (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

“JUDGEMENTAL OUL’ HOORS”: CATHOLICISM AND THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY IN THE WORK OF MARIAN KEYES¹

As discussed in the Introduction, the Catholic Church’s hegemony in post-independence Ireland had particular import for women, with abortion, contraceptives and divorce all unavailable. In the latter decades of the century, Irish feminism accordingly resisted and challenged the inscription of Catholic doctrine in social policy through activism and intellectual discourse alike, as in the battles of the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement’s (IWLM) to legalise contraception in the 1970s. Established in 1971, the IWLM staged high-profile events such as the March 1971 Condom Train, in which members of the group returning from Belfast by rail challenged customs officials at Connolly Station to seize the contraceptive items which they were bringing into the State. In the 1973 case of McGee versus the Attorney General, the Supreme Court ruled that the seizure by custom officials of contraceptives imported by Mary McGee (who was represented by young barrister Mary Robinson) constituted a breach of McGee’s constitutional right to privacy. The ban on importing contraceptives was duly lifted in 1974, and in 1979 Charles Haughey, Minister for Justice, introduced a Health (Family Planning) Bill which made contraceptive available via prescription “for the purpose, bona fide, of family planning or for adequate medical reasons”, an equivocation which Haughey described as “an Irish solution to an Irish problem”.² (In 1985 an amendment to the bill “allow[ed] for the sale of condoms and spermicides without a prescription to people aged 18”, with additional amendments in 1992 and 1993 further

liberalising the situation, including the removal of an age restriction to purchase contraceptives.)

In this move away from a Catholic-dominated legislation and social milieu, the lives of a number of individual women also took on symbolic import. As Siobhán Kilfeather explains, “in the 1980s and 1990s public debate over issues to do with privacy, reproductive rights and alternative sexualities was centered on a series of scandals in which print and broadcast media personalised the issues through sensationalised exemplary cases”³ These included the stories of Ann Lovett, a fifteen-year old who died in childbirth in the Marian shrine in Granard, Co Longford⁴; Joanne Hayes, whose sexual history was interrogated in the “Kerry Babies” case⁵; Eileen Flynn, dismissed from her teaching job when it emerged she was pregnant as a result of her relationship with a separated man; and perhaps most searing and emotive of all, the X-Case, as the 1992 case of the Attorney General versus X was widely known.

The legal intricacies of the X-Case arose as a result of the 1983 abortion referendum, which in turn was the product of three years of lobbying by pro-life campaigners to ensure constitutional protection for the right to life of the unborn. “‘Bitter’ and ‘divisive’”, Diarmaid Ferriter notes, “have been the two words most frequently used to describe the referendum campaign, elsewhere referred to as ‘the second partitioning of Ireland,’” so strongly-held and polarising were views and so heated was debate.⁶ The proposed constitutional amendment (the Eight Amendment) read that “the State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right”, and in the event, the amendment was “endorsed by 66.45 per cent of those who voted”, thereby becoming Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution.⁷

The adoption of Article 40.3.3 now meant that the State could, in theory, prevent women from travelling to Britain or elsewhere to terminate their pregnancies, or indeed that women could be prosecuted for having done so. The full implications of this provision, and the State’s duty in this regard, became agonisingly clear in the X-Case. In December 1991 a fourteen-year old girl — “Miss X” — became pregnant, having been the victim of long-term sexual abuse by a family friend.⁸ X’s parents learned of their daughter’s pregnancy in late January 1992, and they arranged for X to travel to England to have an abortion. First, however, they enquired of the Gardaí whether DNA from the aborted foetus could be used as evidence in the ensuing rape trial. Unsure, the Gardaí consulted the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions who in turn referred the matter to Harry Whelehan, the newly appointed Attorney General.⁹ Given the constitutional protection assured for the right to the

life of the unborn by Article 40.3.3, Whelehan felt he had, Wendy Holden explains, “no choice, having been alerted to the intention to terminate the girl’s pregnancy, but to obtain interim injunctions in the High Court” to prevent X from going ahead with the abortion.¹⁰ When X’s family, having at this point already travelled to England, learned of the injunction and that they could “in theory, be jailed or heavily fined for contempt of court” were they to go through with the abortion, they instead returned to Ireland with the now-suicidal X.¹¹ Once back in Ireland, however, and supported by the Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrat coalition government, they appealed the High Court’s decision in the Supreme Court. It was incumbent upon the five judges to decide both whether the risk of suicide constituted grounds enough for X to obtain an abortion and whether the High Court injunction compromised X’s bodily integrity and freedom of movement.¹² The judges ruled four to one in favour of X being allowed to travel out of the State to obtain an abortion.

The X-Case resonated deeply in public consciousness, generating extensive protest and debate. Another abortion referendum accordingly followed in November 1992. This time the public had three proposed constitutional amendments on which to vote: the Twelfth Amendment, which would remove the threat of “self-destruction” as valid grounds for abortion, and the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, which respectively stipulated that the constitutional right to life for the unborn as guaranteed by Article 40.3.3 would nonetheless “not limit freedom to travel between the State and another state” and “not limit freedom to obtain or make available, in the State, subject to such conditions as may be laid down by law, information relating to services lawfully available in another state”. The Twelfth Amendment was defeated, but the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments were endorsed, meaning that “self-destruction” would continue to be recognised as a threat to the life of the mother, and the right to both travel out of the state to obtain an abortion and to provide information about abortion were safeguarded. As Gerardine Meaney notes, these “successive abortion referenda [put] the issue of changing sexual and gender roles at the centre of political life in the South” and spotlighted what Kilfeather calls “the human costs of Ireland’s Catholic ethos”.¹³

But however prominent had such “questions of socio-sexual control” been on the political agenda from the 1960s onwards, and however much had women’s bodies and reproductive rights become such contested sites of struggle between competing ideologies of conservative Catholicism and liberal individualism, they were not, Irish feminists objected, reflected in the cultural sphere or critical enterprise of Irish Studies.¹⁴ For example, the three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991) was an ambitious attempt by the Field Day enterprise to map out a new Irish canon. Described as “one of the defining moments in

late-twentieth century Irish literature”, and the product of an all-male editorial committee, the anthology drew censure for its elision of both female voices and cultural movements of feminist concern.¹⁵ Catriona Crowe explains that “the feminist critique of the anthology was twofold. It held, firstly, that the essential documents of the women’s movement, from the Irish Women’s Franchise League to the events leading to the election of Mary Robinson, had been left out, while all kinds of other interesting twentieth-century political documents had been included; and, secondly, that the representation of women in the contemporary fiction, poetry, drama and Irish-language sections was grossly inadequate”.¹⁶ Edna Longley, for example, long critical of what she perceived as the *Field Day*’s Northern and nationalist biases, contended that “in excluding women’s politics and political women, of whatever stripe, in lauding Haughey but not Mary Robinson’s libertarian crusades, in overlooking contemporary Irish feminism and its foremothers, in minimising the politics of the Catholic Church, the *Field Day Anthology* locates its own political heart north of the Border”.¹⁷ That the discussion of the anthology took place at the same time as the X-Case was unfolding did not help *Field Day*’s cause: Crowe explains that “the timing of the controversy couldn’t have been worse ... the abortion row deepened everyone’s awareness of the very northern emphasis of the anthology; the Republic of Ireland had been engaged in bitter battles centred on women’s bodies, battles which had not had their counterparts in Northern Ireland”.¹⁸

In the face of such criticism, a further two *Field Day* volumes were commissioned. This time the responsibility of an all-female editorial committee, they had as their subject “women’s writing and traditions” and were published in 2002.¹⁹ They included sections such as “The Republic of Ireland: the politics of sexuality, 1965-2000”, “The law and private life in the Republic of Ireland”, “The women’s movement in the Republic of Ireland, 1968-1980”, and “The women’s movement and women politicians in the Republic of Ireland, 1980-2000” all of which acted as a corrective to the lacunae of the initial volumes, and clearly and comprehensively documented how the personal, indeed the deeply private, had repeatedly become so public and political for Irishwomen.

Yet a mere two years later, in 2004, Gerry McCarthy argued that these supplementary *Field Day* volumes already presented an outmoded picture of Irish women’s writing and concerns when contrasted with the rapidly expanding body of Irish “chick-lit”.²⁰ Imelda Whelehan explains that the term “chick-lit” is “derived from the colloquial use of ‘chick flicks’ to designate films which are primarily aimed at a female audience and are indeed deemed by some to have no interest to men”, and, broadly defined, chick-lit is a form of popular fiction in which the predominant focus is on single twenty- and thirty-something women “navigating their generation’s challenges of balancing demanding careers with

personal relationships”²¹ Helen Fielding’s hugely popular *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (1996) is seen as having “spored a confessional gender”, to employ Bridget’s own malapropisms, for chick-lit, and as having acted as a template for subsequent texts.²² From the genre’s emergence, Irish chick-lit writers such as Marian Keyes, Cecilia Ahern, Cathy Kelly and Sheila O’Flanagan enjoyed (and indeed continue to enjoy) tremendous commercial success both domestically and abroad. This led Gerry McCarthy to contend, as mentioned above, that:

Those volumes [of the *Field Day* project] are already out of date. They have an explicitly political and feminist subtext: their editors are conscious of reclaiming literary ground for women. The new generation of writers has left all that behind. Their work is free-spirited and hedonistic, post-feminist and post-ideological. These writers, and their mainly female readers, are on the same wavelength: they no longer worry about the battle of the sexes. They are too busy enjoying the spoils of victory.²³

In *Two Irelands: literary feminisms north and south* (2005), Rebecca Pelan similarly discerns a depoliticisation in Irish chick-lit, which she describes (and in part dismisses) as “the popular alternative to the bulk of women’s radical fiction produced over the last thirty years”.²⁴ She argues that while Irish women writers “from the early 1970s [onwards] ... have been involved ... in radical cultural and literary practices that have allowed them to confront issues of gender, sexuality, and national/ethnic identity from within the country itself”, such a political engagement has given way in chick-lit to “an Irish-style *Sex and the City* sassiness, a breezy preoccupation with looks, men and careers — a considerable shift from the focus of earlier works, which generally concerned issues of family (usually dysfunctional) and religion (together with its impact on sexuality), as well as a variety of societal ills”.²⁵

McCarthy and Pelan are not alone in claiming Irish chick-lit as the casting off the concerns of the past, instead constituting part of a global “new girl order”, a worldwide economic shift having led to a generation of financially independent and cosmopolitan “singletons” in the wake of Bridget Jones.²⁶ Maria Amor Barros de Rio, for example, similarly argues that:

Cathy Kelly’s and Marian Keyes’ novels do not present a particularly Irish setting but are part of an international cultural trend. The only references to Irish culture and reality are names and places, and so these novels erase any other trace of cultural identification proposing a universal model of behaviour for “modern” women in developed countries.²⁷

Judy McStoffman also claims that “what is remarkable about the novels of [Marian] Keyes and [Cecilia] Ahern is how completely the old Ireland, the impoverished Ireland of saints and martyrs and sinners and drunks, is absent from them. Their stories, which never mention religion, could be set in any affluent western city”.²⁸ What is apparent here throughout current commentary on Irish chick-lit is a sense of the genre and form as a depoliticised, internationalist one, in which traces of ‘Irishness’ have been discarded.

However, although the work of Marian Keyes may resonate with an international audience, it nonetheless retains a keen cultural specificity in its gender and sexual politics, meaning that it does not stand in such stark opposition to earlier Irishwomen’s writing as is sometimes claimed. Far from “never mention[ing] religion”, it both implicitly and explicitly challenges Catholicism, thereby rendering it far from “post-ideological” and significantly affecting the description of it as “post-feminist”. Keyes, admittedly, remarks that her own understanding of the term “feminism”, and hence the tenor of her work, has evolved: “I used to describe myself as a post-feminist. I had picked up this notion that all the work ... had been done by those wonderful women in the Sixties and Seventies”.²⁹ However, although her generation “were told that the battle of the sexes was over and we were all equal now” she nonetheless “couldn't help noticing that women are still second-class citizens” in many ways.³⁰ As an example of this, she points to the disparagement of chick-lit as “forgettable froth” while male writers are vaunted for their work within a similar emotional range; “oh you silly little woman with your little fluffy stories about shoes and romance ... as if men have the monopoly on intellectual criticism”.³¹ Reappropriating the chick-lit tag, Keyes views the genre as having the potential to be “empowering”, as a vehicle for exploring “the conflicts and confusions of our post-feminist world, where we're told we're equal, but we know we're not”; in this sense, “post-” operates as a temporal marker vis-à-vis Second Wave feminism and the Irish women’s movement rather than indicating a cultural state in which issues of gender inequity and inequality are simply consigned to the past.³² (This is analogous to how post-Catholicism operates throughout this thesis, in that while the Church may have lost its hegemony and the close relationship between Church and State has been dissolved, this is not, as outlined in the Introduction, to say that the consequences of this change do not resonate in the present.)

Keyes’ feminist awakening and how, as she herself puts it, she has become “more politicised” throughout her literary career, is evinced in her changing choice of subject material.³³ As Mary Ryan observes, Keyes’ more recent work “tackles issues such as domestic violence and rape at full force, creating strong ties between Irish chick-lit and feminism” in its consciousness-raising of such otherwise taboo subjects.³⁴ In *This Charming Man* (2008),

for example, a journalist draws attention to how “one in five Irish women will experience domestic violence at some stage in their lives” (TCM,179) but how “rapists and wife-batterers rarely got anything but joke sentences from a sympathetic, almost entirely male judiciary” (TCM,168).³⁵ *The Brightest Star in the Sky* (2009) similarly explores the societal prejudices and systemic difficulties faced by rape victims via the character of Maeve. Assaulted by a former boyfriend, Maeve is propelled into “a whole world she’d known nothing about” (BSS, 532):

Cold metal. An internal examination. Swabs and photos. An STD test. An Aids test. Too soon, of course, to do a pregnancy test. Feet back up in the stirrups for another internal. [Her husband] holding her hand. Checks for bruising, tearing, internal bleeding. (BSS, 532)

When these harrowing procedures are complete, the attending garda asks her if she’s “sure you didn’t just, you know, get a bout of the guilts? One last go, for old times’ sake, then got afraid that hubby there might get wind” (BSS,536). When Maeve makes clear that this was not the case she is then asked “Are you sure you want to go ahead with this? Taking it further?...Because it’ll ruin his life, you know. Just so as you know” (BSS,536). In contrast to this concern for the perpetrator, scant sympathy is shown to Maeve. When she confides in close friends about the rape, she is met with scepticism and disbelief: “how could he rape you? He used to be your boyfriend ... that’s a terrible thing to say. He could sue you for that” (BSS,538). And whereas Maeve suffers panic attacks and debilitating anxiety as a result of the rape, the strain on her marriage eventually impelling her husband into a suicide attempt, the case does not even proceed to prosecution as “the DPP thinks there isn’t enough evidence to get a conviction” (BSS,537). As Diarmaid Ferriter reports, Ireland in the first decade of the twenty-first century had the lowest rape conviction rate in the European Union, with *The Brightest Star in the Sky* providing one insight into the procedural and institutional prejudices which may contribute to this.³⁶

In exploring the challenges facing “post-feminist Irish women”, Keyes notes that “many of our concerns transcend nationhood and are shared with women of a similar age in the rest of the developed world”.³⁷ However, she adds that:

Irish women are also different from other post-feminist women ... we're still shaking off the shackles of a deeply misogynistic and controlling church, where battered women were told to return to their abusive husbands because “what God has put together, let no man put asunder”. A country where, although contraception is legal, abortion is not only illegal but unconstitutional.³⁸

As “an attempt to pass from an imagined idea of Irishness to the realised state of Ireland”, the 1937 Constitution — the “foundational legal document” of the State — was both legal charter and moral blueprint, and Keyes elsewhere points to “the fact that in our constitution, which is the foundation of the state, it literally says the woman's place is in the home”.³⁹ Keyes is here referring to Article 41.2.1, which reads that “the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved”, and about which Patrick Hanafin observes that although “it is at the symbolic, rather than at the strictly legal, level that such provisions are of importance ... the very persistence of such provisions in the Constitution [nonetheless] lend tacit support to the notion of patriarchy”, in that within the conservative Catholic social order thus engendered by the Constitution, “woman’s social role as mother is cherished more than any notion of individual female autonomy”.⁴⁰ It contrasts, for example, to other European constitutions which make no such provisions, the French constitution’s only mention of women, for example, being the guarantee in Article One that “statutes shall promote equal access by women and men to elective offices and posts as well as to position of professional and social responsibility”, rather than designating these separate realms of responsibility.⁴¹

In his essay “The Secret World of the Irish Mammy”, Joseph O’Connor quotes Margaret McCurtain’s remark that in such a cultural climate, “around Irishwomen, as in a cage, were set the structures of family life”, and a stock figure in Keyes’ work is likewise that of the “Irish Catholic Mammy”, a woman of a certain age whose subjectivity is defined and confined by her maternal duties and family role.⁴² In *The Other Side of the Story* (2005), Gemma describes her mother, Maureen, as an archetypal “Irish Catholic Mammy” who “won’t miss Sunday Mass even if she’s got rabies and is foaming at the mouth — she’ll simply bring a box of tissues and brazen it out. If her leg falls off, she’ll hop. If her other leg falls off, she’ll walk on her hands while still managing to wave graciously at neighbours’ passing cars” (OSS,57). Gemma recollects how growing up in the cul-de-sac where her mother still lives, “all the neighbours were women of Mam’s age and older and they were called Mary, Maura, May, Maria, Moira, Mary, Maree, Mary, Mary and Mary. Except for Mrs Prior who was called Lotte but that was only because she was Dutch”, and of whom Gemma’s mother generously concedes “I’m very fond of Lotte, even if she is a Lutheran” (OSS,57).⁴³ As Elizabeth Cullingford puts it, women’s “life within the home” in post-independence Ireland was “invested ... with a constitutionally approved aura of Marian sanctity”, as reflected in the collective naming of this generation of women.⁴⁴ (The more pernicious consequences of this Marian worship are explored in Chapter Four, in the discussion of Aisling Walsh’s *Sinners*.)

When, after thirty-five years of marriage, Maureen's husband abruptly leaves to have an affair with his considerably younger PA — “the tedious predictability of it all” (OSS,15), as Gemma bitterly notes — she is distraught. Requiring tranquilisers and antidepressants, she is initially unable to even to attend to such basic tasks as washing and dressing, leading Gemma to move back home. Twelve months later, however, her husband arrives “at the front door with three shopping bags full of his stuff and asked Mam ... if he could come back” (OSS,526) and by the time Gemma returns to the house that evening “he was settled in his chair, doing the crossword [and] Mam was in the kitchen cooking up a storm” (OSS,527). When Gemma upbraids her mother for not reproaching her father in the slightest about his previous infidelity and desertion, her mother responds in a “devout and unreachable” (OSS,527) tone that “I made my wedding vows before God and man ... he's my husband. I took my marriage vows in a *church*” (OSS,527-28). Gemma reflects that such vows had “made martyrs and eejits of generations of women” (OSS,527) and seethes with resentment that “thinking of herself as a dutiful wife, instead of a woman with feelings and rights, meant that Dad was able to slot right back into the life that she'd kept warm for him” (OSS,528), corroborating Meaney's argument that Catholic configurations of womanhood rendered Irish women “unable to accept themselves as thinking, choosing, sexual, intellectual, and complex ordinary mortals and instead cling to a fantasy of women as simple handmaidens of the Lord”.⁴⁵ However, although Gemma is “infuriated ... beyond belief” (OSS,528), she recognises as that “there's no reasoning with that sort of lunacy” (OSS,527) she must accept her mother's passivity. She concludes “thank God I'm an atheist” (OSS,528) if piety and adherence to this model of female subjectivity results in such self-abnegation and doormatting.

Keyes is unequivocal in her antipathy towards Catholicism, which she describes as “a hotch-potch of bizarre rules that are misogynistic, rigidly patriarchal, enthusiastically judgemental, breathtakingly cruel, harshly doctrinaire, then unexpectedly capricious when it suits [the clergy], anti-semitic, anti-every other religion, obscenely wealthy and *obsessed* with sex (not just their own, but everyone else's)”, and has repeatedly referred to “the damage done, in particular to Irish women” by the “misogyny and hypocrisy” of the hierarchy, also describing herself as “repelled by the cruelty of Catholicism. Women in Ireland have thirteen children. It is very misogynistic”.⁴⁶ However, she contends that although “for Irish people of a certain vintage, devout Catholicism is still the order of the day ... Ireland, in the new millennium, is straddling a spiritual faultline” and that “for younger compatriots, anything goes”, this generation opting for a “smorgasboard of beliefs” and a pick-and-choose approach to spirituality rather than dutiful adherence to the dictates of Catholicism.⁴⁷ This generational divide towards the Church is particularly evident in Keyes' short story “Late

Opening at the Last Chance Saloon”, the background to which is the 1995 divorce referendum.⁴⁸ The central protagonist complains to her mother about “All that praying you made us do ... And making us go to Mass. And starving us on Good Friday ... And making us feel ashamed of our bodies and guilty about absolutely everything”. In response, her mother “glow[s] with pride. Truly, she had been the best of Catholic mothers”.⁴⁹ However, in contrast to such devotional fervour, the younger characters reject the moral authority of the Church, deriding the clergy as “hypocrites and perverts” and asking in disgust “what kind of a country ... says its OK for men in dresses to sexually assault little boys?”.⁵⁰ As Joe Cleary observes, a crucial difference between the abortion and divorce referenda of the 1980s and those of the 1990s was that the “scandals” and revelations of clerical child abuse of the latter decade “discredited the authority of the Catholic hierarchy that had earlier given a lead to such campaigns”, thereby lessening the public’s receptiveness to pastoral guidance on issues of personal morality, as is apparent in Keyes’ young protagonists’ dismissal of the Church.⁵¹

The young women equally object to the moral high-handedness of the anti-divorce campaigners. The “No” lobby are scathingly described as:

Judgemental oul’ hoors. Offer it up, they say. Let him ride rings around himself and publicly humiliate you and you’ll get your reward in the next world ... I can’t believe the attitude in this country ... where people think that if your husband belts you black and blue that you have to put up with it — for batter, for worse. You can be damn sure that if any of those Good Catholics ever got a good thumping they wouldn’t be preaching ‘stand by your man’.⁵²

In Keyes’ work, Catholicism equates with judgmentalism and hypocrisy, as also apparent in *Rachel’s Holiday* (1997). *Rachel’s Holiday* documents the eponymous heroine’s descent into and recovery from substance abuse, and a sizeable part of the text takes place in a drug and alcohol treatment centre, where Rachel’s roommate is a “blonde, glamorous woman” (RH, 77) called Chaquie, pronounced “Jackie” but expressly spelt otherwise as she feels “Jackie’s so common when it’s spelt J-A-C-K-I-E” (RH,78). Chaquie appears to be an impeccable exemplar of Catholic orthodoxy and middle-class respectability. “I didn’t see you at Mass this evening,” she comments “purse-lipped” (RH,157) to Rachel, before starting “on another of her hobby-horses. This time it was the evil of mothers who work” (RH,157). She is elsewhere heard “complaining loudly about unmarried mothers being given free condoms to stop them expanding their families” (RH,302):

“It’s disgraceful,” she fumed. “Why should the taxpayers’ money be spent on giving them free french letters? They shouldn’t need anything at all. Do you know what the best contraceptive is? ...The word ‘no’! It’s as simple as that, just two little letters, n and o. No. If they had any morals at all...(RH,302)

“I knew her sort”, Rachel initially thinks to herself, “she was a member of Right Wing Catholic Mothers Against Pleasure, or whatever they were called” (RH,160) and although she develops a “strange, grudging fondness” for Chaquie as the novel progresses, this is because Chaquie’s “in-yer-face right-wing views” (RH,350) and her “insistence that she was a good, respectable, upper-middle-class citizen” (RH,349)” are shown to be a blind for her alcoholism and the “pain and insecurity rampaging about below her sleek, glamorous surface” (RH,350). In other words, Chaquie’s “judgemental, Catholic stance” (RH,350) is deconstructed rather than redeemed. The equation of Catholicism with judgmentalism also permeates Keyes’ novel *Sushi for Beginners* (2000), set in the glossy world of women’s magazines. As Ireland undergoes an economic boom and Celtic Tiger consumerism overtakes Catholicism as the dominant cultural force (a transformation already examined in “Irish Son”), while certain of the lifestyle magazines — “*Hibernian Bride, Celtic Health, Gaelic Interiors, Irish Gardening*” — increase in circulation, it is gleefully reported throughout the text that the *Catholic Judger* is instead “about to fold ... sales are way down”, eventually going “to the wall”.⁵³

The young women in “Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon” are equally jubilant when they learn that a “yes” vote in the divorce referendum has been secured. Not only will this allow vulnerable women to extricate themselves from violent or abusive relationships, but they also interpret the introduction of divorce in symbolic terms as “a triumph of civilisation and modernism ... now Ireland will be able to hold its head up in the real world, without having to apologise for its medieval laws”.⁵⁴ (Keyes herself similarly viewed the introduction of divorce as “a huge step forward. It meant that Catholic priests were no longer running the country”.⁵⁵) This association of the Church with a retrograde oppressiveness which modern Ireland is jettisoning to move forward situates Keyes’s work further within the Irish feminist tradition. The introduction to the “Politics of Sexuality” section of the *Field Day Anthology*, for example, similarly frames the debates and schisms in Irish society “over women’s sexuality, reproduction, the structure of the family and the place of women within it” as “major battles between tradition and innovation”, and the X-case in particular as “a battle between a conservative, Catholic Ireland and a compassionate modern nation”.⁵⁶

If the “modern” is that which is current or contemporary at any time, “modernity” is thus the cultural condition of being modern, and modernisation the act or process of arriving

at this point. However, beyond these definitions which are almost so vague as to be practically meaningless, the terms also have more specific meaning in Irish cultural, historical and economic discourse. Tom Inglis argues that:

There were two phases to Irish modernisation. The first began after the Famine. The Church became central to attempts to modernise Irish farming and society. It was in and through the Church that many Irish people were able to bring rationalised order to family life, develop a decent standard of living, become emotionally self-disciplined and civilised like other Europeans and, at the same time, establish a separate identity to their colonial masters. This lasted until the 1960s when the state abandoned the Catholic vision of Irish society and ushered in a new phase of modernisation ... based on economic growth. The expansion of the media and the market ushered in a new habitus that was based on liberal-individualism, materialism and consumerism, the very things against which the Church had preached so vehemently for generations.⁵⁷

In both common parlance and academic discussion, “modernisation” usually refers to the second phase of Inglis’s classification; the transformations during and since the Lemass era (1959-66), when Ireland moved away from the protectionist, isolationist policies of the Free State and towards attracting foreign investment, membership of the EEC (as it was then) and economic expansion; a supplanting of nationalist concerns with economic ones, as it were, or under the terms of this thesis, the shift from a focus on the nation to that on the state. The accompanying and attendant social change is looked upon positively: as Thomas Misa and Andrew Feenberg note, “in common speech, ‘modern’ is often a synonym for the latest, and it is assumed inevitably the best, in a triumphant progression to the present”.⁵⁸ Peter Taylor similarly remarks that “to be modern is perceived as being essentially positive, it is about ‘moving with the times’, being up to date, following the latest fashions or using the newest gadgets ... in nearly all cases the word modern is being used to convey the idea that what is modern is better than what went before — Henri Lefebvre calls it a ‘prestigious’ word”.⁵⁹ Conversely, “tradition is, in this formulation, seen as regressive, something to be left behind or discarded”, or “a lamentable obstacle to progress”.⁶⁰

However, some critics have challenged how modernisation theory “assumes that this move from tradition to modernity is socially, economically and politically positive and progressive”.⁶¹ Joe Cleary, for example, calls into question, such “sweeping evaluations of the modern as an inevitably liberating phenomenon”, warning that “within the restrictive terms espoused by modernization discourse, questions of property relations, of class, of how and to

whom the benefits of modernization are to be distributed, of whether modernization on Western lines is even sustainable or at what cost to whom, are effaced”.⁶² Terry Eagleton, who describes “tradition” in Ireland as betokening “an oppressive church, a stifling patriarchy, dancing statues of the Virgin, Gaelic chauvinism, and the contract for building new roads going to whichever relative of the minister is currently most strapped for cash”, also offers this broadly Marxist critique of modernisation by cautioning that “modernisation ... means sweat shops and shattered communities as well as enlightened values, pollution and migration alongside Thai cuisine ... Temple Bar is no more a solution to the riddle of history than the Tubbercurry Legion of Mary”.⁶³

Eagleton thus urges for a more nuanced assessment of the course of Irish society rather than the teleological narrative of progress which underwrites much modernisation discourse, arguing that there is desirable and undesirable in past and present alike. “A truly modern nation”, he contends, “would be one which felt able to recall its history without either tearful sentimentalism or glib derision”.⁶⁴ Cleary, however, gloomily concedes that:

Given the oppressive nature of the Irish state as it developed after independence, and the pervasive equation of women with tradition in Irish nationalist and clericalist culture, it was virtually inevitable perhaps that Irish feminism would largely endorse modernisation theory. Because Ireland was construed as an oppressively traditional society, modernisation by convergence with “the Western world” was viewed by contrast as an emancipatory process that would liberate Irish women ... Modernisation theories and “second wave” Irish feminism are not only historically coincident with each other, both gaining momentum in the 1960s and 1970s but they also share a structure of feeling in which contemporary Ireland is viewed as a “traditional” society now undergoing an exhilarating liberation from the past.⁶⁵

Indeed, with Catholicism being configured as a stifling and outdated force through Keyes’ work, this “structure of feeling” and drive towards the modern is also encapsulated in her response when asked if she missed the “old Ireland”. “Yes”, she quipped “I like to think that in the old Ireland I’d have been condemned from the pulpit and exiled which would have been fun”.⁶⁶

Nostalgia for this “old Ireland” with its imbricated version of Catholic hegemony is also lampooned throughout her work. *Rachel’s Holiday* is one of a series of novels Keyes has written about the five Walsh sisters, presided over by Mary “Mammy” Walsh.⁶⁷ Mammy Walsh is described by one of her daughters as “the woman who cried when divorce came to

Ireland and said it was the end of civilisation as we knew it” (A,387) while another recalls that if she or her sisters “asked for two Paracetamol for our sore throat/stomach ache/broken leg/perforated duodenal ulcer” (W,61), their mother’s response would be “Offer it up ... Think of Our Lord suffering on the cross” (W,61). In the novel *Angels* (2002), the family visit Los Angeles and attend “Mass, LA style” (A,427) with “lots of singing and melodramatic acting-out of the readings” (A,428). Mammy Walsh announces to the congregation “We’re from Ireland (A,427)”, her daughter Maggie understanding the unspoken subtext as being “we’re *REAL Catholics*” (A,427). Not only is Irishness synonymous with Catholicism but “authentic” Catholicism is predicated on self-flagellation and guilt as mastered by the “über-Catholics from Ireland” (A,428): in contrast to the “unbridled zeal” and “upbeat and celebratory mood” (A,428) of the service in LA, Maggie recalls Irish Mass as “a miserable priest droning at a quarter-full church, “Blah blah blah, sinners, blah blah blah, soul black with sin, blah blah blah, burn in hell” (A,428). Louise Fuller explains that “the Catholicism that evolved from [the nineteenth century] was a peculiarly Irish hybrid of Tridentalism, folk religion and Victorian puritanism — what has sometimes been referred to derisively as ‘*la catholicisme du type irlandaise*’”, and which was infused with Jansenism, a form of theological thinking which “originated with Cornelius Jansen, a professor at the University of Louvain, who appealed to the authority of St Augustine in propounding his theories on human nature, grace and original sin. Jansenists emphasised the darker side of human nature, grace and original sin. This led to a pessimistic theology, which was reflected in moral rigorism”.⁶⁸ As Tom Inglis observes (and is explored in more detail in Chapter Three), the Irish Catholic habitus thus became one of “self-denial, the rhetoric and practice of foregoing pleasure” holding sway, as exemplified in Walsh’s work by Mammy Walsh.⁶⁹ This further strengthens the argument about the cultural specificity of Keyes’s brand of chick lit: it is not merely the Catholic Church which Keyes reacts against, but a very particular and culturally situated form of Irish Catholicism.

Within this cultural code of “piety, humility, chastity, devotion and subservience”, as it is described by Tom Inglis and Carol MacKeogh, Mammy Walsh is particularly appalled by overt sexual expression.⁷⁰ When she discovers one of Rachel’s flimsy G-strings in the family washing machine, she explodes in disgust, shouting “you brazen HUSSY! That might be the kind of thing they wear in New York, but you’re not in New York now and while you’re under my roof you’ll cover yourself like a Christian” (RH,576). On another occasion she admonishes Rachel for “the right show you made of me with your drugs carry-on” (RH,543) but when Rachel later apologises for “embarrassing you by being a drug addict” (RH,561) her mother concedes “Sure, it could be miles worse. Hilda Shaw is having a baby. Another one.

And she's *still* not married. And, wait till you hear ... Angela Kilfeather is after deciding she's a lesbian ... a drug addict is nothing compared to that." (RH,561). Though Mammy Walsh and Rachel then "laugh tearfully" (RH,562) in reconciliation, and this is a lighthearted moment in an emotionally demanding text, it nonetheless adroitly identifies a cultural consciousness in which the transgressions causing the greatest disruption to the social order were sexual ones (also to be explored in Chapter Four).⁷¹

Against this mindset, the sexual frankness of Keyes' writing is both deliberate and significant. Her first novel, *Watermelon*, was published in 1995. In 2006 she remarked that "in the early days, I didn't know what I was writing because the word 'chick-lit' wasn't invented then. I just knew that I wanted to write a book about women like me: basically, Irish women that are sexually active. It was the first time in popular commercial Irish fiction that women were writing about sex".⁷² Keyes relates this cultural reticence about sex to the hegemony of the Church, describing the "constant message of Catholicism" is that one is "burdened" with "original sin ... You are born defective and you are a woman, so you must be modest. To come out of that with any kind of sexuality intact is a triumph".⁷³ *Watermelon* thus parodies and dismisses "that nonsense about men being ... well ... different from us, dear. They have ... needs ... dear, in the same way that animals do" (W, 44) by depicting Irish women as having needs and desires of their own, rather than simply being the chaste repudiators or joyless recipients of animalistic male lust. This frank articulation of female desire continues throughout her work, meaning that Keyes' hostility to the Church affects, indeed directs, both the narrative arc and tone of her work in her approach to female sexuality.⁷⁴

In this, Keyes stands slightly apart from other Irish chick-lit authors. Fintan O'Toole claims of Celtic Tiger culture that:

The most thoroughly globalised brand of Irish culture in the boom years was also the most conservative. Aspects of Irish culture were commodified as never before in boybands, popular women's fiction and Irish dancing shows. At least the first two of those, however, tended to be peculiarly archaic ... One of the real markers of this was sex. It is a lavish understatement to say that Irish sexual mores changed in the 1990s ... [however] what the boybands and much of the chicklit shared was a strangely antiseptic, coy sexuality.⁷⁵

O'Toole points to Cecilia Ahern as an exemplar of this sexual conservatism, but just as how *mná na hÉireann* are not one homogenous whole, neither are Irish chick-lit writers. If, as one reviewer remarked, "the action always stops well short of the bedroom door" in the bestsellers of Ahern —who describes herself as a "modern Catholic" — then Keyes'

characters, such as Lola in *This Charming Man*, sneak into the bedroom of a potential lover, speculate on “the things that must happen in this room” and are urged by their friends to “look in [the] drawer beside his bed ... Go on, see if he’s got condoms in it. I bet he has (TCM,262)”.⁷⁶ Lola later reports back to her friends that her new partner is a “great man for different positions” (TCM, 294), indeed, his sexual athleticism is such that she “would be just starting to get into rhythm and enjoy self when would be picked up, twirled about like majorette’s baton and entirely repositioned” (TCM,298). “How hard is it to just get a normal shag?” (TCM,294) she asks, exasperated. Keyes’ novels give voice to a variety of activities and proclivities across the sexual spectrum, including passionate intensity where “lust just exploded within me ... My head swam with shock and pleasure” (RH,57), an emotionally unengaged rebound relationship in which “Friday nights ... had become a regular thing and we usually managed a quick mid-week ride. [It] was great fun and there was no pesky churning-stomach, wobbly-kneed, tongue-tied stuff you get when you’re mad about someone” (OSS,354), the availability of “special underwear ... to tuck in your man-bits so they won’t be poking out through your ... dress” (TCM,284) for cross-dressers, and a same-sex liaison which firmly obliterates one character’s “subconscious prejudice that all lesbians look like Elton John” (A,190). Throughout her negotiation of the popular novel form, Keyes thereby captures and conveys in a matter-of-fact manner and popular form an Irish society which is engaging in and enjoying behaviours which would be considered transgressive under traditional Catholic mores. As Kathy Cremin notes, “the evolution of popular Irish women’s fiction throughout the 1990s permits us to reflect on ... changing attitudes to gender and sexuality”.⁷⁷ Eugene O’Brien similarly argues that “the change in female attitudes to sexual desire is an index of that [sic] the symbolic order of Ireland has changed and is changing” and this shift from a Catholic to a post-Catholic consciousness is abundantly clear in Keyes’ work.⁷⁸

Imelda Whelehan, however, observes that although the protagonists of chick-lit texts are almost exclusively sexually active young women, certain topics remain curiously occluded from the genre, namely “periods ... bad sex, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases”.⁷⁹ She suggests that the absence of unsatisfactory sex from the genre is because its depiction could be considered “too feminist, too strident”.⁸⁰ However, Mary Ryan notes that “Irish chick lit not only recognises that certain aspects of the female body have been ignored or censored, but it also gives a voice to these aspects by discussing them in their novels”.⁸¹ In her exploration of Irish female sexuality, Keyes is unflinching in describing not only those encounters where “as soon as he entered me, I started to come. And come and come. It went on forever ... my body contracted with waves of pleasure” (RH,59) but also “those nightmare

sex sessions when you both realise about three seconds into it that it's a terrible, terrible mistake ... [but] you can't pretend that you've just seen someone you know on the other side of the room...you can't just look at your watch, gasp and mutter something incoherent about your flatmate having no key to get it ... you're there for the duration and you've just got to grin and bear it" (RH,539-40). The absence of STDs from Keyes' work, meanwhile, emanates less from a refusal to confront such unsavoury or taboo topics, and more from her characters' fastidiousness in observing "the condom ritual. You know, rustling round in a drawer for it, the crinkling of the [wrapper] being undone, saying 'is that the right way? Or does it go the other way?'" (W, 326-27) in the most torrid of moments. ... As is clear, these plot details and this frankness of tone are deliberate strategies by Keyes to demystify discussion of such topics, in order to render them no longer taboo.

However, there is one notable exception to such heedfulness throughout Keyes' work. As previously mentioned, Keyes has written a series of novels about the five Walsh sisters, and Maggie, the second eldest daughter, is looked upon by the others as "the 'good' daughter" (RH,468), a "lickarse" (RH,592), the "most dutiful of us all" (W,43). Rachel reports of their childhood that Maggie's primary school teacher had "never met such a well-behaved little girl in her thirty-eight years of teaching" (RH,307) and describes Maggie as "the only one of us who spoke to our neighbours, happy to discuss hip replacements, grandchildren's First Communion, the unusually wet weather and the availability of Tayto in Chicago" (RH, 22). Maggie, for her part, describes the family as operating at "maintenance level dysfunction" (A,24) and the collective credo of her sisters being "The More Dramas the Better" (A,24). She is only occasionally bothered by how her sisters unfailingly "referred to me as clean living and sporty ... and painted a picture of me that was years, probably decades, out of date" (A,23) and acknowledges in the opening lines of *Angels* (2002) — narrated from her perspective — that she'd "always lived a fairly blameless life" (A,1). She later reiterates how she is "bad at being bad" (A,430), recollecting how "the one time I tried shoplifting, I got caught ... The day I bunked off school ... I got caught" (A,430-31) and text moves towards the revelation that, as a seventeen year-old, "the one time I had unprotected sex ... I got pregnant" (A,431).

Maggie explains that she withheld this information from her parents as she feels they would be shocked to hear of her predicament. She was, she emphasises, "the well-behaved one, my parents' comfort, the one daughter they could look at and not have to say, 'Where did I go wrong?'" (A,432), whereas "if someone wild and breezy like [her older sister] Claire had gotten pregnant at seventeen, it would be as if everyone had almost expected it from her" (A,432). Indeed, Claire — who upon being abandoned by her husband and left alone

with a newborn baby vows to rear her child on “feminist diatribes ... out with *The Little Mermaid* and in with *The Female Eunuch*” (W,51) — describes abortion as “something I feel very strongly about” (W,506) and rails against “the crowd who get all sanctimonious and self-righteous and say that abortion is murder” (W,505) with “SPUC stickers [on] the back window of the car” (W,505). Maggie remarks that Claire was “very vocal about women’s rights and what bastards the priests were. In fact she used to go on so much about the right to abortion that Mum often sighed, ‘That one’ll get up the pole and have an abortion just to prove a point’” (A,435). For Maggie, however, having an abortion is not a political statement but a desperate release from a crushing bind. Echoing Frederica Mathewes-Green’s famous remark that “no woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice-cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg”, Maggie describes how she “thrashed around like an animal in a trap, torn asunder and trapped ever deeper by the ugly realization that no matter what choice I made, it would have terrible implications that I’d have to live with for the rest of my life” (A,433). Nonetheless, feeling “young and incapable, barely mature enough to take care of myself, never mind a helpless scrap of life” (A,433), she decides that “not having it was the best — or least bad — option” (A,434). She describes the psychological “fall-out” (A,444) from the abortion which follows, how she was wracked by “every emotion from guilt to curiosity, shock to regret, self-hatred to wretched relief” (A,444). In subsequent years when friends considering abortion would turn to her for advice, her counsel would be that “it was their body and they had the right to choose ... But ... they shouldn’t expect to emerge unscathed from the experience.” (A,444).⁸²

In settling on the appropriate tone and plot structure in which to broach the subject of abortion, Keyes explains that she didn’t want to “to come across as being blasé about [abortion]. It’s probably the worst thing that can happen to many women, having to make that choice. I didn’t want to trivialise it, and say ‘ah sure, hop off for an abortion in your lunch hour’”.⁸³ Nonetheless, she stresses that “we’ve got to face the fact that it happens” and points to a “huge blind spot in Ireland, pretending that it’s not going on, and of course it happens all the time”.⁸⁴ Whilst contending that “popular fiction is not really the place for polemic”, she nonetheless concedes that she was slightly “agenda-driven” when writing about abortion in *Angels* and wanting to “show that it happens to ‘good girls’” such as Maggie.⁸⁵

One strategy of approach in Irish culture when engaging with crisis pregnancy has been the imaginative reworking of the high-profile cases of the Eighties and Nineties, for example Margo Harkin’s film *Hush-a-bye Baby* (1990), which as Elizabeth Cullingford notes, has

“obvious connections with the Ann Lovett story” as well as the “Kerry Babies” case, or Edna O’Brien’s *Down by the River* (1996), a fictionalised retelling of the X-Case.⁸⁶ However, what *Angels* attests to is not any individual episodes, but instead the more “ordinary” (though of course no less momentous for the women involved) and largely unchronicled experiences of the thousands of Irishwomen who travel to Britain for abortions every year.⁸⁷

Angels also demonstrates the depth of emotion generated by the topic, showing it to be a much-contested issue in Irish society. Maggie, who describes herself as a “a foul-weather Christian, and only prayed when I was afraid or when I desperately wanted something” (A, 426), recounts how:

Occasionally, anti-abortionists paraded through the streets of Dublin, campaigning to make abortion in Ireland more illegal than it always was, carrying rosary beads and waving placards with pictures of abortion fetuses. I had to look away. But when I listened to them condemning abortion so vehemently, I wanted to ask if any of them had ever been in my situation. I would’ve bet money that they hadn’t. And that if they had, their commitment to high-minded principle might have wavered. (A,439)

Although Keyes cannot automatically be conflated with her first-person narrators, she nonetheless acknowledges that this is her own voice in the text: “that’s just how I feel about the men who tell women not to have abortions. It’s terribly wrong for one group of people to force their morals on another group of people, and judge them, when they know nothing about what it feels like to be in that situation and will never have to put their own opinions to the test”.⁸⁸ In *Watermelon*, Claire similarly challenges the reader to “show me a man who’s pregnant, penniless and partnerless and then invite him to stand on the soap-box and tell me that he thinks abortion is completely wrong. Hah!” (W,506). Just as how the “No” lobby in “Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon” were described as “judgmental oul hoors”, here the rosary-bead bearing “pro-life bullies” (A,444) are configured as misogynistic, judgmental, hypocritical and lacking in compassion.

Canadian-based commentator Ann Dooley describes Irish chick-lit as the product of a “post-Catholic” climate, betokening an Ireland which is now “the most libertine place in Europe” and in which “anything goes”, following the erosion of “the authority of the church and the family”, a perhaps hyperbolic claim, but one which demonstrates the enormous shift in *Zeitgeist* with the societal move away from the Church.⁸⁹ Certainly, Keyes’ landscape may be considered post-Catholic in that Catholicism neither feeds into her protagonists’ codes of personal morality nor is the Church a potent political force. The Irish mammy, if viewed

affectionately, is a comic anachronism against the social and sexual liberalisation which has taken place. Nonetheless, the unfond eye Keyes casts over any lingering traces of the Catholic ethos and the strength of the antagonism demonstrated towards the Church in her work compromises any description of Irish chick-lit as a celebratory free-for-all. Keyes' championing of Irishwomen's sexual and reproductive freedoms is both a reflection of the societal changes which have occurred and exploration of issues of continued feminist concern, meaning that the chick-lit novel, in Keyes' hands, does not so much stand in opposition to the Irish feminist movement of previous decades as constitute its continuation in contemporary form. Keyes does not write sex scenes simply for the sake of explicitness: instead it is to convey the full realities of Irishwomen's lives in opposition to the historically-dominant cultural Catholicism which occluded such matters. Furthermore, like pop music, as examined in relation to "Irish Son", popular fiction forms such as chick-lit must be keenly attentive to the mores and expectations of its audience. Keyes' huge popularity among Irish audiences indicates that her words and themes are striking home.

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- 1 A version of this chapter was published as "Judgemental oul' hours: Catholicism in the work of Marian Keyes", in Lisa Fitzpatrick, ed. *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2013).
 - 2 See Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 43.
 - 3 Kilfeather, "Irish Feminism," 111.
 - 4 Maria Luddy remarks of Lovett's tragic story that "The case received intense publicity in Ireland, many women especially linking Lovett's plight to the silence imposed on all Irish women who became pregnant outside marriage. In the political context of an Ireland that had just witnessed an acrimonious debate on abortion, Lovett's unacknowledged pregnancy and lonely death echoed the plight of thousands of Irish women, who for decades had been forced to hide their pregnancies, abandon their babies, or emigrate to hide their 'shame'", Maria Luddy, "Unmarried Mothers in Ireland, 1880-1973," *Women's History Review* 20, no. 1 (2011): 109.
 - 5 See Tom Inglis, *Truth, Power and Lies: Irish Society and the Case of the Kerry Babies* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004).
 - 6 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 468. Tom Hesketh, *The Second Partitioning of Ireland: The Abortion Referendum of 1983* (Dublin: Brandsma Books, 1990).
 - 7 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 467.
 - 8 For a full account of the case, see Wendy Holden, *Unlawful Carnal Knowledge: The True Story of the Irish 'X' Case* (London: Harper Collins, 1994).
 - 9 Ibid. See also Lisa Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
 - 10 Holden, *Unlawful Carnal Knowledge: The True Story of the Irish 'X' Case*, 30. Lisa Smyth quotes an Irish Press editorial of 18 February 1992: "During that [1983] referendum campaign, opponents pointed out that cases such as this could arise, with girls and women being arrested at ports and airports on their way to Britain for abortion, or on their return. Their claims were dismissed as scare stories by those backing the amendment. Now, suddenly, they are coming true with a brutality that even the critics would not have predicted". Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland*, 6.
 - 11 Holden, *Unlawful Carnal Knowledge: The True Story of the Irish 'X' Case*, 21. Lisa Smyth provides an excellent precis of the case's legal intricacies; Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland*, 4. See also Jennifer Schwegge, ed. *The Unborn Child, Article 40.3.3 and Abortion in Ireland* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008).
 - 12 See also Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland*.

- 13 Gerardine Meaney, "Engendering the Postmodern Canon? The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volumes IV & V: Women's Writing and Traditions." in *Opening the Field: Irish Women, Texts and Contexts*, ed. Patricia Boyle Haberstroh and Christine St Peter (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007), 18.- Kilfeather, "Irish Feminism," 111. The legal status of abortion and the implications of Ireland's lingering Catholic ethos for women was again forefronted in late 2012, following the death of Savita Halappanavar. Halappanavar (31), an Indian national resident in Galway, miscarried at seventeen weeks. As Kitty Holland, who broke the story in the Irish Times, explains, "her husband has said she repeatedly asked for a medical termination over a three-day period but this was refused as a foetal heartbeat was still present and they were told 'this is a Catholic country'", to which Halappanavar and her husband responded that they were not Catholic but Hindi, but to no avail. Halappanavar then contracted E. Coli septicaemia and died several days later. When the story broke in December 2012, there was mass public outcry, and angry calls for the government to legislate for such cases, twenty years on from the X-Case as this was. At the time of writing (January 2013), an inquest into Halappanavar's death is forthcoming, and the Oireachtas is hearing submissions ahead of the drafting of an abortion bill and the government decision to legalise abortion in some circumstances. Kitty Holland, "Halappanavar Inquest to Open Next Week," *Irish Times*, 8 January 2013. Harry McGee, "Coalition Road Map to Advance Abortion Debate Begins with Oireachtas Hearings," *ibid.*
- 14 Ailbhe Smyth, "States of Change: Reflections on Ireland in Several Uncertain Parts," *Feminist Review* 50(1995): 34. Ursula Barry and Clair Wills, "The Republic of Ireland: The Politics of Sexuality 1965-2000," in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke, et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).
- 15 Seamus Deane, ed. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991). Boyle Haberstroh and St Peter, "Introduction," 1.
- 16 Catriona Crowe, "Testimony to a Flowering," *Dubin Review* 10(2003).
- 17 Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, 34.
- 18 Crowe, "Testimony to a Flowering."
- 19 Siobhan Kilfeather Angela Bourke, Maria Luddy, Margaret MacCurtain, Gerardine Meaney, Mairin Ni Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd, Clair Wills, ed. *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).
- 20 Chick-lit is also defined by Chicklitbooks.com as a type of women's popular fiction characterised by "a personal, light, and humorous tone ... The plots usually consist of women experiencing usual life issues, such as love, marriage, dating, relationships, friendships, roommates, corporate environments, weight issues, addiction, and much more" Cited in Mary Ryan, "Trivial or Commendable?: Women's Writing, Popular Culture, and Chick Lit," *452F: electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature* 3(2010): 74.
- 21 Imelda Whelehan, "A Space of My Own: Feminine/Feminist Spaces in Contemporary Popular Culture," in *Literature, Gender, Space*, ed. Sonia Villegas-Lopez and Beatriz Dominguez-Garcia (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2004), 23. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, "Introduction," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 3.
- 22 Mary Ryan quotes Suzanne Ferriss, the "entire chick-lit phenomenon is invariably traced back to this single novel" (Ferriss, 2006: 4). Ryan, "Trivial or Commendable?: Women's Writing, Popular Culture, and Chick Lit," 76. Irena Ragaisiene explains that, as per Fielding's text, the heroines of chick-lit novels are "usually in their twenties or thirties, struggle to balance challenging careers and personal lives centred on the pursuit for a satisfying romantic relationship", Irena Ragaisiene, "Chick Lit as the New Woman's Fiction: Inscriptions in Marian Keyes's Novel *Watermelon*," *Literatura* 50, no. 5 (2008): 68-69.
- 23 McCarthy, "Women on the Verge of a Big Shake-Up."
- 24 Pelan, *Two Irelands: Literary Feminisms North and South*, xiii.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Kay S Hymowitz, "The New Girl Order," *City Journal*, no. Autumn (2007).
- 27 Maria Amor Barros de Rio, "How to Disguise Fairy Tales in 21st Century Ireland: A Feminist Analysis of Marian Keyes' and Cathy Kelly's Blockbusters," *Estudios Irlandeses* 0(2005).
- 28 Judy McStoffman, "The New Face of Irish Letters," *Toronto Star* (2004).
- 29 Gillian Glover, "Anxiety of a Best-Seller," *Scotsman*, 7 June 2004.
- 30 Marcia Klein, "Spinning Yarns in a Post-Feminist World," *Sunday Times*, 10 June 2007.
- 31 Anna Carey, "Love, Marriage and Surviving Heartache," *Sunday Tribune*, 29 September 2002. Aspasia Karras, "Chew on This," *Sunday Times (South Africa)*, 18 September 2005.
- 32 Klein, "Spinning Yarns in a Post-Feminist World." Brian Lavery, "The Subtle Sisterhood," *ibid.*, 2 April 2006.
- 33 *Ibid.*

- 34 Mary Ryan, "A Feminism of Their Own?": Irish Women's History and Contemporary Irish Women's Writing," *Estudios Irlandeses* 5(2010): 98. See also "Then and Now: Memories of a Patriarchal Ireland in the Work of Marian Keyes," *452F: electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, no. 4 (2011), <http://www.452f.com/index.php/en/maryryan.html>.
- 35 Marian Keyes, *This Charming Man* (London: Penguin, 2008).
- 36 Diarmaid Ferriter, "Women and Political Change in Ireland since 1960," *Eire-Ireland*, no. Spring/Summer 2008 (2008): 189.
- 37 Marian Keyes, "It's Been One Week since Her Last Confession," *Irish Times*, 1 October 2005.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Patrick Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution," in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-99*, ed. Ray Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 149. Lynn Jolly, "Ireland Hard on Women, Soft on Rape," *Mirror*, 6 April 2007.
- 40 Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution," 149. "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution," 158. Ivana Bacik refers to this article as "the most objectionable provision [of the Constitution] from a feminist perspective", Ivana Bacik, "From Virgins and Mothers to Popstars and Presidents: Changing Roles of Women in Ireland," *Irish Review* 35(2007): 101. Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution," 158.
- 41 "The French National Assembly - Constitution of October 4, 1958," <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/english/8ab.asp>.
- 42 Joseph O'Connor, *The Irish Male: His Greatest Hits* (Dublin: New Island Press, 2009), 299.
- 43 Marian Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story* (London: Penguin, 2004), 38.
- 44 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 251. See also Mary Holland, "Mary the Mother and Her Impact on Irish Politics," in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* ed. Angela Bourke, et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).
- 45 Tom Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland," *Eire-Ireland* 40, no. 3-4 (2005): 25.
- 46 McCarthy, "Women on the Verge of a Big Shake-Up." Pelan, *Two Irelands: Literary Feminisms North and South*, xiii. Marian Keyes, "Marian Keyes - Newsletter - March 2012," <http://www.mariankeyes.com/Newsletter/March-2012?forumboardid=12&forumtopicid=12>. Charlotte Philby, "Marian Keyes: My Secret Life," *Independent*, 5 December 2009. Alex O'Connell, "Craicing Good Read," *Times*, 2 October 1999. When asked to name her "real-life villain", Keyes responded "I'm not keen on the leaders of most organised religions, but being a recovering Catholic, I'll choose one and go for the Pope". Philby, "Marian Keyes: My Secret Life." See also Jackie Bennett and Rosemary Forgan, eds., *Convent Girls* (London: Virago, 2003).
- 47 Marian Keyes, "Father Ted Loses His Sheep," *Sunday Times*, 23 June 2000.
- 48 Divorce had previously been defeated in referendum in 1986.
- 49 "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon," in *In Sunshine or in Shadow: Stories by Irish Women*, ed. Mary Maher and Kate Cruise O'Brien (Delacorte Press: New York, 1997), 190-91.
- 50 "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon," in *In Sunshine or in Shadow: Stories by Irish Women*, ed. Mary Maher and Kate Cruise O'Brien (Delacorte Press: New York, 1997). In *Rachel's Holiday* (1997), for example, when the eponymous Rachel learns that an elderly farmer has repressed his homosexuality his entire life, not feeling himself able to act upon this in rural Ireland, she can only barely restrain from quipping "you could have become a priest ... and had your pick of the boys", such potshots indicating a bitter broad brushing of priests and child abusers, *Rachel's Holiday* (London: Penguin, 1997), 270..
- 51 Cleary, "Introduction: Ireland and Modernity," 15. Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 62. Harry Ferguson, "The Paedophile Priest: A Deconstruction," *Studies* 84, no. 335 (1995).
- 52 Keyes, "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon," 193.
- 53 *Sushi for Beginners* (London: Penguin, 2000), 6: 62: 6.
- 54 "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon," 195.
- 55 Amanda Doherty, "Closing the Chapter on My Alcoholic Haze," *Sunday Mirror*, 24 May 1998.
- 56 Ursula Barry and Clair Wills, "The Republic of Ireland: The Politics of Sexuality 1965-2000," in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Maria Luddy Angela Bourke and Siobhan Kilfeather, Margaret MacCurtain, Gerardine Meaney, Mairin Ni Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd, Clair Wills (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1411.

- 57 Inglis, "Individualisation and Secularisation in Catholic Ireland," 68. He also argues that when Ireland can be considered to have modernised depends upon "what one means by modernisation. If one means the end of magic as a dominant form of ethical behaviour; the beginning of a new control over life and death; the adoption of many of the manners and practices of modern Europeans; and the adoption of a new discipline over the body — then Ireland can be said to have modernised during the nineteenth century and the Catholic Church to have played a major role in the process. If, on the other hand, one means by modernisation the advent of an industrial type of society in which religion becomes rationally differentiated from the rest of social life, the state becomes separated from the Church, religious belief and practice becomes a private rather than public affair, the rational choice of individuals in the market place takes over from the pressures of tradition and community to conform; and production and consumption take primary importance over being spiritual — then it might be said that Ireland did not begin to modernise until the 1960s ... In other words, Ireland went through two stages of modernisation", *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 250.
- 58 Thomas J Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg, *Modernity and Technology* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 5.
- 59 Peter J Taylor, *Modernities: A Geohistorical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Polity Press, 1999), 1-2.
- 60 Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 15-16. Cleary, "Introduction: Ireland and Modernity," 10.
- 61 McCarthy, *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992*, 15.
- 62 Cleary, "Introduction: Ireland and Modernity."
- 63 Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 313. "A Side-Splitting Spoof," *Irish Times*, 3 March 2001.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Cleary, "Introduction: Ireland and Modernity," 15-16. See also Emer Nolan, "Postcolonial Literary Studies, Nationalism and Feminist Critique in Contemporary Ireland," *New Hibernia Review* 42, no. 1&2, Spring/Summer (2007).
- 66 Klein, "Spinning Yarns in a Post-Feminist World."
- 67 They are as follows: Marian Keyes, *Watermelon* (Arrow Books: London, 2005). *Rachel's Holiday*. ———, *Anybody out There?* (London: Penguin, 2007). *The Mystery of Mercy Close* (London: Penguin, 2012). See also *Mammy Walsh's a-Z of the Walsh Family*, Kindle ed. (London: Michael Joseph, 2012). E book.
- 68 Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, xxix.
- 69 Cited in Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland," 24.
- 70 Inglis and MacKeogh, "The Double Bind: Women, Honour and Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland," 75.
- 71 Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland." See also Fintan O'Toole, *Ship of Fools: How Corruption and Stupidity Sunk the Celtic Tiger* (London: Faber, 2009), 215..
- 72 "How Marian Lives to Dye Another Day," *Sunday Independent*, 1 October 2006. See also Catherine Deveney, "The Other Side of the Story," *Scotland on Sunday*, 9 April 2006.
- 73 "How Marian Lives to Dye Another Day."
- 74 In "A feminism of their own?: Irish women's history and contemporary Irish women's writing", Mary Ryan cites Suzanne Ferriss' observation that instead of "presenting their protagonists as subordinate to male advances, chick-lit authors present women as sexual agents"; Ryan, "A Feminism of Their Own?": Irish Women's History and Contemporary Irish Women's Writing," 94. See also "Ending the Silence: Representing Women's Reproductive Lives in Irish Chick Lit," *Nebula* 8, no. 1 (2011): 215.
- 75 O'Toole, *Ship of Fools: How Corruption and Stupidity Sunk the Celtic Tiger*, 186.
- 76 Henry Sutton, "The Sins of the Father," *New Review*, 13 April 2008.
- 77 Kathy Cremin, "The Dispersed and Dismissed: The World of Irish Women's Bestsellers," *Critical Survey* 15(2003): 62-63.
- 78 Eugene O'Brien, "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse," in *Irish and Catholic? Towards an Understanding of Identity*, ed. Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006), 66.
- 79 Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 219. Mary Ryan notes that Keyes discusses menstruation in her work. Ryan, "Then and Now: Memories of a Patriarchal Ireland in the Work of Marian Keyes". 123-24.
- 80 Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City*, 219.
- 81 Ryan, "Ending the Silence: Representing Women's Reproductive Lives in Irish Chick Lit," 219.
- 82 See also "Then and Now: Memories of a Patriarchal Ireland in the Work of Marian Keyes". 126.
- 83 Carey, "Love, Marriage and Surviving Heartache."
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 See also Joanne Hayden, "The Marian Kind," *Sunday Age*, 28 March 2004.

- 86 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 237. Edna O'Brien, *Down by the River* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996).
- 87 In 2008, 4600 women provided addresses in the Irish Republic when presenting for abortions in England and Wales. Department of Health, "Statistical Bulletin: Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2008," (Government Statistical Service, 2009).
- 88 Carey, "Love, Marriage and Surviving Heartache."
- 89 McStoffman, "The New Face of Irish Letters."

THE SHIFT FROM A CATHOLIC TO POST-CATHOLIC IRELAND IN THE WORK OF MAEVE BINCHY

As examined in the previous chapter, Marian Keyes employs the vehicle of the chick-lit novel to negotiate discourses of female subjectivity, sexuality and desire, thereby challenging and rejecting the archetype of the desexualised “Irish Catholic Mammy”. In her adoption and adaptation of the women’s popular novel to the Irish context, Keyes (born in 1963, and whose first novel, *Watermelon*, was published in 1995) has described herself as having a predecessor in fellow popular novelist Maeve Binchy, and, as will be explored in this chapter, whose work is more subtly subversive than Binchy’s reputation as a cosy “national treasure” allows for, and thus demands attention. Born in 1940, Binchy worked as a journalist and women’s editor at the *Irish Times* throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, before her first novel, *Light a Penny Candle*, was published in 1982. She went on to write an additional fourteen novels and several short story and non-fiction collections before her death in July 2012, with a final short story collection appearing posthumously in November 2012. Her work enjoyed tremendous popularity: it is estimated that she sold over 40 million books in forty countries.¹

Binchy’s work can be divided into two groupings: those novels set in the small-town Ireland of her girlhood, and those novels and short-stories in which she turns her sharp observational focus to contemporary Ireland, tracing the economic and social transformations in Irish society from the 1980s through the Celtic Tiger and beyond.² For example, in *Tara Road* (1998), set on the cusp of the Celtic Tiger era, a character who emigrated to the United States ten years beforehand returns to Dublin for a visit and is “astounded at how Ireland was doing, how prosperous the people were, and how successful were the small businesses she saw everywhere. When she had left to go to America to seek

her fortune at the age of eighteen, Ireland had been a much poorer country. ‘Look what has happened in less than ten years!’ ... Anything was possible in the Ireland of today” (TR, 81-82).³ Conversely, the Dublin of *Minding Frankie* (2010) is “in the middle of a recession” (MF,116), with one restaurateur reflecting on how “business was so up and down. No groups of estate agents and auctioneers celebrating another sale as they had every day during the property boom. No leisurely business lunches. Times were tough” (MF,116-7), the plentiful disposable income of the boom years being no more.⁴

Upon Binchy’s death, numerous tributes were paid both to her skill as a storyteller and her cultural significance. By depicting the quotidian experiences of Irish women in her work, she both empowered Irish women readers by allowing them to see their daily realities represented and recreated in literary form, and paved the way for the generation of chick-lit writers who followed. If *Bridget Jones’ Diary* provided a template for documenting the experiences of the single-girl-in-the-city, Binchy just as importantly demonstrated that the specifically Irish experiences could be conveyed via the women’s popular novel. *Irish Times* editor Kevin O’Sullivan described Binchy as “in her own very special way, an important feminist ... She was not, in any exclusive sense, a ‘women’s writer’. But in the Ireland she grew up in, the lives of women were especially in need of her kind of benign and tolerant attention. She gave a quiet, unsentimental, gently humorous dignity to stories of otherwise obscure female lives”⁵ Binchy herself had explained “there was a feeling in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s that we [the Irish] were not terribly interesting ... We thought anything that happened anywhere else was more important and more exciting than our humdrum lives”.⁶ On top of this sense of cultural inferiority, “women also thought it wasn't quite ladylike to be pushing yourself forward, shouting about what life was like for you”.⁷ She elsewhere remarked of the Ireland of her youth that “[women] were constantly told — at school, at home, in the parish sermon and by the kinds of articles we read in women's magazines — that it was good to be quiet and docile and not to appear too bright or questioning”.⁸ Claiming female experience and social landscapes as worthy of literary representation, as did Binchy, therefore acted as a corrective to these cultural codes of piety and subservience, and refuted the notion that Irish female experience was of little interest or only of secondary importance, and it was this which led Keyes to remark that “the whole phenomenon of Irish chick-lit ... is thanks to [Binchy]” in that Binchy gave Irish chick-lit writers the “confidence” to write in an Irish idiom and set their work in recognisably Irish locales, and to herald Binchy as “responsible for social change. In a time when Ireland was a theocracy in all but name, she made Irish women feel that their lives mattered and that their stories were worth telling”.⁹

However, although Keyes might hail Binchy as a dissenting voice in a time of theocracy, the two writers differ significantly in their negotiation of the Catholic past and post-Catholic Ireland alike. As Eugene O'Brien and Eamon Maher observe, while "Catholicism has been the hegemonic ideology which underpins the work of so many Irish writers of all genres", it is treated in a variety of different ways, as while "some writers speak out eloquently against a repressive upbringing, others rejoice in the innocence of a former edenic existence".¹⁰ Hence while Keyes' self-declared attitude towards the Catholic Church, as previously explored, is one of "contempt", and the clergy likewise scorned in her work as "judgmental oul' hoors", Binchy had nothing but praise for the "wonderful hard-working nuns who taught us well at the Holy Child Convent school, [and] pleasant priests in the parish".¹¹ She fondly describes a childhood "filled with saints and martyrs and traditions and feast days and hymns and bells and miracles and incense — and, looking back, it was all like a huge happy pageant".¹² Although Binchy experienced a dramatic dissolution of faith in early adulthood, she described this occurrence as "a loss. I really mean that. I'm not going around doing a lot of sins nowadays, so I might as well be a believer. Wouldn't it be lovely to think there's a heaven?"¹³ She emphasised that she was not "not one of those collapsed Catholics, full of guilt and bitterness about the church".¹⁴ Hence her work does not challenge Catholic ideology as combatively as does Keyes'; rather her critique is more subtle and oblique.

To start, characters who fervently embrace Catholicism become the subject of gentle comic irony. For example, in *Circle of Friends* (1991), set in the fictional 1950s village of Knockglen, we learn that "Mr Flood, of Flood's Quality Meat Killed on the Premises ... had been staring into [a] tree a lot lately, and worse still having conversations with someone he saw in its branches. The general thinking was that Mr Flood had seen some kind of vision, but was not ready to reveal it to the town. His words to the tree seemed to be respectful and thoughtful, and he addressed whatever he saw as 'Sister'" (CF,43).¹⁵ Rather than hailing Mr Flood as a spiritual intermediary, his family look upon his visions with embarrassment and "alarm" (CF,97).¹⁶ The situation is resolved when Mr Flood is:

referred to a new young psychiatrist ... [who] listened to Mr Flood endlessly, and then prescribed medication. There were no more nuns in trees. In fact, Mr Flood was embarrassed that he should ever have thought there were. It was decided that it should be referred to as a trick of the light. Something that could happen to anyone (CF,551).

This plotline alludes to not only the Marian shrine of Knock, Co Mayo, where the Virgin

Mary was believed to have appeared in 1879 but, more contemporaneously to the period of the novel's composition, the summer of 1985 saw a spate of apparently moving statues across Ireland, starting with a statue of the Virgin Mary in Ballinspittle, Co Cork. Binchy also pokes fun at religious mania in *Heart and Soul* (2008).¹⁷

Similarly, the elderly Kitty Reilly is a patient at St Brigid's Heart Clinic who places her faith not in modern medicine but in Catholic mystics. For example, instead of crediting her new medication with having cured her breathlessness, she explains that she "had a word with Padre Pio as well, it wasn't just the tablets" (HS,69), and later "kept insisting that any good health or improvement was due to the direct intervention of some saint or other and blamed the world in general for ignoring this saint whenever she was not feeling great" (HS,176). Kitty then turns to "St Joseph of Cupertino who apparently was the last word on curing people. She had leaflets about him which she distributed to everyone in the waiting room. [A nurse] had said as a joke that poor Padre Pio must be up in heaven feeling very left out now that Mrs Reilly had moved on, so Kitty had got a whole new stack of Padre Pio medals for fear of causing offence" (HS,275). Kitty's final appearance is in *Minding Frankie*, where she is "possibly in the early stages of dementia, conducting long conversations with saints" (MF, 151), her devotional fervour being seen as both comically excessive and — like Mr Flood — a form of psychological impairment or imbalance.

Binchy also describes the Ireland in which she grew up as "amazingly religious. Ludicrously so in many ways", and her generation as "desperately worried about sin".¹⁸ Sin under this religious formation is largely synonymous with sex, about which Binchy describes her generation as possessed of an "utter hysteria".¹⁹ Accordingly, those of Binchy's novels set in the 1950s and 1960s capture what Diarmaid Ferriter terms "a vanished era, when the language associated with sex was overwhelmingly negative and judgemental; a time when condemnations and warnings abounded and there were deemed to be sexual traps and temptations around every corner".²⁰ *Circle of Friends*, for example, traces the coming-of-age of Benny Hogan and Eve Malone in Knockgleng and then at University College Dublin in the late 1950s. Nuala O'Faolain describes this social milieu as one "where religion and sex were counter forces, themselves held in check by the third great force of class distinction."²¹ Binchy is adept in depicting the difficulties faced by her characters in negotiating these conflicting codes. When Benny's boyfriend reveals that he has the use of his "father's car" (CF,438) in which to travel home from a dance — an "occasion of sin" indeed — Benny's "heart sinks". She reflects on how "once in the car it was going to be very, very hard to say no. Everything they had been told at school, and at the Mission, and in all those sermons on Purity, made it seem like a simple choice. Between Sin and Virtue. You were told that Virtue

was rewarded, that Sin was punished, not only hereafter, but in this life. That boys had no respect for the girls who gave in to their demands” (CF,438-39).²² As Eugene O’Brien explains, and as has also been explored in Chapter One, “Catholicism has generally seen desire, especially sexual desire, as a negative human quality, in need of repression. The equation of desire with sin has long been part of the Irish psyche”, also succinctly expressing this “ethico-moral question” in the equation “desire + sin = guilt”.²³ Patsy McGarry likewise describes how in post-Famine Ireland:

Sex became taboo. Allied to a Victorian prudery rooted in an eighteenth century wave of evangelical revivalism in Britain, and a Catholic Church seemingly fixated on sex as the only sin, sensuality was suppressed in the Irish consciousness ... In 1854 Pius IX promulgated the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the clergy preached that celibate life was superior to married life, that “impure thought” was evil, as was all sexual activity without a marriage licence. Sexual pleasure was taboo. It was commonly described as “dirty”, “disgusting”, powerful evidence of an inferior animal nature which constantly threatened what was divine in the human.²⁴

To engage in sexual activity unsanctioned by marriage was thus seen as compromising one’s integrity or a lowering of one’s standards, a mindset made apparent in *Circle of Friends* when Eve — admittedly somewhat tongue-in-check — warns the landlady of her boarding house “Don’t cheapen yourself now” (CF,472) as she heads out for the evening with a male companion, Benny likewise cautioning that “he won’t respect you” (CF,472) should she do so.

However, Benny also reflects upon the inadequacy of this moral instruction, in that “nobody had ever told anybody about how nice it felt, and how easy it would be to go on, and how cheap you felt stopping” (also adding more ominously “and about how you feared greatly that if you didn’t go ahead with what you both wanted to do, then there would be plenty more who would” (CF,438-39), thereby pointing to the practical as well as moral consequences of this strict sexual code). As Tom Inglis observes, the archive contains “numerous diatribes about the evils of sex and drink, but very few about its pleasures”, pleasures which Binchy’s young protagonists are tentatively discovering, and for which the dichotomy between sin and virtue fails to account.²⁵ Though neither as stridently or volubly as in Keyes’ work, for example where the eponymous heroine of *Rachel’s Holiday* (1997) details how she “wanted [her partner] to kiss me ... I wanted him to throw me in a taxi and tear my clothes off. I wanted him to fling me on a bed and fuck me ... I was so filled with

desire for him by then that he could have done anything, he could have thrown up, and I would have found it sexy”, Binchy’s work thus nonetheless acknowledges female enjoyment of sexual activity and female desire in opposition to the received discourses of the time.²⁶

Furthermore, Inglis also offers the reminder that although denigrated and repressed, “sexuality was not eliminated from Irish culture and society”; “as Michel Foucault pointed out, the silencing of sex ... did not make it go away. Rather, it brought a whole new attention to sex and made it much more complicated than it ever had been”.²⁷ This complexity is something with which the young female university students in *Echoes*, also set in the 1950s, must contend. They reflect of the socio-sexual mores, again with Binchy’s trademark humour, that:

It was so complicated because there were these limits. You were allowed to go so far, and it was all fine, you were a warm sweet responsive person; and then there was some line, which, if you crossed it, meant you were going the whole way, and if you didn’t boys got this awful thing about being in distress. Though they discussed it in great technical detail, they couldn’t agree from their limited experience where this line was, and how you crossed it. It had been different for all three of them. Maybe it was different for everyone, which was why there was always such an almighty fuss about the whole thing (E,281).²⁸

More significantly, Binchy’s work also repeatedly points to another reason for there being “such an almighty fuss about the whole thing” as being the stigma of illegitimate pregnancy. Binchy remarking that for her generation, “the greatest evil that could befall a family was getting pregnant without being married”.²⁹ This plot detail is one to which her work repeatedly returns. In *Echoes*, when the unmarried Clare O’Brien becomes pregnant, she is called a “slut” and a “little tramp” (E,385) by her distraught mother, who in tears, accuses her of having “ruined us all in this family” (E,385) through the “disgrace” (E,386) of the pregnancy. In *Circle of Friends*, when the upwardly mobile Nan Mahon finds herself in the same situation, her predicament is such that she attempts to dupe Benny’s boyfriend into believing he is responsible so that he will propose. When, however, her machinations are uncovered in the novel’s dramatic denouement, she defensively lashes out against what she calls the “Holy Joe” hypocrisy and prurience of her contemporaries: “all of you desperate to do it, playing around the edges, not having the guts or the courage, confessing it, titillating everyone still further” (CF,543), and ostracising those who do not likewise conform.

Binchy’s work also makes clear that this cultural paradigm in which “the sexual honour of women revolves around their innocence and subservience”, and in which unplanned

pregnancy was looked upon as so shameful and in which transgressors were met with such familial and societal condemnation (the full consequences of which are investigated in Chapter Four, in the focus on the Magdalene laundries) was not simply confined to the 1950s, which as Joe Cleary notes, is frequently configured in Irish culture as a “grimly oppressive ‘dark age’”, against which the present moment conceptualises itself as one of liberal enlightenment.³⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, the early 1980s was a time of conservative backlash in Ireland in which pro-life factions lobbied to ensure constitutional protection for the right to life of the unborn. In Binchy’s short story “Decision in Belfield”, featured in *Dublin 4* (1982), pregnant university student Pat starkly contrasts the comforting advice and promises of acceptance offered by agony aunts about her situation — “most of them said that your parents would be very understanding — you must go straight away and tell them. You will be surprised, the Problem Pages said, at how much tolerance and understanding there will be, and how much support there is to be found at home” (D4,128) — and the reality of the response with which she knows she will be met in her own home.

Pat is keenly aware that contrary to the assurances of the Problem Pages, there will be “no support ... no understanding” from her own parents and that “Mum and Dad would not be a bundle of support and two big rocks of strength” (D4,128).³¹ Rather, the news would be met with anger and consternation. She remembers her parents’ reaction to the “dreadful shame” (D4,129) of her elder sister’s similarly unplanned pregnancy several years beforehand; “she had never heard words used like the words that were used that weekend. Dad had even apologised for some of the things he had called Cathy, and Mum had never stopped crying” (D4,129). Pat’s sister bitterly observed at the time that while her parents “say they’re so liberal ... they keep saying they’re in favour of getting divorce introduced and they want contraceptives, and they want censorship abolished” (D4,130), this liberalism and tolerance falters when the issues are moved from the abstracted political to the specifically personal. As such, Pat, having thus “learned enough over the years not to believe the Problem Pages” (D4,156), decides to withhold any mention of her pregnancy from her parents, and that “it would be best if she went to London, on her own” (D4,156), under the pretence of “work [and] the possibility of getting into the London School of Economics” (D4,156). With Pat feeling that she has no option but silenced exile, the disconcerting ending to “Decision in Belfield” is therefore an example of how, as Christine St Peter puts it, Binchy “quietly challenges her readers to struggle with at least some of the potent realities of Irish women’s lives”, by “creat[ing] narratives that indirectly provide shrewd social commentary”, the issues being approached obliquely rather than head-on, in contrast to a text like Keyes’ novel *Angels*.³²

However, Christine St Peter also points to Binchy's "accurate charting of historical changes in Irish women's lives since the 1940s", and the seismic social transformations undergone by Irish society throughout the 1980s and 90s means that the "Catholic culture of self-abnegation in which sexual pleasure and desire were repressed" and in which unplanned pregnancy creates such scandal, gives way to markedly different sexual discourses and norms in the "totally changed Ireland" (HS,438) and post-Catholic climate of Binchy's contemporary texts.³³ In *Heart and Soul* (2008), for example, the middle-aged Hilary remarks to her son Nick, in his early twenties, that "your generation is so lucky. You can more or less do what you like. We were all so buttoned up and peculiar. Everything you ever read about us all back then was true" (HS,104). Nick's response is that Irish society "was just different ... You were obsessed by sex because you didn't get any. Now that is all round the place, people are much more easy-going about it" (HS,104). Inglis and MacKeogh outline how "during the last half of the twentieth century, there was a radical departure from the Church's discourse of self-denial and penance in which sex had to be repressed, and a move towards a discourse of self-indulgence and pleasure in which there is an obligation for sex to be fulfilled".³⁴ Inglis elsewhere draws upon Dennis Carlson's identification of "four different discourses or perspectives about sexuality — that is, four different ways in which people in Western societies have written, spoken, understood and learnt about sex" in his analysis of this process, and if we too draw upon Carlson's work, Binchy's novels can be understood as tracing the transition from "a traditionalist discourse which portrays sex primarily in terms of sin and sickness", as evinced in *Circle of Friends*, to "a libertarian discourse which emphasises sexual pleasure, diversity and individual sexual rights".³⁵ This transition is evinced, for example, in *Minding Frankie* (2010), when overzealous social worker Moira Tierney raises concerns that a single father has "brought a flashy girl in to live" (MF,142) in his apartment. However, she is reprimanded by her supervisor that "we are not nuns, Moira. This isn't the 1950s. It's no business of ours what he does in his private life as long as he looks after that child properly. His girlfriends are neither here nor there" (MF,142), one's sexual life no longer being a matter of public concern, but instead a private matter, cohabitation and premarital sex being separate from, rather than integral to, one's moral fitness; a markedly different state of affairs to the mindset explored in texts such as *Circle of Friends*.

Similarly, in *Heart and Soul*, Clara Casey, a "handsome, dark-haired woman maybe in her forties" (HS,7) who is separated from her husband, embarks on a new romance. Although she is slightly anxious about entering into this new relationship, this is not out of any concern about sin or morality, but rather about her lack of recent sexual experience: "She hoped that it would all work out all right. It had been so long since she had made love to anyone. They

said you never forgot how to do it, and it all came back to you like riding a bicycle. But, hell, she had never made love with anyone except That Bastard Alan [her ex-husband]. She wished that she had accepted some of the offers that had been suggested over the past few years. It could have been a kind of rehearsal” (HS,259). Inglis explains that as Irish society has “move[d] from a traditional Catholic illu^sio of being fecund without being sexual, to a contemporary illu^sio of being sexual without being fecund, or from being innocent and pure about sex, to being knowledgeable and skilled at being sexual ... the fear of being too sexual has been replaced with a fear of not being sexual enough” — precisely the anxiety experienced by Clara, who fears she will not prove adequately skilled.³⁶ She need not have worried, however, as we are later told that “the evening ended very well and naturally as if they had been lovers for a long time” (HS,261).

No more details are provided than this, as while Binchy explores the mores, anxieties and concerns surrounding sex in a frank and matter-of-fact fashion, unlike Keyes, she elides the actual thrusts and mechanics of the act, another significant marker of difference between their work. Binchy’s explanation for this reticence is she’d “be embarrassed [to write about sex]. If it was real sex of which I’d had experience myself, I’d feel it was a betrayal to write about it. If it was fantasy sex, I would imagine people saying, ‘Get her! The notions she has!’ I really would not be able to do it”, elsewhere remarking that “I write like I talk ... And I would never ask anyone about their sex life. So to write about it would be a betrayal, both of my own experience and of the men I’ve made love with in my life”³⁷ Perhaps this speaks to the generational divide between Binchy and Keyes and the characters they depict, with there being no lingering trace of sex as a furtive, private or embarrassing realm of experience in Keyes’ work, her characters instead discussing and describing the practicalities of their sexual encounters with gusto.

However, much like the shift in codes of sexual behaviour, unplanned pregnancy no longer incurs such disapprobation and scorn in Binchy’s more recent texts. For example, in *Tara Road* (1998) when Hilary and her husband discover they are unable to have children, they investigate adoption. This, however, proves more difficult than they had anticipated, Hilary explaining to her sister Ria that “nowadays, they’re all keeping their kids, you see, and getting an allowance from the State. I’d put an end to that, I tell you” (TR,87). The more kind-hearted Ria, asks if it would be preferable for these pregnant young women to be “terrified out of lives”, reminding Hilary of “all the stories, girls committing suicide or running off to England and everything, never knowing what happened. Surely it’s much better the way it is?” (TR,87) — those very stories of desperate women and the furtive shame surrounding their plights being those documented by Binchy in her earlier works. This point

is reiterated in both *Quentins* (2002) and *Minding Frankie* (2010). The kindly Dr Flynn explains to a pair of prospective adoptors in *Quentins* that “adoption wasn’t as easy as it used to be, too many people chasing after a small pool of babies. The days were gone when single girls gave up their babies to orphanages or for adoption. Very much healthier attitude, of course, but not helpful when you were looking for a a child” (Q,113).³⁸ When a young couple in *Minding Frankie* are in the same situation, the older generation reflect on how “years ago it had been so different. There were orphanages full of children yearning for happy homes. Today, there were allowances and grants for single mothers” (MF,227), such State support betokening a paradigm societal shift in the response to single mothers from the era of the Magdalene laundries, as will be explored further in Chapter Four.

Indeed, it is in *Minding Frankie*, Binchy’s final work before her death, that this cultural seachange and the resolutely post-Catholic social climate is most apparent. For example, the middle-aged Frank Ennis, a self-declared “tidy, meticulous sort of person” (MF,238) learns that he has fathered a son, who is now in his mid-twenties. Though Frank is initially shaken by the news, which he likens to “having my whole neat world turned upside down” (MF,238), he nonetheless quickly comes to terms with events, realising that it is not the searing scandal of the “more disapproving climate” (MF,226) of his youth and stresses to his son that “there is ... no concept of an illegitimate child nowadays. The law has changed and society has changed too. People are proud of their children, born in wedlock or outside (MF,239)”.

Similarly, the elderly Josie and Charles Lynch are religious to the point of comic excess, having “planned a life based on the maxim that the family that prays together stays together” (MF,4). As with Mr Flood in *Circle of Friends* and Kitty Reilly in *Heart and Soul*, their devotion becomes a comic trope. They spend “considerable time debating whether they should put a picture of the Sacred Heart or of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in the newly painted [guest] room” (MF,9) and their driving quest throughout the text is to erect a statue to St Jarlath, the semi-mythical sixth century saint after whom the crescent in which they live is named. Their greatest hope for their only son, Noel, was that he “would be[come] a priest” (MF,4). However, with “great surprise and a lot of disappointment” (MF,4) they learned that Noel had “no interest whatsoever in a religious life” (MF,4), and indeed, rather than feeling himself called to the priesthood, he made clear that if it “was the last job on earth he wouldn’t go for it” (MF,5). Josie and Charles’s piety is depicted as anachronistic, at odds with the prevailing mores, rather than typifying them, and Noel is embarrassed by “the religious mania of his parents who thought that the Rosary was the answer to most of the world’s problems” (MF,10).

Nonetheless, he is still living at home in his late twenties, working in a “dead-end job” (MF,10) and “battling against alcohol” (MF,32), as he himself terms it. When the terminally ill Stella claims — erroneously, as it is revealed at the novel’s end — that Noel is the father of her unborn child (the eponymous Frankie) following a drunken encounter of which he has no recollection, she implores him “to look after [Frankie], to be a dad for her, to keep her out of the lottery of the care system” (MF,53) that Stella herself had experienced. Noel reveals all this at once to her parents, meaning that Josie and Charles learn in one sitting that “everything they had feared in a godless world *had* happened. Their son had enjoyed sex outside marriage and a child had resulted, and he was admitting a dependency on alcohol even to the point of getting help from Alcoholics Anonymous” (MF,59). Initially they are “frozen with horror” (MF,59) and Josie experiences “the whole range of disgrace, mortal sin and shame” (MF,62). However, much as Frank Ennis adapts to the news that he has an adult son with no great difficulty, so too do Josie and Charles almost instantaneously rally to their son’s side; there are “no recriminations. No mention of sex before marriage, only concern” (60) and “sympathy” (60) for their son, much as it might be at odds with their religious and moral beliefs, and therefore striking somewhat of an implausible note in Binchy’s efforts to convey the changes which have occurred in a post-Catholic Ireland. Furthermore, rather than the pregnancy causing a scandal, the crescent rallies together to care for the infant Frankie, meaning that the “illegitimate” child unites the community, rather than being a reason for social fracture as in earlier texts.

This shift from a Catholic to post-Catholic climate is also shown as having significant consequences for the clergy themselves in Binchy’s work, positively and negatively alike. For example, in *Echoes*, Angela O’Hare is appalled when she receives a letter from her brother Sean, a missionary priest, detailing how he “had left the religious house three years ago; how he was married to a Japanese girl; and how [he] had one child of fourteen months and another on the way” (E,71). Angela rages against her sister-in-law, whom she thinks of as “a Japanese woman with no religion and no morals. To her, a priest was the same as anyone else; she would have no idea what a sin it was, and what a terrible decision Sean had to make” (E,76), and feels it incumbent upon her to conceal the news from her elderly mother, for whom “the glory of the priest son in full regalia very largely compensated for the loss of the drunken troublesome husband who had been a heart scald to her for her whole married life” (E,291). “How could poor Mammy take it in and cope with it”, Angela wonders, “if even [she] who was young and meant to be modern and intelligent couldn’t take it in herself?” (E, 76). She deliberates over how to respond to her brother’s letter, and when she eventually does so, it is to convey her shock and to emphasise that Sean “must realize everyone in

Ireland would be shocked too, no matter how good and supportive his fellow priests in the mission field had been ... she begged him to realize that Castlebay in 1950 was a place where understanding and casual attitudes towards married priests simply did not exist” (E,87). Instead, his actions would be looked upon as a scandalous falling-from-grace.

By way of contrast, in *Whitethorn Woods* (2006) it is mentioned merely in passing that James O’Connor, having “left the Church because he had been outraged by the way an older, abusive priest had been protected and allowed to escape either treatment or punishment by a cover-up” (WW,5), had “married Rosie, had two little sons [and] worked in computer technology of some kind” (WW,165).³⁹ That laicisation is here dealt with so casually evinces a paradigm shift in attitudes towards the priesthood and its perceived sanctity, rather than constituting a central plot thread or crisis event as it was for Sean O’Hare; priests are indeed looked upon as “the same as anyone else” rather than being set apart by dint of vocation.

Mary Kenny observes that “the Catholic Church is portrayed as a very human institution, in the best sense of the word [in Binchy’s work]: the priests and nuns are real human beings who are, on the whole, doing their best”.⁴⁰ The above mention of clerical abuse is one of the few explicit acknowledgements of “the scandals” by Binchy in her portrait of post-Catholic Ireland. Rather than focus on the revelations of impropriety and abuse, her interest instead lies in the fate of “the good priests who do indeed exist”, and whom she describes as “almost afraid to mention their calling and feel saddened that the path they chose has been so sullied”.⁴¹ To this end, enter the character of Fr Brian Flynn. Fr Brian first appears in *Whitethorn Woods* as the curate in the small town of Rossmore, before being transferred to Dublin’s inner city whereupon he features in *Heart and Soul* and *Minding Frankie*. Fr Brian is keenly aware that the perceptions of the priesthood have changed and that priests are no longer held in such high regard. He reflects that the elderly Canon Cassidy, now descending into his dotage, “still lived in a world of certainties, a place where a priest was important and respected, a world where there was an answer for every question asked ... [and where] The priest was wanted, expected and needed at all kinds of happenings in the lives of the parishioners”. He himself, however, “had learned to be more reticent. In modern Ireland, even a town like Rossmore, there were many who would not welcome the appearance of a Roman collar on the doorstep” (WW,8). “People did not automatically respect the Church and Churchmen any more”, Fr Brian is aware, “far from it” (WW,5). As evidence of this, when he is transferred to Dublin at the start of *Heart and Soul*, he is left to his own devices to find accommodation, as “nobody seemed to mind where he lived. The days were gone when the priest’s house was a matter of concern and importance” (HS,165). The model of the parochial house with the devoted housekeeper in attendance — as provides

the structural basis for *Father Ted*, for example, set only fifteen years or so beforehand, as will be examined in Chapter Three — has become a thing of the past.

The extent of this societal turn away from — if not in fact decided turn against — the clergy is driven home to Fr Brian in *Heart and Soul* when Eileen Kennedy, a delusional young woman, believes herself to be in a relationship with him. She claims “you told me that I was special, that you would get released from your vows to marry me” (HS,181), fabricating text messages and emails to this end, and letting herself into his apartment to stage incriminating photos in support of her claims.⁴² When Fr Brian warns Eileen that he will report her behaviour to the Gardaí, she simply retorts “they won’t believe you. Just another priest with a panic attack. That’s what they’ll think” (HS,181). She also threatens to “go to the newspapers. The way I was treated here is shameful. Building up my hopes, promising me the sun, moon and stars and when you had your way with me, just backing out” (HS,182). Delusional as she may be, Eileen is nonetheless cannily aware of a ready media appetite for stories of philandering priests and a societal presumption of guilt in cases where the clergy are involved (as was also apparent in “real life” in May 2011, when RTÉ documentary *Prime Time Investigates* incorrectly claimed that Fr Kevin Reynolds had raped a woman and fathered a child in Kenya. The incident led to RTÉ being fined €200,000 by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), major restructuring within the organisation, the scrapping of the *Prime Time Investigates* programme, and the introduction of new journalistic guidelines and an editorial standards board. Perhaps when it comes to the abuse narratives indicting the Catholic Church, the fact-checking process is not as vigorously adhered to, and indeed the BAI report on the episode was critical of how “second hand repetition of gossip was treated as corroboration” by Aoife Kavanagh, the programme’s producer, in the rush to reveal and condemn).⁴³ Indeed when Fr Brian does approach the Gardaí to lodge a complaint, the jaded desk sergeant simply thinks that “priests wandering from the straight and narrow was part of the territory nowadays”, and although he fills out a report on the situation, his expression upon seeing the photos staged by Eileen “said everything and hinted that despite the filing of a report, nothing was going to be done. The glance said this was a priest who had had a fling and had now changed his mind” (HS,185-86). With no help forthcoming from the authorities, it remains to Fr Brian and his acquaintances, one of whom sympathetically remarks that Fr Brian “must be the only one in the Church who has always kept the rules” (HS,179) to resolve the situation, which they do through an uneasy mixture of threats and appeals to Eileen as an “ordinary, decent person who couldn’t live long with such a deception” (HS,208).

Deluded stalkers are, however, perhaps the easiest resolved of Fr Brian's problems as he dwells upon the role of the priesthood in "the twenty-first century in a country that was fast becoming secular" (WW,17). His flock are "ever-decreasing" (WW,6) in number, and "apart from a few elderly folk there was hardly anybody at his daily 10am mass" (HS,163), leaving him feeling increasingly redundant. Fr Brian also appears to be undergoing somewhat of a crisis of faith, as rather than drawing upon conventional theology when counselling his remaining parishioners, he instead opts for "a comforting supply of meaningless clichés" (WW,342), and "a lot of protestations about the Lord moving in mysterious ways and even ... the bit of Shakespeare about there being more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy" (WW,15). One parishioner complains to Canon Cassidy that when he asked Fr Brian for advice about how to vote about a proposed bypass, the priest "went on about doing what our consciences told us to do ... that's no use at all, suppose everyone's conscience told them something different. Where would we be then? It's guidance we need" (WW,168). The Canon's response, however, is that "the days of guidance are long gone. I never thought I'd live to hear myself say this but it appears to be true"(WW, 168). The dissolution of the Church's hegemony means the clergy is now either unable or unwilling to issue dictates to an acquiescent laity, even on the few occasions when they are called upon to do so, and when the issue at hand is a practical rather than moral or theological one — such as voting about a bypass — rather than a more thorny or contentious issue.

"Why do you stay?" (WW,12), Fr Brian's sister-in-law disparagingly asks him, "what with no one having any respect for priests any more or anything?". His response is that "because I joined up, signed on, whatever, and very occasionally I do something to help" (WW,12). Elsewhere when asked whether he feels his vocation is hopeless, he replies, "I don't think it's all hopeless. I think we do *something* to help and I certainly see a lot that inspires me" (MF, 260). However, the post-Catholic Ireland as depicted by Binchy has so entirely abandoned the strictures and Catechesis of the Church that any assistance that Fr Brian provides is firmly of practical, rather than spiritual or theological, nature. He reflects in *Heart and Soul* that "his work was much more in the nature of a social worker than the tradition and ritual of the priesthood" (HS,166). However, rather than being troubled by this, he simply considers it to be "no bad thing. If, at the end of the day, you had helped with housing or child support, or intervened to ensure that the minimum wage was being paid, it was often a better feeling than having offered prayers to God for something that would surely never happen" (HS,167). Pragmatic as this view may be, it entirely negates the Church's core business of spiritual salvation, a point reiterated in *Minding Frankie* when Fr Brian fills in as

“acting chaplain at St Brigid’s Hospital ... while the real chaplain is in Rome on a pilgrimage” (MF,2). When he approaches a hairdresser on behalf of the dying Stella who “wants a hairdo” (MF,2) he explains that “apart from being asked to bring in cigarettes and drink for the patients, this is the only serious request I’ve had” (MF,2). This willingness to attend to such requests earns Fr Brian the patients’ admiration and respect, Stella for example explaining that “she didn’t normally have a lot to say for the clergy, but Brian Flynn was a very decent fellow and didn’t go on about sin and redemption and things. He did what a priest should do, he brought her cigarettes and did little jobs for people” (MF,46). While this is a comically ironic description of “what a priest should do”, the irony lies not only in Stella’s miscomprehension, but also in that the bulk of Fr Brian’s energies are indeed devoted to such tasks. That such is the case means that when Fr Brian “speculate[s] to himself about the role of a priest in today’s society” (HS,334), he is simply unable to reach “any satisfactory conclusion” (HS,334), so far removed are his duties from those traditionally the domain of holy office.

Through this focus on the struggles and uncertainties of Fr Brian, Binchy’s later novels thus present the position of the Catholic Church in a post-Catholic Ireland as still very much uncertain and undetermined, reflecting the socio-political reality that this process of renegotiation is still very much underway in the wake of the Ryan and Murphy Reports. David Glover and Scott McCracken contend that “popular fiction offers not so much an authentic account of people’s everyday lives, but an example of the interaction between that experience and the dominant (or hegemonic) social and cultural structures and ideologies”.⁴⁴ With one such dominant ideology in the Irish context being Catholicism, Binchy’s work thus explores with deft narrative flair and keen social observation the impact of this ideology, and equally its demise. Binchy remarked in 1998 that “the past may have many interpretations, but everyone will agree that the Ireland in which I grew up during the 1940s and 1950s was most definitely a different country”, with regards to both the status of women and the Catholic Church.⁴⁵ She describes, perhaps slightly hyperbolically, how a “hurricane of [social and political] change” had swept through Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century, and her novels are adroit at exploring the consequences of this change for both laity and clergy alike.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Binchy’s fond, if not uncritical, nostalgia for the Ireland of her youth and her attempts, albeit unsuccessful, to identify a precise and particular role for the Church in post-Catholic Ireland demonstrate how the post-Catholic movement has not simply been one of repudiation and rejection, but has also been accompanied in quarters by a less of bewilderment and loss.

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- 1 Valerie Shanley, "Profile - Maeve Binchy," *Sunday Tribune* 2010.
 - 2 Her "1950s" novels are - *Light a Penny Candle* (1982), *Echoes* (1985), *Firefly Summer* (1987), *Circle of Friends* (1991), and *The Glass Lake* (1994).
 - 3 Maeve Binchy, *Tara Road* (London: Orion, 1998).
 - 4 *Minding Frankie* (London: Orion, 2010).
 - 5 Kevin O'Sullivan, "A Unique Ear," *Irish Times*, 1 August 2012.
 - 6 Aine McCarthy, "All Human Life Is There," *ibid.*, 11 June 1996.
 - 7 *Ibid.*
 - 8 Maeve Binchy, "Gone with the Wind of Change," *ibid.*, September 26 1998.
 - 9 Marian Keyes, "My Hero: Maeve Binchy," *Guardian*, 3 August 2012. See also "Newsletter - August 2012," <http://www.mariankeyes.com/Newsletter/August-2012?forumboardid=19&forumtopicid=19>.
 - 10 Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien, "Introduction," in *Breaking the Mould: Literary Representations of Irish Catholicism and Ireland*, ed. Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 7.
 - 11 Bennett and Forgan, *Convent Girls*, 247. Cited in Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: Revised and Updated Edition*, 327.
 - 12 Maeve Binchy, "My best teacher", *Times Educational Supplement*, 17 February 2006; See also Maeve Binchy, "I believe", *Express*, 28 August 2000; *Ibid.*Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: revised and updated edition*: 327.
 - 13 In an oft-cited anecdote, Binchy explains that at the age of twenty-three she "went to Jerusalem to see the room of The Last Supper as excited as if I was going to see Elvis Presley. I climbed Mount Zion in the heat, but couldn't find the place, so went all the way down and then back up again. Eventually, someone pointed to the entrance of a small cave. I went in and remarked that it couldn't be the place; a man beside me replied: 'What did you expect? A Renaissance table set for 13?' I suddenly realised that, if this was the entire basis for my religion, the whole lot was just a fairytale. I shouted: 'None of it is true, not the angels or anything,' and left." Angela Levin, "I Wanted to Be a Saint but I Lost My Faith in the Holy Land," *Daily Mail*, 7 September 1994. See also Susan Chenery, "Binchy: I Thought God Was Irish," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1989. Also Mary Kenny, "Irish and Catholic Values in the Work of Maeve Binchy," *Studies: an Irish quarterly Review* 93, no. 372 (2004). Jamie Portman, "Maeve Binchy Takes the Romance out of Her Novels," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 June 1995. See also Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: Revised and Updated Edition*, 326-27.
 - 14 Polly Toynebee, "Behind the Lines: Interview with Maeve Binchy, Irish Journalist and Novelist," *The Guardian*, 10 February 1986.
 - 15 Maeve Binchy, *Circle of Friends* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1991).
 - 16 *Ibid.*, 97.
 - 17 *Heart and Soul* (London: Orion, 2008).
 - 18 "All Changed, Changed Utterly," *The Times*, 10 December 2010. Helen Birch, "A Fair Crack at Happiness," *The Independent*, May 12 1995.
 - 19 *Ibid.*
 - 20 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 10. Patsy McGarry, "Of Scribes and Pharisees," in *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Columba Press, 2008), 153.
 - 21 Nuala O'Faolain, "Circle of Fear," *Irish Times*, May 30 1995. As Christine St Peter observes that "while the narrative interest is on the middle class [throughout Binchy's work], the author's own background, the distinctions among the classes, and the consequences of those distinctions, are precisely delineated in all of her works", Christine St Peter, *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 137.
 - 22 Nuala O'Faolain describes this as a "milieu ... [w]here religion and sex were counter forces", O'Faolain, "Circle of Fear."
 - 23 O'Brien, "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse," 50-51.
 - 24 Patsy McGarry, "The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland," *ibid.*, 35; "The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland," in *Irish and Catholic? Towards an Understanding of Identity*, ed. Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006), 37.
 - 25 Cited in Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 9.
 - 26 Keyes, *Rachel's Holiday*, 57; *Rachel's Holiday*, 59.
 - 27 Inglis, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality*, 15.
 - 28 Maeve Binchy, *Echoes* (London: Arrow Books, 1984).
 - 29 Shanley, "Profile - Maeve Binchy."

- 30 Inglis and MacKeogh, "The Double Bind: Women, Honour and Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland," 68. Joe Cleary, "Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology in Contemporary Irish Culture," in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999*, ed. Ray Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 108.
- 31 Maeve Binchy, *Dublin 4* (London: Random House, 1996).
- 32 St Peter, *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, 145; *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, 141.
- 33 Ibid. Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland," 11.
- 34 Inglis and MacKeogh, "The Double Bind: Women, Honour and Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland," 75.
- 35 Inglis, *Lessons in Irish Sexuality*, 16.
- 36 Inglis and MacKeogh, "The Double Bind: Women, Honour and Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland," 75. Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 10. One of Binchy's earliest short stories, "Tottenham Court Road", in her *London Transports* collection (originally published as two separate volumes, *Central Line* and *Victoria Line*), similarly explores in touchingly comic fashion the plight of the twenty-nine-year old Julia, who is so embarrassed and anxious about her sexual inexperience that she visits a pornographic bookshop in search of some "manuals of instruction". Maeve Binchy, *London Transports* (London: Century Publishing, 1983).
- 37 Birch, "A Fair Crack at Happiness." Kenny, "Irish and Catholic Values in the Work of Maeve Binchy," 432.
- 38 Maeve Binchy, *Quentins* (London: Orion, 2002).
- 39 *Whitethorn Woods* (Orion: London, 2006).
- 40 Kenny, "Irish and Catholic Values in the Work of Maeve Binchy," 428.
- 41 Binchy, "All Changed, Changed Utterly."
- 42 ———, *Heart and soul*: 181.
- 43 Anna Carragher, "Investigation Pursuant to Section 53 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 in Respect of the Programme "Prime Time Investigates — Mission to Prey"," (Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, 2012). It should be noted that this form of moral panic is not exclusive to Ireland. The BBC faced similar censure in November 2012 when an episode of "Newsnight" documentary incorrectly implicated Lord McAlpine in the child abuse scandal centred upon deceased television and radio presenter Jimmy Saville.
- 44 Glover and McCracken, "Introduction," 8.
- 45 Binchy, "Gone with the Wind of Change."
- 46 Ibid.

“DOESN’T MARY HAVE A LOVELY BOTTOM?”: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND CATHOLIC IDEOLOGY IN FATHER TED¹

As discussed in the Introduction, documentaries such as *Suffer the Little Children* (1994), *Dear Daughter* (1996) and *States of Fear* (1999) had significant political and cultural impact in their uncovering of institutional abuse and their focus on the culpability of the Catholic Church and the State for the same.² However, another programme from the same period also made sizeable and lasting inroads on the public consciousness regarding the Catholic Church – a programme of quite different tenor from the searing documentaries. The sitcom *Father Ted*, written by Arthur Mathews and Graham Linehan, and which originally aired from 1995 to 1998 on Britain’s Channel 4, has gone on to achieve widespread popularity and cult status alike, taking top position in a 2008 poll of Ireland’s favourite television programmes, while a cohort of loyal “Tedheads” reenact key moments from the series at an annual “Tedfest”.³ While other television series of the time such as *Ballykissangel* (1996-2001) also featured clergy members as central characters, none of these enjoyed the popularity and cultural purchase of *Ted*.

Set on Craggy Island, a fictitious island located off the west coast of Ireland, *Ted* centres upon three priests — Fathers Ted Crilly (Dermot Morgan), Jack Hackett (Frank Kelly) and Dougal Maguire (Ardal O’Hanlon) — and their downtrodden housekeeper, Mrs Doyle (Pauline McLynn), who live together in the parochial house. Despite writing their sitcom at a time during which the Church was undergoing so dramatic a falling-from-grace, Mathews and Linehan claim structural rather than political impetus in having chosen priests as comic personae. For example, they describe the clerical world as a closed community in which priests appear to all know one other, with such bonhomie enabling them to introduce and

dispense with secondary characters with ease. Linehan also remarks that “one of the great things about priests is that they all dress the same. So you can take a concept, impose it on a priest and it becomes funny almost automatically”.⁴ The programme is thus populated by such figures as Father Finnegan, the Dancing Priest who claims “prayer isn’t the only way to praise God, you know. And it keeps you fit as well” (“Think fast, Father Ted”, S2), Father Billy O’Dwyer whose DJ-ing has earned him the moniker “The Spinmaster” (“Think fast, Father Ted”, S2) and the participants in the annual All-Priests Five-a-side Over Seventy-Fives Indoor Football Challenge, the star player of which “can walk up two flights of stairs unassisted. Only needs one nun to help him get out of a chair” (“Escape from Victory”, S3). Linehan similarly remarks that “because of the mysterious thing religion is, you can make things up and spoof people...there's a reference to this disease that old priests get where they get very hairy, and because it's set in a vaguely mysterious world you might just believe that”.⁵ Rather than critiquing the clergy’s traditional aloofness from the laity or interrogating the mysteries of faith, *Father Ted* exploits them for comic purpose.

With sitcom being an abbreviation, after all, of “situation comedy”, a further structural advantage to the nature of the priesthood, Mathews and Linehan point out, is that none of the characters can easily extricate themselves from the set-up of the parochial house, thereby ensuring plenty of opportunity for situational set-pieces. Ted is a would-be bon-vivant, aspiring to a life of celebrity and glamour. However, rather than basking among the “Bright lights! Glamour! Film premieres!...Parties! Cocaine busts! Las Vegas!” of which he wistfully dreams, he must remain exiled on the remote Craggy Island at the behest of his superiors, having embezzled parochial funds, about which his tetchily repeated defence is that “the money was just resting in my account”. His fellow clerics prove little consolation: the elderly Jack is lost in a perpetual alcoholic haze and Dougal is largely theologically illiterate, variously asking Ted if he believes in the afterlife and offering the advice that “heaven and hell and everlasting life and all that type of thing — you're not meant to take it seriously” (“Good luck, Father Ted”, S1). When called upon to perform the last rites, he intersperses scattered words of Latin with the names of European footballers. Mathews describes Ted’s position as being “stuck with three people he had nothing in common with. All the best sitcoms are about thwarted ambition, chasing up blind alleys and being in a situation you don't want to be in”, elsewhere citing *Porridge* and *Steptoe and Son* as classic sitcoms in this vein, and this scenario of frustrated ambitions therefore being replicated in *Ted*.⁶

Indeed, Linehan and Mathews repeatedly cite the influence of British sitcom upon *Father Ted*. When the surreality of the programme was compared with that of Flann O’Brien

— for example, there is no longer a west coast on Craggy Island, it just “drifted off ... now it’s just north, south and east” — Mathews remarked that “it would be nice if we could say that we were influenced by some great Irish comic tradition ... but really it’s just *Reggie Perrin*, *Fawlty Towers*, *The Young Ones* — stuff like that”, elsewhere reiterating that “*Ted* would not have existed if it hadn’t been for *The Young Ones* or *Only Fools And Horses*”.⁷ Linehan also points to the structural similarities to *Only Fools and Horses* in that “you’ve got the guy who doesn’t think he’s stupid, but is, you’ve got the really stupid guy and you’ve got the old guy” and expressly describes *Father Ted* as “a sitcom in the British tradition although it was set in Ireland”.⁸ Describing sitcom as “a form of programming which foregrounds its comic intent” in his formalist study of the genre, Brett Mills emphasises that “the sitcom’s primary aim is to be funny”.⁹ “Sitcom”, he argues, “is only meaningful — and explicable as a genre — if its comic intent is understood; it is this which drives and defines it”.¹⁰ By situating and configuring *Father Ted* in specifically sitcom terms, Linehan and Mathews similarly seek to emphasise the primacy of the programme’s humour.

Conversely, they also attempt to downplay interpretation of *Ted* as a vehicle for comment upon Catholicism by emphasising that the mode of the programme is one of comic inflation rather than social realism. Mathews argues that the programme should be looked upon as “silly rather than satirical. It did play up to clichés, but it was basically berserk. You can’t scrutinise it in any serious, political way”.¹¹ Linehan remarks that “we just like nonsense and try to cram as much comedy as possible into it. These are not real people. *Father Ted* is a live action cartoon, very surreal and not realistic at all”.¹² Discussing the “long-standing literary and cultural phenomenon of nonsense”, Michelle Ann Abate points out that:

One of the governing principles of nonsense [is that] these seemingly silly and insignificant elements encode an array of social, political, and cultural meaning and importance Given the way in which nonsense resists and even openly rejects elements of logic and linearity, it opens up the possibility for unconventional artistic forms, innovative aesthetic styles, and irreverent— often subversive — cultural interpretations. Indeed, nonsense often evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion, discussed in *Rabelais and His World*, of the carnivalesque for the way that it defies the dominant social order and upends hegemonic authority, control, and power... Unpacking the subversive nature of ... ostensibly harmless fun ... demonstrates the social, political, and cultural sense that is paradoxically encoded in its nonsense.¹³

“Nonsense” details and storylines in *Father Ted* include Dougal becoming trapped on a milkfloat which will explode should its speed dip below five miles an hour; Mrs Doyle fashioning a hybrid cake-jumper for her favourite singer; attractions like the Tunnel of Goats and the Ladder of Death at the Craggy Island fairground; and Fr O’Dwyer, having forgotten all his other records, substituting “Ghost Town” for the national anthem at a charity raffle at which he is DJ-ing. The programme also makes use of slapstick and visual gags, such as Mrs Doyle repeatedly falling off the window sill and roof; Ted unwittingly aligning himself with a stain on his window which from the outside makes him appear to be sporting a Hitler-style moustache; and the assorted mishaps of Fr Larry Duff (Tony Guilfoyle) whenever Ted rings his mobile phone, the disturbance of the phonecall variously leading to Duff’s being trampled by a herd of donkeys, triggering an avalanche while skiing, driving off a cliff and losing large amounts of money on a game show.

Mathews and Linehan also emphasise that, given the cultural materials at their disposal, theirs is a remarkably restrained portrait of the Church; Mary Kenny describes how “on one Monday in November 1994, the three leading stories on RTE, the national television network, were the political repercussions following the Brendan Smyth case, the collapse and death of a Dublin priest in a homosexual sauna club, and the conviction of a Galway priest for a sexual assault on a young man, all in one news bulletin”.¹⁴ Linehan remarks that “compared to what’s going down now, our priests are far better behaved. We don’t want to refer to all that business, the world (of Father Ted) is a more innocent world”.¹⁵ However, although the main characters of the programme are relatively blameless — the financial irregularities dogging Ted, Jack’s alcoholism, and Dougal’s imbecility notwithstanding — “all that business”, the scandals and ignominies in which the Catholic Church was embroiled throughout the 1990s, does in fact permeate the series, significantly undermining the writers’ claims in this regard. The spectre of clerical child abuse, for example, haunts “Grant Unto Him Eternal Rest” (S1) when Ted remarks that the upholstery on the chair in which the elderly Fr Jack (Frank Kelly) normally sits is so worn away that it is now “smooth as a baby’s behind”. “You’d know all about that Ted”, the younger Fr Dougal (Ardal O’Hanlon) remarks with a knowing smile. Shocked by the inference, Ted exclaims “what?” but the matter is clarified when Dougal continues without guile, “when you’re baptizing them. The babies”, to Ted’s relief. Equally loaded is the opening scene to “New Jack City” (S2), which sees Ted surreptitiously listening to a horse-race on the radio in which a horse named Divorce Referendum going head-to-head with another named Glory-be-to-God. The 1995 divorce referendum was indeed a close race, a “yes” vote being secured by only the smallest of margins, but a victory which nonetheless “suggested ... that the moral policing in sexual

matters the church had enforced in the early decades of independence had almost completely broken down”.¹⁶ As such, this scene in *Ted* is a short but pointed commentary on the waning influence of the Church.

As examined in Chapter One, the “scandals” played no small part in undermining the Church’s moral authority, and *Father Ted* also engages with what Mathews gleefully terms “bishops being up to no good in the bedroom”.¹⁷ In “Flight into Terror” (S2), when faced with potential death in an air crash, Father O’Shea impulsively confesses that “I got my housekeeper pregnant a couple of years ago and forced her to leave the country”, bringing to mind the improprieties of Casey and Cleary alike. Similarly, in “A Christmassy Ted” (S2), Ted receives a phone call from Bishop Tom McCaskell (Andrew McCulloch) in Rome. Ted is surprised to hear from the Bishop, remarking to him “you left in an awful hurry” and asks when he is to return to Ireland. The Bishop responds that it won’t be until “things have died down a bit. I might have to head off to South America for a while. You know she’s going to write a bloody book about it?”, again alluding to Bishop Casey’s abrupt departure from Ireland, subsequently traveling to Ecuador, and Annie Murphy’s co-authoring of a book — *Forbidden Fruit: the true story of my secret love for the Bishop of Galway* (1993) — about the affair.¹⁸ Even Ted’s own misdemeanour is culturally loaded, his misdirection of parochial funds alluding to Casey’s appropriation of diocesan monies to pay child maintenance to Murphy.

The most sustained engagement with the issue of clerical sexual impropriety, however, occurs in “The Passion of Saint Tibulus” (S1). The episode opens with the visit to Craggy Island of Fr Hernandez (Derrick Branche), an amorous Cuban cleric. He gives Ted a carved wooden fertility idol with an oversized phallus, expressing his wish that this gift will bring Ted as much luck as it has brought himself, and appraises the drab, downtrodden and thoroughly desexualized housekeeper Mrs Doyle (Pauline McLynn) as a “very beautiful woman”, accompanying his words with hand gestures simulating copulation. “Sometimes this celibacy is hard for a man” he sighs, which leads Ted to mention that apparently Bishop Len Brennan (Jim Norton), their superior “was at the old...[hand gestures] himself. And the union was blessed, so they say ... A boy, I think. Lives in America now”, once again a nod to the Bishop Casey affair. And as with Casey, Bishop Brennan’s sexual indiscretions do not slacken his concern for public morality. Owing to a legal loophole, the lurid film *The Passion of Saint Tibulus* is airing on Craggy Island, having been banned elsewhere. Bishop Brennan orders Ted and Dougal to campaign against the film; however, the more active they are in denouncing its “nudey bits” and amorality, the greater the interest in it they generate, leading *Tibulus* to become the highest grossing film ever shown on Craggy Island. Incensed, Bishop

Brennan orders Ted and Dougal to be exiled to remote parishes in South America and the Philippines respectively. However, before this comes to pass they appropriate a video tape entitled “Holiday 1995” which depicts the Bishop frolicking on a beach with his mistress and young son and which acts as insurance against their removal. Linehan describes the episode as “very easy to write — we just followed the course of certain events in real life” and transformed them into sharp and timely satire.¹⁹ David Marc notes that “as may be the case with life itself, the definition of ‘satire’ is becoming more obscure as its fan base expands. In its long development from ancient Greek theater to the inky page, satire was a term reserved for a particular kind of humor that makes fun of human folly and vice by holding people accountable for their public actions”, a process of accountability to which *Father Ted* adds.²⁰ Jonathan Gray et. al. similarly explain:

One particularly useful definition posits satire as ‘verbal aggression in which some aspect of historical reality is exposed to ridicule. It is a mode of aesthetic expression that relates to historical reality, involves at least implied norms against which a target can be exposed as ridiculous, and demands the pre-existence or creation of shared comprehension and evaluation between satirist and audience’. As a form of political discourse, two of the most important components of this definition are the verbal *attack* that in some way passes *judgment* on the object of that attack, thereby enunciating a perceived breach in societal norms or values ... it is in the act of focusing attention on the object of attack that the satirist demands communal evaluation and rebuke. As GK Chesterton writes, ‘the essence of satire is that it perceives some absurdity inherent in the logic of some position, and ... draws the absurdity out and isolates it, so that all can see it’ ... in so doing, the aesthetic or artistic dimension in exposing such folly or vice is manifest in satire’s most notable feature: ridicule. Satire’s calling card is the ability to produce social scorn or damning indictments through playful means and, in the process, transform the aggressive act of ridicule into the more socially acceptable act of rendering something ridiculous. Play typically makes the attack humorous, in turn enlisting the audience in a social rebuke through communal laughter.²¹

This is precisely what happens in “The Passion of Saint Tibulus”, Mathews admitting the episode “was certainly influenced by the news of Bishop Casey’s affair” as well as that of Cleary, and rendering both figures the target of ridicule and thereby undermining both the figures involves and the institution and values they regard.²²

In this satirical vein, the programme is equally astute in its references to the mutually antagonistic relationship between the Catholic Church and the media, Colum Kenny noting that “there is no love lost between the Irish Catholic hierarchy, as a body, and even those journalists who most frequently write about religion in a serious way”.²³ In “Good Luck Father Ted”, Ted is selected to feature on *Faith of our Fathers*, a “Telly Éireann” show profiling individual priests. The interviewer starts by asking him: “Father, how would you say that people’s religious beliefs here on Craggy Island have been affected by the advent of television and greater access to the media in general?” The development of mass media in Ireland, and television in particular, has indeed been recognised as key to the dissolution of the Catholic Church’s “moral monopoly” from the 1960s onwards. As Louise Fuller puts it, “television had the effect of liberalizing Irish society almost overnight. It played an iconoclastic role in challenging and deconstructing accepted notions of Irish/Catholic identity ... airing ... all manner of views very often not in keeping with the official Church position”, and *Father Ted* thus makes metatextual comment on this.²⁴ Moving to the contemporary period of *Father Ted*, the media were again key in exposing institutional and clerical abuse.²⁵ Tom Inglis points to how:

It was the media that broke the tradition of not criticising the Church and its teachings in public. It was the media that forced the Church into giving a public account of itself. It was the media, and in particular television, which brought an end to the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism.²⁶

Paula Murphy similarly observes that “the influence of the media in the 90s as a force for investigation and formation of public opinion was tremendous”.²⁷

However, some commentators felt the media to have been less than objective in its coverage of stories involving the Church. Louise Fuller, for example, contends that “a climate of self-righteousness condemnation” provoked a “witch-hunt” on the Church, Tom Inglis describing the alleged one-sidedness of Louis Lentin’s *Dear Daughter* (1996) as rendering it “open season” on the clergy, and Harry Ferguson similarly objecting that the construct of the “paedophile priest” existed in a way that, say, the “paedophile farmer” or “paedophile businessman did not”, when “the most common single occupational group represented in [child abuse] cases has in fact been farmers”.²⁸ This tension between Church and media works its way into *Father Ted* in the episode “Tentacles of Doom” (S2), when three bishops visit Craggy Island to oversee the upgrading of the Holy Stone of Clonrickard to a Grade II relic. Bishop Facks (Denys Hawthorne), one of the visiting party, is fixated with negative media coverage of the Church, repeatedly declaring that “our priority must be to fight back

against the anti-clerical bias in the media ... these days, you can't open a newspaper without seeing some trendy anti-clerical article written by some bearded Leftie ... we have to straighten out the media. That's the important thing, Father". The negative media coverage garnered by the Church also proves of concern to the clergy in "A Christmassy Ted" when Dougal and Ted become lost in the lingerie section of a department store whilst doing their Christmas shopping. They converge with six other priests who are similarly trapped and their collective panic at being surrounded by 'women's secret things' is heightened by the realisation that their situation, eight priests loose in a lingerie section, would cause a "national scandal" if picked up by the media. Ted, however, devises an escape plan which allows them to exit the store unobserved and the following day is relieved to find that their misadventure has evaded media attention when he flicks through "the Catholic scandal supplement" of the newspaper, the headline of which is "Pope Denies Claims". Again, Linehan may remark that "it's too easy to make fun of the church these days. We're not doing that" but this disclaimer fails to account for the implicit critique of the Church in details such as the above, which depict the institution as on the defensive when taken to task for its ills, and repeatedly dogged by scandal.²⁹

Linehan and Mathews also attempt to depoliticise the programme by emphasising that its mode is not one of social realism. Mathews describes "all the characters (apart from Ted) [as] rather extreme caricatures"³⁰. Linehan also remarks that "we didn't realize we were doing it at the time, but aside from Ted, each central character seems to be a parody of popular perceptions of the Irish. We were certainly sick of the clichés about Ireland — even the nice ones — so it felt good to bend and stretch those stereotypes until they became caricatures"³¹. Granted, it could be argued that the manner in which *Father Ted* uses stereotypes and stock characters is congruent with how the programme operates as a sitcom. Mills observes of the sitcom genre that:

For representations to be successful — and by successful, what is meant is easily understandable — they must conform to and utilise, normalised social conventions. For the sitcom, whose primary intention is the creation of comedy, 'immediacy' is imperative, and to find a character immediately funny that character must be a recognisable type, a representative embodiment of a set of ideas or a manifestation of a cliché.³²

Marxist critic Terry Eagleton, however, describes himself as a "champion of stereotypes on materialist grounds", arguing that "stereotypes are not always illusions ... it would be surprising if people who have shared roughly the same cultural and material circumstances

over long periods of time did not manifest some psychological traits in common”³³ Indeed, rather than the character traits and cultural norms which undergo caricaturisation and comic gigantism in *Father Ted* being rendered apolitical by dint of their stereotypicality, they instead both target Catholic ideology and evince an intertextual engagement with the wider sociocultural context.

The programme’s engagement with issues of gender and sexuality is perhaps the most concerted example of this process. An important strand of this thesis is examining the particular import that the Church’s hegemony had for women in post-independence Ireland, and how the latter decades of the century saw much feminist resistance to the Catholic ethos of the State. These conflicts and discordant ideologies provide much cultural source material in *Father Ted*. The episode “Rock-a-hula Ted” (S2), for example, opens with Dougal and Ted watching a television show on which rock-star Niamh Connolly (Clare Grogan) appears. Mathews explains that the character of Connolly was “inspired by Sinead O’Connor”, O’Connor’s 1994 rap-song “Famine” positing that “there was no famine. See Irish people were only allowed to eat potatoes. All of the other food, meat, fish, vegetables, were shipped out of the country under armed guard to England while the Irish people starved”³⁴ In “Rock-a-hula Ted”, Niamh Connolly similarly explains that the song she is about to perform is “about how the Church in Ireland secretly had lots of potatoes during the Famine and they hid the potatoes in pillows and sold them abroad at potato fairs ... and the Pope closed down a lot of the factories that were making the potatoes and turned them into prisons for children”. More significantly for the gender politics of “Rock-a-hula Ted”, however, O’Connor also achieved infamy for tearing up a picture of Pope John Paul II on Saturday Night Live in 1992 with the words “Fight the real enemy”. She subsequently claimed that the Church had been “beating the shit out of the children for years and sexually abusing them”, claims which Elizabeth Cullingford notes have been largely vindicated in the years since, and declared that “the Catholic Church have controlled us ... through their teachings on sexuality, marriage, birth control and abortion”³⁵ As such, O’Connor acts as a readymade cipher for feminist protest against the Church, and in “Rock-a-hula Ted” Connolly, accompanied by a pregnant sign-language interpreter and with an enormous “woman” symbol above her head, performs a protest song inveigling against “big men in frocks telling us what to do/they can’t get pregnant like I do”. Later in the episode Connolly also appears on the cover of music magazine *Rock Cupboard* — a tribute to Dublin publication *Hot Press*, of which Mathews was one-time Arts Editor — under the headline “I am still very angry” and wearing boxing gloves emblazoned with “Clit Power”. Ted, however, is baffled by this slogan,

wondering “Clit Power? What does that mean? ... I used to know a Father Clint Power. Maybe she’s having a go at him”.

Ted’s unfamiliarity with female anatomy is a synecdoche for his obliviousness to feminist concerns at large, not the least of which is the casual subjugation of Mrs Doyle. While watching Connolly on the television, Ted expresses his impatience with “this whole radical feminism lark ... this idea that the Catholic Church has some sort of negative attitude towards women”. He turns to Mrs Doyle, who has staggered into the room, carrying a hod of bricks. “Mrs Doyle, you’re a woman”, he says, “what do you think of all this stuff? Do you think the Catholic Church is a bit sexist?”. However, he pays scant attention to her response, leaving the room to fetch a packet of crisps for himself and when she has finished talking responds with a cursory and dismissive “yeah, whatever”. Furthering the irony is that Mrs Doyle’s response was that she’d “always found the Church very responsive to my views”, dismissing those opposed to the Church as “just a load of old moaners. Moan, moan, moan”. Though Connolly may be lampooned as a humourless ideologue whose claims are historically garbled, the clergy are nonetheless depicted as indifferent to women’s views, gender inequity allowing them to watch television while Mrs Doyle — whom Eugene O’Brien describes as “the metonym of the role of women in the church” — is engaged in thankless and demanding physical work, her other tasks in the episode including not only vacuuming the parochial house, but also digging a draining ditch, retiling the roof, building a greenhouse and washing Ted’s car.³⁶ O’Brien argues that “the value of *Father Ted* ... is to place the structure of the Church in the crucible of satirical commentary. Satire is very much an interrogative discourse in its mode of operation. As it pokes fun at objects, people and structures, it implicitly questions the standards and codes through which these objects, people and structures were accorded value in the first place”, and “Rock-a-hula Ted” certainly calls into question the degree of the Church’s regard for women via this interrogative humour.³⁷

If not outright misogynistic, then the clergy’s attitude towards women in “Rock-a-Hula Ted” is presented as nonetheless deeply patronising. Connolly comes to stay on Craggy Island and Fr Liam (Dermot Crowley), a visiting cleric, exclaims “who is this lovely girl?”. He pays no heed to her retort — “don’t call me a lovely girl, I’ve sold twenty million records” — instead laughing dismissively and continuing his conversation with Ted. Fr Liam is the organiser of the “Lovely Girls” competition, a chaste and sexless beauty pageant which Ted is invited to compère and which is described by Mathews as a “low-budget version of the Rose of Tralee”.³⁸ (Such is the cultural currency of *Father Ted* that the Rose of Tralee is now commonly referred to in popular discourse as a real life “Lovely Girls” contest, an infiltration into public consciousness that no other television programme of the time achieved.³⁹) When

Ted remarks fondly of one of the contestants, “doesn’t Mary have a lovely bottom?”, Fr Liam leans across and warns him that this could cause offence. Ted rectifies the situation by declaring “of course, they all have lovely bottoms”, the important issue as Ted perceives it being to avoid any perceived favoritism rather than any sexual objectification. Indeed, the sexual dimension to the competition is intentionally muted. According to Fr Liam, choosing a priest as compère “eliminates any sexual aspect” from the proceedings in the first place, and the participants are subjected less to physical appraisal and more to paternalism and soft-focus sentimentality. They are dressed in modest below-the-knee floral frocks, and the rounds in which they compete include “Lovely Walks”, “Lovely Laughs” and a sandwich-making competition in which their efforts must conform to certain dimensions. In his study of Irish beauty pageants such as the Rose of Tralee and the Calor Housewife of the Year, Fintan Walsh has coined the term “homelysexuality” to describe “a domesticated, marketable, and commercially profitable sexual accent, paradoxically devoid of eroticism” and argues that “the Irish pageant has regulated the production of a female sexual accent in particular, emptied of depth, eroticism, or even what might be understood as subjectivity”, gender norms which are satirised in “Rock-a-hula Ted”.⁴⁰

Such a diminishment of women as either domestic drudges or delightful but disempowered lovely girls is also apparent in the episode “Grant Unto Him Eternal Rest” (S1), in which Jack appears to have died after ingesting large amounts of shoe polish. His solicitor, a glamorous young woman, visits the parochial house. After she has detailed the terms of Jack’s will to Dougal and Ted, Ted says to her “look, you’re a lovely girl, but I really think we should talk to the solicitor”. When she emphasises that she is the solicitor, a “senior partner with Corless, Corless and Sweeney”, he chuckles and jocularly scolds her for trying to make fun of “the big thickos from the island”. Dougal similarly overcomes his customary bashfulness around women to quip that if she’s a solicitor then he is Boy George. The following scene opens with Dougal singing “Karma Chameleon” and Ted nursing a black eye, reflecting that “it’s true what they say about career girls being very aggressive”. Women, under the conservative gender norms satirised in *Father Ted*, should appear pleasant, make sandwiches and laugh appealingly at Ted’s jokes, but not assert their autonomy or assume any sort of responsibility outside of domesticity.

Furthermore, it is out of character for Dougal to have spoken to the solicitor in the first place. Tom Inglis describes as Irish Catholic culture as “a ... culture of self-abnegation in which sexual pleasure and desire were repressed” which “meant instituting separations and divisions between the sexes. It also meant eliminating temptations and what the Church termed ‘occasions of sin’. Any place where men and women met socially became

problematic”.⁴¹ Patsy McGarry similarly explains of Ireland that “told that women were an ‘occasion of sin’ since the time of Eve, men in Ireland were separated from them in school, at Church and social occasions. They were often frightened of them”.⁴² Dougal exemplifies this terror of women, remarking in “Rock-a-hula-Ted” that he wouldn’t know what to say to “lovely girls” should he find himself in their presence. Ted advises him that suitable topics for conversation include “anything to do with clothes or perfume, basically” and finishes with the encouraging words that “if you ever meet a woman I’m sure you’d been able to deal with it”. The segregation of the sexes is such that Ted can speak of “if” Dougal should ever meet a woman, and encountering a woman is configured as a terrifying experience with a ferocious species entirely different to oneself, similar perhaps to meeting a bear in the wild.

Similarly, when Polly Clark (Gemma Clark), an attractive novelist, pays a visit to the parochial house in the episode “And God Created Woman” (S1), Dougal hides behind the sofa rather than engage in conversation. He later explains to Ted “I don’t know many women”. When Ted points out that his mother is a woman, Dougal responds “My mother? She’s not really a woman, Ted. She’s not like the women you see on the telly. Like the *Gladiators*. She wouldn’t be one of them”. Ted concedes that Dougal’s mother would indeed bear little resemblance to the leotard-clad contestants on *Gladiators*, a physical combat entertainment show, and so points to Mrs Doyle as another example of a woman. Dougal gives him an incredulous look and says “ah come on now Ted”. “Woman”, Monique Wittig contends in *The Straight Mind*, “is an imaginary formation and not a concrete reality” and “woman” likewise operates here less as a biological category than as cultural construct, “women” being defined by — and subsequently feared for — their sexuality.⁴³ Indeed, while it is unlikely that Ted and Dougal are familiar with Wittig’s work, they also corroborate her contention that “‘woman’ has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought”, Witting here drawing the by now rather well-known distinction between biological sex (woman) and gender (female heterosexuality).⁴⁴ “Aren’t nuns great though Ted?” Dougal says with relief in “Grant Unto Him Eternal Rest”, “it’s good because you feel as nervous with them as you do with real women”. Similarly, when Jack’s solicitor arrives at the parochial house and Mrs Doyle tells Ted “there’s a woman here to see you”, he corrects her; “a woman, Mrs Doyle? You mean a nun”. Wittig argues that lesbians, having stepped outside the realm of heterosexuality, are not “women”, in that they refuse to align the cultural construction of their gender with their sexuality according to traditional mores, “for what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man ... a relationship which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ... a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay

heterosexual” and nuns are similarly not considered “women” in *Father Ted*, located as they are “beyond the categories of sex”.⁴⁵

Mrs Doyle, however, is unwavering that the solicitor is “a woman”, “a young woman. With a skirt” she adds disapprovingly. Gerardine Meaney argues that “the attractions of the traditional feminine role, particularly as the Catholic Church defines it, are grounded in a deep loathing of femininity [within the context of this argument signifying female sexuality] ... and those women who identify with it are also expressing a form of self-hatred, a revulsion against themselves as women”.⁴⁶ For Mrs Doyle, champion as she is of the Church, this loathing of femininity is manifested in both the suppression of her own sexual energies and an antagonism towards those women who do not follow suit, Mathews remarking that Mrs Doyle “deeply distrusts any woman who isn’t a nun and doesn’t have a mole and a moustache”.⁴⁷ When Polly Clark visits the parochial house, like the solicitor, she is met with a hostile reception from Mrs Doyle, who addresses the novelist brusquely, remains stony faced when she and Ted share a joke, and later comments purse-lipped to Ted, “I never thought we’d have anyone like *her* staying here”. She also expresses her disappointment at Ted’s enjoyment of Clark’s work, remarking, “I’m surprised at that, Father. I didn’t think you’d like that sort of thing. I read a bit of one of them once. God, I couldn’t finish it. The language ... unbelievable ... it was a bit much for me, Father”.

However, Mrs Doyle is suspiciously familiar with Clark’s books in light of her alleged repudiation of them. Arms folded in displeasure, she quotes from the novels at length:

Feck this and feck that...You big bastard...Oh dreadful language. You big hairy arse. You big fecker. Fierce stuff. And of course, the F word father. The bad F word. Worse than feck. You know the one I mean. F you. F your effing wife. I don’t know why they have to use language like that. I’ll stick this effing pitchfork up your hole, that was another one. Bastard this and bastard that. You can’t move for the bastards in her books. It’s wall-to-wall bastards. You bastard. You fecker. You bollocks. Get your bollocks out of my face. God it’s terrible Father.

So engrossed does Mrs Doyle become in her tirade that even being forcibly escorted from the room by Ted does not deter her, instead shouting back from off-set “ride me sideways, that was another one”. Mathews describes this side of Mrs Doyle’s character as “a kind of suppressed sexual obsession masquerading as disgust”⁴⁸, a prurience which also finds expression in “Cigarettes, Rollerblading and Alcohol” (S2) when she describes a couple whom she encountered the year before:

They were a bit obsessed with the old ... S-E-X. God I'm glad I never think of that type of thing Father. That whole sexual world. God, when you think of it it's a dirty, filthy thing, isn't it Father? Can you imagine Father? Can you imagine Father, looking up at your husband, and him standing over you with his lad in his hand, wanting you to degrade yourself? God almighty can you imagine that Father? Can you picture it there Father? Oh get a good mental picture of it. Can you see him there? Ready to do the business?

As when describing Clark's novels, Mrs Doyle becomes extremely animated on the topic of "that whole sexual world", leaning closer and closer into Ted's face as she attempts to illuminate the scene for him, and the graphicness of her descriptions significantly undercutting her claims that she never thinks about "that type of thing", at the same time satirising the exercise of "composition of place" that is part of the Catholic liturgy.⁴⁹

Mrs Doyle's simultaneous obsession with and denunciation of sex as a "dirty, filthy thing" can be understood as the return of the repressed emanating from what Eugene O'Brien describes as "a culture where repression of desire was very much part of the socio-religious mindset", as examined in Chapter Two in relation to the work of Maeve Binchy.⁵⁰ However, Inglis also emphasises that "the denial and silencing of sex" did not exist in isolation but instead formed "part of a wider cultural programme of denying and sacrificing the self" and this too is parodied in *Father Ted*.⁵¹ In "A Christmassy Ted" (S2), Mrs Doyle is aghast to learn of an automated Teamaster machine which "takes the misery out of making tea". "Maybe I like the misery" is her bristly response. Likewise, in "Cigarettes, Alcohol and Rollerblading", she sets out upon a pilgrimage to St Patrick's Hill and stops Ted short when he describes the experience as "tremendous fun ... you don't wear socks and then they chase you with a big plank", saying that she wants a "good miserable time" instead. St Patrick's Hill is a thinly fictionalised version of Croagh Patrick, a hill in County Mayo which penitents traditionally climb barefoot on the last Sunday in July, and "Cigarettes, Alcohol and Rollerblading" is adroit in amplifying what Inglis identifies as the "strong element of self-denial and penitential practice in Irish Catholicism".⁵² The episode takes its name from the vices which Ted, Jack and Dougal are respectively prevailed upon by a neighbouring cleric to give up for Lent, but they soon lapse in this, leading Ted to compare themselves disfavouredly to the figure of Matty Hislop, "a drunkard who found God and punished himself for his sins. He did all kinds of things. He had this terrible allergy to cats so he used to carry a kitten in his pocket and sniff it from time to time. His head just inflated like a balloon". Ted rings the "Matty Hislop crowd" for assistance with their Lenten abstinence and Sister Assumpta (Rose Henderson) is dispatched to the parochial house. She subjects Dougal

and Ted to a “daily punishment” such as dragging them along the ground behind a tractor, replacing their mattresses with bricks, immersing them in ice-cold baths, and chivvying them to “get an early start or we’ll miss the rain”. Inflicting hardships such as these upon oneself, she explains, is part of “Matty Hislop’s ten-step programme to rid yourself of your pride”.

Sr Assumpta promulgates “a disdain for and detachment from materialism, that is, seeking satisfaction through involvement in the world, particularly through material comforts, consumer products and sensuous pleasures”.⁵³ Ted, however, simply feels that she’s “obviously insane”. Mathews similarly explains that Hislop is based on Matt Talbot — a Dubliner who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century atoned for his years of alcoholism through extreme masochism and self-denial, practicing mortification of the flesh and devoting almost unfeasible amounts of time to prayer — and remarks of Talbot, “nowadays he’d but considered mad and given psychiatric help but in Dublin there’s a bridge and a street named after him”.⁵⁴ As Inglis notes, “the rejection of enjoyment, pleasure and desire obtained enormous cultural kudos” while the Church reigned hegemonic, but in a changed cultural climate such asceticism now appears comic and alarming in equal parts.⁵⁵

Just as *Father Ted* implicitly undermines the ascetic tradition in this fashion, so too does it subvert Catholic social teachings by juxtaposing differing mores and norms. In “Song for Europe” (S2), for example, Dougal and Ted enter a song contest and Charles, the producer of the show, explains that he is in a gay relationship. Ted is taken aback but attempts to cover his surprise with jovial liberalism, introducing Dougal as his own partner, then clarifying “not my sexual partner! I mean, you know, my partner that I do the song with ... not that there’s anything wrong with that type of thing”. Charles’ stony response is to inquire “I thought the Church thought that ‘that type of thing’ was inherently wrong?”. After all, the Catholic Catechism denounces homosexual acts as “intrinsically disordered ... contrary to the natural law ... under no circumstance can they be approved”, while the 1986 “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” by the then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) similarly describes homosexual inclination as a “strong tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil”.⁵⁶ Ted, however, prevaricates around such condemnation:

Ah, yes. It does. The whole gay thing: I suppose it’s a bit of a puzzle to us all. I suppose it must be great fun though — not the, eh, you know but the nightclub scene and all that. The whole rough and tumble of — of —homosexual activity and having boyfriends when you’re a man. Anyway, don’t worry about what the Church thinks! Sure they used to think the earth was flat! It’s like, you know,

sometimes the Pope says things he doesn't really mean. You know. We all get things wrong. Even the Pope!

Charles then asks “what about papal infallibility?”, leaving Ted truly trumped and Catholic moral thinking destabilised through this role reversal whereby the priest endorses social liberalism while his gay parishioner instead draws attention to articles of faith. While Ted's bumbling might be an example of the “recognisable, stock situations” that sitcom customarily uses as the base of its comedy, the incident also serves to isolate and undercut traditional Church teaching.⁵⁷

The Church's rigid opposition to contraceptives also becomes comic fodder in *Father Ted*, a dissonance again existing between Ted's instinctive response to a situation and the position he is impelled to adopt as part of the Catholic hierarchy. In “Speed 3” (S3), he suspects that Pat Mustard, a hirsute lothario milkman, “has been delivering more than dairy products” on his morning rounds, leading to a slew of “very hairy babies” across Craggy Island. When Ted calls Pat to task over this, however, Pat denies any responsibility, saying “you need proof for that kind of accusation, Father. And I'm a very careful man, Father. A very careful man”. Ted's indignant retort is “except when it comes to taking precautions in the bedroom”, to which Pat's sly rejoinder is “you wouldn't be advising the use of artificial contraception, would you Father?”. Indeed, the Church's position as declared in encyclical *Humane Vitae* (which, incidentally, is addressed to the Pope's “Venerable Brothers, the Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops and Other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See, to the Clergy and Faithful of the Whole Catholic World, and to All Men [emphasis added] of Good Will”, not deigning to even address women), to unequivocally oppose “any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation”, leaving Ted's only recourse being to tell Pat Mustard to “just ... feck off”.⁵⁸

Similarly, in “Kicking Bishop Brennan Up the Arse” (S3), Ted has a nightmare in which he is sent to a remote jungle to attempt to convert a tribe of warriors to Catholicism. However, they remain unconvinced. As they are about to sacrifice Ted to their Volcano God, one of them remarks of Catholicism “it'll never catch on here. We don't agree with the Pope's line on artificial contraception. It's the 1990s, for goodness sake”, even an animistic jungle-tribe thereby being more progressive in matters of sexual morality than is the Catholic Church.

Before being cast in the titular role of *Father Ted*, actor and comedian Dermot Morgan had long been antipathetic towards the Catholic Church in his stand-up routines, and was also responsible for a figure called Fr Trendy who held that “it is vital in this modern world of

ours to be with-it ... God is 'groovy' and religion is a 'cool vibe'".⁵⁹ Morgan described the inspiration for Fr Trendy as "the trendy media priest" to be found in 1970s Ireland, remarking that "the 'over-the-top' sincerity ... the friendly and homely smile and style, the youth and innocence, the with-it analogies and metaphors, the over-obvious attempt to say 'I know about real life and I am modern and with it and I do understand and I do know about the world' were too much for me to resist".⁶⁰ (Perhaps the figures Morgan had in mind for this parody included Fr Michael Cleary, who described himself as aiming "particularly at the younger folk and the people of that age-group who look for in their priest this camaraderie and this ability to sort of understand their forms of entertainment, their likes and dislikes — one who, you might say, seems to be on their wavelength" and who features in Peter Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968) performing an *a cappella* version of the "Chattanooga Shoshine Boy".⁶¹) Morgan also earned repute as a keen satirist for *Scrap Saturday*, a radio programme broadcast on RTÉ Radio One in the early Nineties in which he was the main performer.⁶² Aware of his reputation as an iconoclast, he remarked of Linehan and Mathews that "the guys always say — disingenuously if you ask me — that [*Father Ted*]'s just a happy show about priests ... But anything so deranged has to have a subversive element ... for all their protestations of innocence, the fact that they'd hire me at all shows their true intent. It's like saying, 'We're setting up a general practice. Let's get Dr Mengele in'".⁶³ Though *Father Ted* may have initially have been broadcast on a British television network and though British sitcom may have acted as so formative an influence for Linehan and Mathews, the appearance of Morgan in *Ted* would thus have been for an Irish audience — that is to say, an audience attuned to the show's fuller cultural context — just one of the many signifiers of *Ted*'s more antagonistic treatment of the Catholic Church than Linehan and Mathews' stance on the programme allows for.

Similarly, although Linehan may remark of *Father Ted*, "if you take it as a social thing... which you shouldn't really, I think we're probably doing more of a service by not attacking the church but just being a little bit silly about it", the institutional church as it appears in *Father Ted* does not need to be attacked when it is hoist so spectacularly by its own petard, such as in the satirisation of the affairs of Cleary and Casey, thereby pointing to what Michelle Ann Abate astutely terms "the importance of taking silliness seriously".⁶⁴ Even aside from this, as Jonathan Gray et al note, "all humour challenges social or even scientific norms *at some level* ... In turn, all laughter (in assuming social norms) also challenges or otherwise toys with these norms, producing 'anti-rites', as Critchley dubs them, that 'mock, parody or deride ritual practices of a given society'".⁶⁵ The comic absurdity which is the keynote of *Ted* far from equates with cultural obliviousness and, indeed, even amongst the

dancing priests, “hairy babies”, and cake-jumpers of the series, often it is the hierarchy and the “Catholic culture based on practises of chastity, humility, piety and self-denial” which appear most absurd and nonsensical of all.⁶⁶ Not only that, but through the use of stereotypes, set-pieces, and ribald farce, the sitcom format facilitates rather than hinders this underlying critique, meaning that *Ted* both reflected and contributed to the post-Catholic climate.

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- 1 A version of this chapter was published as “Doesn’t Mary have lovely bottom?": gender, sexuality and Catholic ideology in Father Ted”, *Etudes irlandaises*, 31, 1, 89-102
 - 2 See for example Carol MacKeogh and Diog O’Connell, eds., *Documentary in a Changing State: Ireland since the 1990s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 3. Kevin Rockett contends that “the major catalysts for the radical transformation of the public perception of the church and its agents was a series of documentaries and current affair programmes on the histories of institutional abuse made for television between 1996 and 1999, the two which made the most impact being Dear Daughter (1996) and States of Fear (1999); Rockett, “Contesting the Past in Irish Film and Television,” 133-34.
 - 3 “Top 100 Tv Programmes in the Rte Guide,” <http://www.lecaic.com/2008/10/01/irelands-top-100-tv-programmes-the-rte-guide-list/>. Graham Linehan and Arthur Mathews, *Father Ted: The Complete Box Set*, (London Hat Trick International Ltd, 2002). A cultural myth persists that Linehan and Mathews first pitched Father Ted to RTE, but it was turned down by the network, however this was not the case, as clarified by Linehan, Charles Arthur, “Twitter Has Made Me,” *Guardian*, 27 May 2012.
 - 4 Ben Thompson, “In the Name of the Father,” *Independent*, 23 April 1995. Arthur Mathews and Graham Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 106.
 - 5 Thompson, “In the Name of the Father.”
 - 6 James Rampton, “The Point Is There Is No Point,” *Scotland on Sunday*, 7 November 1999. Thompson, “In the Name of the Father.”
 - 7 Ibid. Tom Lappin, “High Priests of Comedy,” *Scotland on Sunday*, 1 March 1998..
 - 8 Deirdre Falvey, “Fathers of Ted,” *Irish Times*, 30 December 1995. Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 92.
 - 9 Brett Mills, *Sitcom* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 49..
 - 10 *Sitcom* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 6.
 - 11 Stanford, “Land of My Fathers.”
 - 12 John Doyle, “Holy Terrors,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 November 1996.
 - 13 Michelle Ann Abate, “Taking Silliness Seriously: Jim Henson’s *the Muppet Show*, the Anglo-American Tradition of Nonsense, and Cultural Critique,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 4 (2009): 608. “Taking Silliness Seriously: Jim Henson’s *the Muppet Show*, the Anglo-American Tradition of Nonsense, and Cultural Critique,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 4 (2009): 590-91.
 - 14 Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: Revised and Updated Edition*, 301.
 - 15 Falvey, “Fathers of Ted.”
 - 16 50.3% of votes cast were in favour of divorce, 49.7 against, Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), 372.
 - 17 Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 36.
 - 18 Annie Murphy and Peter De Rosa, *Forbidden Fruit: The True Story of My Secret Love for Eamon Casey, the Bishop of Galway* (London: Little, Brown and company, 1993).
 - 19 Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 36.
 - 20 David Marc, “Foreword,” in *Satire Tv: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P Jones, and Ethan Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 2009), ix.
 - 21 Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P Jones, and Ethan Thompson, “The State of Satire, the Satire of State,” *ibid.*, 12-13.
 - 22 Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 36.
 - 23 Colum Kenny, “Reporting Religion,” in *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. John and Maher Littleton, Eamon (Dublin: Columba Press, 2008), 111.

- 24 Fuller, "New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy: Looking Back to the Future," 77. See also "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones," 176.
- 25 Rockett, "Cinema and Irish Literature," 553. See also MacKeogh and O'Connell, *Documentary in a Changing State: Ireland since the 1990s*.
- 26 Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 93.
- 27 Murphy, *The Shattered Mirror: Irish Literature and Film 1990 - 2005*, xx.
- 28 Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, 254-55. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 229. Ferguson, "The Paedophile Priest: A Deconstruction." See also Michael Breen, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Media and the Scandals," *ibid.* 89, no. 356. Seamus Murphy SJ, "No Cheap Grace: Reforming the Irish Church (2010)," in *An Irish Century: Studies 1912-2012*, ed. Bryan Fanning (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2010). Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 454-55.
- 29 Doyle, "Holy Terrors."
- 30 Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 340.
- 31 *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 8.
- 32 Mills, *Sitcom*, 7.
- 33 Terry Eagleton and Matthew Beaumont, *The Task of the Critic: Terry Eagleton in Dialogue* (London: Verso, 2009), 239. See also Terry Eagleton, "Pork Chops and Pineapples," *London Review of Books* 25, no. 20 (2003).
- 34 Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 176.
- 35 Sinead O'Connor, "People Need a Short, Sharp Shock," in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke, et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1619. See also Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 248.
- 36 O'Brien, "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse," 47.
- 37 "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse," 57.
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- 42 McGarry, "The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland," 38-39.
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- 47 Mathews and Linehan, *Father Ted: The Complete Scripts*, 64.
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- 50 O'Brien, "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse," 47.
- 51 Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland," 24.
- 52 *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.
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- 59 Dermot Morgan, *Trendy Sermons* (Swords: Ward River Press, 1981).
- 60 *Trendy Sermons* (Swords: Ward River Press, 1981), 88.
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- 62 Morgan, *Trendy Sermons*. Dermot Morgan et al., *Scrap the Collection*, (Dublin: Lunar Records, 2002).
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CHURCH AND STATE IN CULTURAL DEPICTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE¹

Luke Gibbons observes of the emotive abortion and divorce referenda of the 1980s that the task fell to Irish cinema to “discharge the excess that could not be accommodated within the language of broadcasting, journalism or indeed the courtroom”.² A similar cultural process — the “return of the repressed” — has been underway in more recent years in the transition from a Catholic to post-Catholic habitus and social imaginary, as Irish society has had to come to terms with the revelations of mass institutional abuse. Much as how there has been a filmic tradition of narratives about the Troubles - such as Neil Jordan’s *The Crying Game* (1992), Jim Sheridan’s *In the Name of the Father* (1993) and *The Boxer* (1997), Terry George’s *Some Mother’s Son* (1996), Paul Greengrass’s *Bloody Sunday* (2002), Pete Travis’s *Omagh* (2004), Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008), – as Irish society has been faced with the traumas in Northern Ireland, there has been an outpouring of not only films, but also plays, novels and other creative texts, depicting the industrial schools, Magdalene laundries, and other residential institutions, and asking why and how children and women had been subjected to such abuse, privation and neglect.³ Richard Kearney contends that “stories can sometimes retrieve psychic trauma in a way that more literalist diagnostic approaches cannot”.⁴ Fintan O’Toole similarly notes:

When a society is shocked into recognising its own ugliest face in the mirror, as ours has been with the Ryan Report, it needs a lot of things to happen. Most of them are political and financial and social. But some of them are psychic. They exist in the area of ritual, of atonement and expiation — even, perhaps, of

exorcism. This is normally the bailiwick of religion. It's the kind of thing we look to churches to do for us. In this case, however, organised religion can't do the exorcism because it itself needs to be exorcised. What we're left with is the arts.⁵

This chapter examines three creative representations of the institutional traumas: Aisling Walsh's television drama *Sinners* (2002); Gerard Mannix Flynn's dramatic monologue *James X* (2003); and Bruce Beresford's film *Evelyn* (2002). It explores the ways that these texts engage with the cultural and political climates of both the time period from which they emerge and those which they retrospectively depict in their various portraits of the Magdalene laundries and industrial schools.

Although there is “no established definition of what constitutes a Magdalene Laundry” or of the precise categories of women confined within, as these instead shifted over time, the laundries can broadly be described as religious-run carceral institutions for “problem” girls and women, including but not limited to “those who were perceived to be ‘promiscuous’, were unmarried mothers, were the daughters of unmarried mothers, were considered a burden on their families or the State, had been sexually abused, or had grown up in the care of the Church and State”.⁶ The laundries also operated in association with a network of religious-run Mother and Baby Homes, with academic and Magdalene advocate James M Smith explaining that:

The Irish Free State, from its earliest days, worked with the Catholic hierarchy to establish a bifurcated, two-tiered, institutional response to the “problem” of the unmarried mother and her illegitimate child. This institutional system was conceived so as to effect absolute segregation between two classes of fallen women — those deemed “first offenders” and thus open to spiritual reclamation and those deemed “hopeless cases” and perceived as sources of moral contagion ... mother and baby homes operated by Catholic sisterhoods, funded by the state and local authorities, and providing assistance to the first class of unmarried mother. The Magdalene asylums always presumed to be appropriate institutions for the second class of women — those deemed in need of incarceration and/of self-protection constituted the second tier.⁷

In twentieth-century Ireland, ten Magdalene laundries were operated by four congregations of nuns, with the final laundry, situated on Dublin's Sean McDermott Street, not closing until 1996.⁸ Throughout the decade that followed, a body of documentaries, books and films focused attention upon the institutions, and the harsh and punitive conditions within.⁹

However, Smith also observes that “increasingly, popular cultural representations tend to conflate the Magdalene asylum, mother and baby homes, and other residential institutions. While laundry work was common across all three sets of institutions, they were otherwise distinct” and that although some books and films depict “women giving birth and caring for infants purportedly while confined in the Magdalene asylum”, there is no historical evidence that this took place, for all the many women who were transferred to the Magdalene laundries after having given birth.¹⁰ One text which conflates the institutions in this manner is Aisling Walsh’s *Sinners*, a conflation which, though historically inaccurate, allows Walsh to heighten her critique of “the core question of social and theological attitudes to sexuality that underpinned the Magdalene system”, and to examine why, within this specific socio-religious context, illegitimate pregnancy and non-legitimated female sexuality was viewed as so shameful and the women subject to so condemnatory a societal response in the first place.¹¹ *Sinners* is centred upon the figure of Anne-Marie (Anne-Marie Duff), a young woman who is pregnant, it is inferred, following an incestuous relationship with her brother Éamon (Michael Colgan). Anne-Marie is committed to a Magdalene laundry by her aunt Colette, her only living relative apart from Éamon.

Once within the laundry, Anne-Marie cannot leave of her own accord but is instead dependent upon the family’s written consent for her release. Her brother, meanwhile, faces neither such censure nor curtailment of his movements and when he subsequently pays Anne-Marie a visit in the laundry, she asks “why was your life worth protecting more than mine?”, why she should have been removed from the public domain and the pregnancy kept a silenced secret while her brother’s life continues as before.

Sinners’ answer to this question is, in part, to forefront the figure of the Virgin Mary. Mary McAuliffe argues that “throughout modern Irish history, Irish women’s sexuality has been an exercise in contradiction, the virgin/whore, the seductive temptress and the pure guardian of public and private morality. The Church recommended the figure of the Virgin Mary as the role model for Irish women; she was the ideal woman/mother, passive, self-sacrificing, nurturing and wholly unconnected with sex or sexuality”.¹² As pointed to in Chapter One, Mary took on particular prominence in the post-independent State, Gerardine Meaney explaining that:

Popular Catholic devotional literature in twentieth-century Ireland ... promulgated the idea of a special link between Ireland and the Virgin mother. At the zenith of Catholic influence in the southern Irish State, Pope Pius XI’s address to the Eucharistic Congress of 1932 spoke of the ‘The Virgin Mary, Queen of Ireland’. A survey of Mariological devotional literature, religious souvenirs and

Episcopal pronouncements indicates that Pope Pius was not indulging in metaphorical flourishes. The concept of a special relationship between Ireland and the Virgin Mary was heavily promoted in the early decades of southern independence.¹³

In *Sinners*, the Marian liturgies and devotions in which the nuns lead the “sinners” celebrate Mary as “mother most chaste...mother most undefiled”, Catholicism’s ideal, albeit paradoxical, paradigm of femininity, described by Tom Inglis as “a mother figure who was at the same time completely desexualised ... fecund and female, and yet ... virgin and pure”.¹⁴ What art historian John Turpin terms “visual Marianism” is also strongly apparent throughout the film.¹⁵ Statues of Mary are situated in the convent reception, in the doorway of the dormitory in which the women sleep and above the laundry entrance, the camera resting upon this last statue a number of times throughout the film, a visual cue that it is under and behind the veneration of Mary that the “sinners” are sequestered out of sight and must engage in the arduous laundry work for having failed to remain likewise pure.

However, although Sr Bernadette (Tina Kellegher) denounces Anne-Marie’s “corrupt and defiled flesh” as “an abomination of God’s holy will”, the Reverend Mother (Ruth McCabe) tells Anne-Marie that although she may have “contravened the laws of God and society” by falling pregnant outside of marriage, “here [in the laundry] you can do penance for your sins. You can earn, as Mary Magdalene did, the forgiveness of our Blessed Lord”. In her influential study, *Alone of all her Sex: the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary* (1983), Marina Warner argues that the counter-image to the Virgin Mary in Christian iconography is that of Mary Magdalene, the biblical “sinner” and repentant whore after whom the laundries were named, and that Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene thus comprise a “diptych of Christian patriarchy’s idea of women”, namely “consecrated chastity...[and] regenerate sexuality”.¹⁶ There is, Warner argues, “no place in the conceptual architecture of Christian society for a single woman who is neither a virgin nor a whore”.¹⁷ Furthermore, Warner argues, whereas the Virgin is venerated for her purity, “the Magdalene, like Eve, was brought into existence by the powerful undertow of misogyny in Christianity, which associates women with the dangers and degradations of the flesh”.¹⁸

Smith similarly argues that the Magdalene laundries were indicative of “a broader cultural tendency to categorise female sexuality in absolute terms”, and this misogyny and absolutism is emphasised in *Sinners* in the fate which befalls Angela (Ruth Bradley), a young girl transferred to the laundry “from the orphanage” — as industrial schools were commonly, if mistakenly, known — for fear that she would “go the same way as my ma”, a “sinner” before her, and fall pregnant if released into the outside world.¹⁹ Whilst celebrating the Feast

of the Purification, the symbolic cleansing of Mary following childbirth, the laundry chaplain, Fr Flannery (Alan Devlin), is drawn to Angela's beauty and youth.²⁰ He subsequently forces the girl to perform oral sex upon him, remarking that she had been "well spotted" in the "orphanage" for her "lascivious eyes", thereby vocalising what Warner terms "the characteristic Christian correlation between sin, the flesh and the female".²¹ The episode is intercut with scenes of the other women being led in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, a prayer sequence wherein Mary is celebrated as "mother inviolate ... virgin most holy", before returning to Fr Flannery contemptuously calling the distraught Angela a "filthy little slut". The totality of the patriarchal and misogynistic system within which the women are ensnared — and with which the nuns have become complicit — is emphasised when, at Anne-Marie's behest, Angela makes known to the Reverend Mother and Sr Bernadette what has taken place. Rather than meeting with a sympathetic response, the young girl is instead forcibly removed to a psychiatric hospital, "madness" here operating, in the Foucauldian manner, as a socially constructed category for those deemed transgressive.²² This disturbing sequence is intercut with Sr Bernadette prostrating herself before the chapel altar, reciting the Rosary and the Memorare (a devotional thanksgiving to "the most gracious Virgin Mary ... never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession was left unaided"). Examining various engagements with Mary in Irish culture, Cullingford notes that "like the image of Mother Ireland, the image of the Virgin Mary is Janus-faced: a source of power, peace and consolation for some, a repressive nightmare for others".²³ In *Sinners*, it is firmly the latter; the theological basis for the humiliation and abuse of the laundry women.

However, as "the reasons for the intensity with which sexuality and especially reproduction were patrolled in the Irish context remain debated", it has been countered that Marian worship did not alone shape Irish discourses and norms of sexuality.²⁴ Instead, commentators such as Inglis argue that "the obsession with sexual purity was connected to both cultural and material interests", and more specifically to the changes in land ownership and inheritance which occurred in the post-Famine period.²⁵ Diarmaid Ferriter reports how "one farm in four disappeared as a result of the Famine, the decline being concentrated in holdings of less than 15 acres. The 'cottier' class — that is, those on the lowest rung of the social ladder — were virtually wiped out", and taking their place was a new class of relatively wealthier tenant farmers, ones with more assets to safeguard and thus more to lose by the arrival of any illegitimate children and who, furthermore, did not need the labour that children traditionally provided as they were wealthy enough to hire and dispense of casual labour at will.²⁶ In addition, the model of inheritance changed from one of land division to

one of primogeniture, “landholding practices” which, Gerardine Meaney argues, “ensured a persistent pattern of low rates of marriage, later marriages and emigration until late in the twentieth century” and “required a high level of sexual repression to be sustainable”.²⁷ Louise Fuller points out that:

Tenant farmers [were] the group who had survived the Famine relatively unscathed, who had benefited from the increased prosperity of the post-famine era, and among whom the Church’s devotional revolution was most effective. In the post-famine era, these people were aspiring to new models of respectability and social prestige ... They had seen destitution, poverty and misery as the price exacted by the Famine for unrestrained fertility, and were happy to adopt the Church’s strict code of sexual behaviour. Indeed, as the population consistently fell over the remainder of the century, many would say that their adherence to it became obsessive. Land was the priority of this group.²⁸

As “the economic strategy of a farmer intent on improving his standard of living could be ruined by the transgressive actions of his daughters” it was imperative that female sexuality be subject to strict societal control and those who deviated be severely castigated.²⁹

Such material factors also shape Anne-Marie’s fate, for though she had ostensibly been placed in the laundry to atone for her sins, her removal also serves the family’s material interests, enabling her brother, strongly encouraged by his aunt, to marry for land with his name unsullied by scandal or shame. Suspecting what has occurred, Anne-Marie bitterly remarks of Éamon’s union with the plain Betty McEvoy, “who needs good looks when you have twenty acres?” She realises that her family are thus doubly unlikely to sanction her release from the laundry.

Sinners may thereby address the ‘why’ of the laundries by engaging with the above theological archetypes and mercenary concerns, but it also explores the ‘how’ of the institutions, the practical means by which they were sustained, and the State’s role in this. James M Smith describes the laundries as forming part of an “architecture of containment”, a network of interconnected carceral institutions which “functioned as a constant reminder of the social mores deemed appropriate in Catholic Ireland and of the consequences awaiting transgressors of those standards”, and whose underlying ideological function was “to confine and render invisible segments of the population whose very existence threatened Ireland’s national imaginary, the vision of Ireland enshrined in President Éamon de Valera’s 1937 Constitution”; namely an idealised Catholic society where such aberrations as broken families, illegitimate pregnancy or incest would not occur³⁰. As is well documented, de

Valera has taken on totemic status in contemporary Irish culture as “the secular expression of the dominance of the Catholic Church in the life of the state”; Elizabeth Cullingford notes that “de Valera’s Ireland” now refers to that era of the Irish past “haunted ... by sexual and physical abuse of women and children”, with de Valera repeatedly configured as “the man who did most to ensure that these things stayed below the threshold of consciousness”.³¹ Joe Cleary similarly observes that “de Valera’s Ireland” “now serves as a reflex shorthand for everything from economic austerity to sexual puritanism, from cultural philistinism to the abuse of women and children”.³²

This is indeed how de Valera features in *Sinners*. In one of the film’s early scenes, the women are gathered in their grey and drab “recreation” room, chaperoned by a nun. One woman watches, sobbing, from behind the barred laundry window as her child is passed to a waiting couple for adoption (a clear example of the film’s conflation of the Magdalene laundries with the Mother and Baby Homes). In the background, a radio broadcast describes “Éamon de Valera, President of the Irish Republic” — an office which de Valera held from 1959 to 1973 — receiving blessing whilst at prayer, de Valera thus configured as the symbolic figurehead of a seamless alliance of Church and State under which the women sequestered are out of sight, their infants forcibly removed. (When the chaperoning nun leaves the room, however, one of the girls quickly changes the radio from the dreary broadcast of de Valera at prayer to a contemporary pop station. Playing is Helen Shapiro’s “Walking Back to Happiness”, a song rendered deeply ironic by its context, in that any such mobility or happiness is firmly denied to the women listening. *Sinners*’ soundtrack includes several period pop songs such as “Anyone Who Had A Heart”, “Do You Want To Know A Secret?”, “I Only Want To Be With You” and “The House Of The Rising Sun” — in which The Animals sing of lives “spent in sin and misery” — whose titles and lyrics provide a somewhat heavy-handed and strained commentary on the furtive secrecy surrounding the women’s plight and their isolation from the wider world.³³)

Later on, a government minister (Macdara O’Fatharta) also visits the laundry. The women welcome him with miniature tricolours, the irony of which — given what is depicted as State endorsement of their institutionalisation — is matched only by the “Mary Immaculate” banner under which they are gathered, given the drudgery and degradation to which they have been subjected for failing to remain similarly without “sin”. The Minister, whose office remains unspecified, expresses his gratitude to the nuns “on behalf of the State and the people that I represent” for the “spiritual and material home” which they provide to the “unfortunates” in their care, *Sinners* thereby suggesting that even if the laundries were not under the direct provisions of any specific ministerial brief, the State was nonetheless

thoroughly supportive and appreciative of the regime, having abdicated their duty of care to the nuns.

Until extremely recently, the State's precise role in the Magdalene regime was a disputed one, with James M Smith arguing that there was "a long and as yet unacknowledged history of State collusion in Ireland's Magdalene laundries", and his archive work heavily pointing to this collusion. Smith is heavily involved with Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), a "a non-profit, all-volunteer organisation which seeks to respectfully promote equality and advocate for justice and support for the women formerly incarcerated in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries".³⁴ In 2009 JFM wrote to the government requesting the establishment of a "distinct redress scheme" for former laundry residents, similar to but separate from the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB), a board established in 2002 and whose remit was "to make fair and reasonable awards to persons who, as children, were abused while resident in industrial schools, reformatories, and other institutions subject to state regulation or inspection".³⁵ The official response from Batt O'Keeffe, Minister for Education and Science, was that "the Magdalene laundries were privately owned and operated establishments which did not come within the responsibility of the State. The State did not refer individuals to Magdalene laundries nor was it complicit in referring individuals to them" and that as such the Magdalene women were ineligible to present their cases to the RIRB.³⁶ The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dermot Ahern, similarly declared that "the Magdalene Laundries were private, religious run institutions without any legislative or State mandate for their general operation ... the vast majority of females who entered or were placed in Magdalene Laundries did so without any direct involvement of the State".³⁷

However, a November 2010 report by the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) into the laundries found that "from the 1940s onwards, State funding was provided to a laundry in Henrietta Street in Dublin in respect of the women and girls on probation there" and that an examination of "the records of the Central Criminal Court retained in the National Archives, which documents criminal convictions following the foundation of the State in 1922 to 1964 ... indicate that subsequent to conviction for offences including infanticide, manslaughter and murder, at least 54 women were given a suspended sentence by the Court on condition that they resided in a Magdalene Laundry".³⁸ In light of such findings, the IHRC recommended that "a statutory mechanism be established to investigate the matters advanced by JFM ... such a mechanism should first examine the extent of the State's involvement in and responsibility for the girls and women entering the laundries, the conditions in the laundries, the manner in which girls and women left the laundries and end-of life issues for those who remained".³⁹ The JFM group also brought this issue before the UN

Committee Against Torture, who ruled in favour of the women and called on the State to provide redress. Furthermore, the 2013 Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries (also known as the McAleese Report after chair Martin McAleese) unequivocally found that there had been “significant State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries”, for example in that “of the cases in which routes of entry [to the laundries] are known, 26.5% were referrals made or facilitated by the State.”⁴⁰ The State was also directed involved, it found, in the funding and inspection of the laundries. As a result, on 19 February 2013 in a speech which has obvious parallels with Bertie Ahern’s 1999 apology to those who had experienced abuse in the industrial schools, Taoiseach Enda Kenny offered a formal apology to the former Magdalene residents, saying “This is a national shame for which I say again I am deeply sorry and offer my full and heartfelt apologies ... I, as Taoiseach, on behalf of this State, the Government and our citizens, deeply regret and apologise unreservedly to all those women for the hurt that was done to them, for any stigma they suffered as a result of the time they spent in the Magdalene laundry”.⁴¹

Upon publication of the McAleese Report, attention was drawn to how, in the decade preceding the report’s release, popular culture had acted as a campaigning tool by bringing the laundries into the public sphere and public consciousness.⁴² James M Smith emphasises, for example, that a scene in Peter Mullan’s *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) in which the laundry women are flanked by the Gardaí Síochána as they participate in a Corpus Christi procession “replicates an archival photograph allegedly depicting Magdalens from the Gloucester Street asylum parading down Dublin’s Sean McDermott Street in the 1960s before community onlookers”.⁴³ Such photographic evidence leads Smith to ask “if, as the state maintains, the Magdalen asylums were private religious institutions outside political control, why were the nation’s police used to enforce a form of imprisonment inconsistent with the judicial and constitutional rights afforded all Irish citizens?”⁴⁴ Smith commends *The Magdalene Sisters* for this scene, arguing that it “targets the long but as yet unwritten history of state and communal collusion in [the laundries’] operation”, and that “the historical photograph ... underscores how evidence of state involvement was always available in the cultural archive but remained largely ignored”.⁴⁵

Sinners takes similar aim at the State, as the Gardaí play a prominent role throughout; they escort linen to and from the laundry, drive a melodramatic subplot in which Kitty (Bronagh Gallagher) throws herself to her death after an ill-fated affair with a garda (Gary Lydon), in the hope that he would provide her and her infant daughter with a home, and, most crucially, are deployed to pursue errant laundry residents. Though Anne-Marie is

distressed by her pregnancy and initially unwilling to care for her baby when it is born, she subsequently develops a bond with the child and writes to her brother imploring him to allow her and “baby Éamon”, to return to the family home. Her letter, however, is returned to the laundry unopened, a clear message that she is without family support. Desperate to avoid the adoption of her child to a “good Catholic home”, as she scornfully describes it, she attempts to flee with her child, not heeding the Reverend Mother’s warning that should she try to escape, “the guards will hunt you down and bring you back”. This they do, whereupon she is viciously beaten, her hair shorn and her baby removed. Anne-Marie’s forcible return to the laundry by the Gardaí implies that she has not merely transgressed a moral code by falling pregnant but has also broken the law of the land and is thus subject to the disciplinary forces of the State, despite the fact that there was never a statutory basis upon which to detain an unmarried mother in a Magdalene institution. She has been treated “like a common criminal” as Frank (John Kavanagh), an elderly widower in whose house she temporarily seeks refuge, subsequently notes in distaste.

Though initially unwilling to become involved in Anne-Marie’s plight, Frank becomes concerned about her fate and pays her a visit in the laundry. A courtship of sorts develops and he proposes. Anne-Marie accepts, though with the proviso that there will be “no children”, that this is to be a celibate union. When Frank objects that this contravenes Church teachings on wifely “duty”, Anne-Marie remains resolute, also although upon first arriving in the laundry she may have prayed to the “Holy Mother” for aid, her laundry experiences have transmuted this faith to cynicism and rejection. Frank agrees to Anne-Marie’s conditions and the film ends with Anne-Marie leaving the laundry with her much-older bridegroom, having been disowned by her family, separated from her child and her closest friend having thrown herself to her death. With this being as close as any of *Sinners*’ characters come to securing a “happy ending”, television reviewers criticised *Sinners* for its unrelenting bleakness. Victoria Segal, for example, remarked that “short of the producers coming round to your house, removing your furniture and forcing you to sit in the dark, it is hard to imagine how [the film] could be gloomier viewing”, and Thomas Sutcliffe similarly pointed to the film’s “unremitting gloom. This isn't just a figure of speech, incidentally, because nearly all the action takes place in a sepulchral half-light, as if the nuns had tracked down Ireland's only supplier of 20-watt bulbs”.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, whatever of the overwhelming grimness of both its dramatic arc and visual atmosphere, *Sinners*’ achievement remains its conveying of the extent of the Magdalene women’s anguish and distress, and its provocative focus upon the responsibility of not only the Church, but also the Irish State, for the same.

The State is equally prominent in many of the depictions of the industrial schools. The “Darkest Corner” series, for example, was a tripartite series of plays staged by the Abbey Theatre in 2010. It comprised Richard Johnson’s *The Evidence I Shall Give* (1961), a courtroom drama about the proposed transferral of a 13-year old girl to an industrial school; the specially commissioned *No Escape* (2010) by Mary Raftery, a verbatim play which reworked testimony provided to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse into dramatic form; and Gerard Mannix Flynn’s dramatic monologue *James X* (2002).⁴⁷ The series took its name from Taoiseach Brian Cowen’s remark that the Ryan Report “shone light into the darkest corner of the history of the State” and was intended to “remember the findings and reflect on the systemic abuse revealed within state-funded and regulated institutions”.⁴⁸ This focus by the Abbey on the State rather than the nation with the “Darkest Corner” series is particularly significant because if, as discussed in the Introduction, “the nation” has dominated twentieth century Irish culture and criticism. This is particularly so in Irish theatre. “The Irish national theatre movement”, Nicholas Grene explains, was an integral part of that broader cultural nationalism of the turn of the century which sought to create for a long-colonised Ireland its own identity”, taking it upon itself to set “the broken bones of national identity” and forge for the emergent nation a distinctly Irish consciousness.⁴⁹ As a result, Grene explains, while “it has not only been in the politics of the nation that the national life has found its theatrical expression”, Irish drama from its inception has been keenly attuned to the entity of the nation. The longstanding natiocentricity of Irish drama led Fintan O’Toole to assert in a 2004 review of *James X* that “since we got a national theatre a century ago there have been hundreds of plays about the nation and none about the State”.⁵⁰

O’Toole, however, qualified his statement by contending that *James X* “makes up for that neglect”, elsewhere describing *James X* as “one of the most powerful performances on the Irish stage in the early years of the new millennium ... in a culture awash with works about the nation, a play about the state”.⁵¹ A nation is, in Benedict Anderson’s famed formulation, an “imagined community”, created and sustained by the conviction — however illusory — that all its members are linked by cultural/linguistic/racial/religious commonalities and ties, and can exist in the conceptual without taking territorial form (though it is beyond the remit of this thesis to explore the difficulties and tensions which arise when nation and state are not coterminous, one need look no further than the Irish context for an example of the same).⁵² The State, however, as a sovereign political reality, is defined and bound by more tangible means; “political narratives”, legislation and judicial processes.⁵³ Furthermore, unlike the abstraction of the nation, the State can also be held accountable for its actions in law, and found negligent for failing to fulfil those duties by which it legitimates itself.

Such is the occasion of *James X*: the eponymous protagonist, his surname “for confidentiality reasons” (JX,14) denoted only by an X, sits in “a waiting room in the Dublin High Court” (JX,11), preparing to testify to the “personal injuries, mental distress, nervous shock, wilful assault and battery etc etc” (JX,14) which he suffered in a series of State-run residential institutions as a child and young adult.⁵⁴ The State possesses a vast bureaucratic apparatus. Upon arriving at court, James is presented with a file containing a panoply of educational and psychological assessments, medical reports and court orders, his life as it has been charted on the official record, and textual evidence of what Ray Ryan terms “the workings of the state” in its “various disciplinary formats and designations”.⁵⁵ The documents are redacted versions of ones obtained by Flynn — who drew heavily on his personal experience in the writing of *James X*, having been resident in a series of industrial schools and other institutions as a child and young adult, though he is insistent that *James X* not simply be read in autobiographical terms — from the Department of Health under the Freedom of Information Act. What they attest to is the fact that on each occasion James has been committed to or released from an institution it has been, as Flynn puts it, “under licence of the State” (JX,6).

As James waits to enter the court, he reads from the file, and it quickly becomes apparent that the State interventions in his life as detailed in the documents have been variously ineffectual, inappropriate or counter to his best interests. Born into an eleven-children family in Dublin’s inner-city, James’s earliest recollections are of “watching Mammy fight with Daddy ... shouts, police and partings. My father going out of the house to live in the hostel for men” (JX,18-19). He makes his first appearance on the official record as a three year old: “a problem to the teacher from the start as he was always fighting with other children” (JX,13). A troubled childhood ensues, and a psychological evaluation of the ten-year-old James recommends that:

This boy is in need of psychiatric treatment at a child guidance clinic before his antisocial behaviour becomes irreversible but I fear James will not attend as an outpatient ... so the only solution would appear to be an industrial school for a period of at least two years. This of course will not offer him any real psychotherapeutic treatment but may at least give him a stable environment for a few years (JX,26)

Although offering a stable physical location, institutionalisation is thus inadequate to his deeper psychological needs. Nonetheless, James is sent to Letterfrack, the name by which St Joseph’s Industrial School located in that townland was more commonly known, and which

operated in Irish society as a byword for brutality and terror long before the Ryan Report offered its official account of it as “an inhospitable, bleak, isolated institution” where “children were emotionally and physically neglected” and “physical punishment was severe, excessive and pervasive”⁵⁶

“Growing up in working class Dublin in the 1960s”, O’Toole recollects, “there were certain words that carried a dark meaning all of their own — Artane [site of another industrial school] and Letterfrack”.⁵⁷ O’Toole claims Letterfrack’s notoriety as evidence of a suppressed awareness of the brutal conditions within the industrial schools, or what he terms “the propensity for Irish culture to have ‘unknown knowns’ — things that are known to be true but are treated as if they are outlandish fictions. No honest person seriously doubted that the industrial schools were instruments of terror and torture — why, otherwise, were children threatened with Letterfrack and Daingean [location of St Conleth’s Reformatory School], words that induced a numbing chill of fear?”⁵⁸

Such a chill of fear is experienced by the adult narrator of *James X* even thinking about his time in the school. He describes his “mind ... going overboard, straying off down into the depths ... the wind rages inside me and all around me, stampeding in panic” (JX,28-30) as he revisits this period of his life, during which he was subject to “cane, boots, fists and the hand-stitched leather strap” (JX,29), and “starved, beaten and slaved on the nation’s land” while the wind “howls”, “screams” and “stings” with “no knowledge of mercy” (JX,29). James pleads, with increasing urgency, for somebody to “tell me ma, tell me da or me brothers or sisters that they’re killing me and hitting me, bashing me and beating me, slapping me and lashing me in the fields and on the mountains and in the wet cold bogs. Somebody tell someone ... Someone come and get me. Where are you? Where are you? Someone tell someone. Please! Please!” (JX,28), this vivid stream-of-consciousness recollection effectively conveying both the fear and confusion James experienced as a child and that of the adult James in the present moment as he relives events.

Though his prayers to “Saint Joseph, Saint Jude, Saint, Saint anybody” (JX,28) go unanswered, James secures premature release from Letterfrack “on medical grounds” (JX, 28), describing himself as “sick. Sick from the kick, from the bang of the stick from the Brother”, but while the industrial school may have “changed my world” (JX,27), this is not a positive transformation. When he returns to his family in Dublin, he describes himself as “different. Something had happened to me. I was on the outside. I knew things other boys didn’t” (JX,31), hinting at dark revelations yet to be come. His behavioural issues have been exacerbated rather than eliminated by his time in the industrial school. A doctor’s report details how James “often takes a bath during the night and remains in the bath for hours and

that he is always terrified” (JX,34), while a subsequent psychiatrist’s report advises that James has been continuing to play truant “stealing bicycles, stealing from cars and causing malicious damage to a garage” (JX,34) and is thus “in need of a period in a unit under the jurisdiction of the court where he could have intensive investigation, treatment and rehabilitation. It is quite certain that he would not attend on an outpatient basis and I fear that residential care at a school for retarded boys would not be a success but a trial would be worthwhile, particularly if sedation is used. Failing that, returning him to an industrial school is the only alternative” (JX,34). In lieu of any effective psychological intervention, James is in due course sent to St Conleth’s Reform School, Daingean for two years, where he finds himself surrounded by the “same faces” as at Letterfrack, “everybody from the earlier school in Connemara was there, older, harder, tougher” (JX,36), all similarly caught in a cycle of institutionalisation, poverty and abuse.

James’s trajectory through this “architecture of containment”, to borrow James M Smith’s phrase, continues with a spell in the “Central Mental Hospital for the criminally insane” (JX,39), where he describes himself as “liquid lobotomised” by the drugs he receives, before ending up in prison.⁵⁹ In prison he is again surrounded by “the same faces I saw way back in Goldenbridge, at Connemara, and in the reform school. The same, the same, the same, same” (JX,41). A panic attack triggered by memories of Letterfrack acts as a catalyst for a nervous breakdown. He describes how “one night while in my cell, everything became unreal to me. My hands seemed awkward. My legs, my feet, my face, my nose, ears, eyes, the cell, the prison. I became frightened, stiff. My heart pounded in my chest. Nothing like this had ever happened before. My mind raced with paranoia, something was leaving me, everything was leaving me and I was helpless to stop it. I was becoming conscious for the first time of what had happened to me back then when I was eleven and what was happening now: this prison, this cell, me, this body, that world there beyond the walls. Everything I had taken for granted collapsed. Nothing made sense anymore, reason was gone” (JX,41-42), though it had long been noted that James required psychiatric attention, this descent into psychosis nonetheless goes unchecked.

Emerging from prison at the age of twenty, James is reassured by his mother that “it’s all over” (JX,44). He describes himself as “made in Ireland, compliments of the Probation and Welfare, the Church, the Brothers and the nuns, the doctors and the psychologists, the new and improved James X” (JX,46), now “free, free, free” (JX,44). This self-description, however, is deliberately ironic as the present-day James, looking back upon his younger “mad and bad and dangerous to know” (JX,49) self is all too aware that no such liberation has occurred. Rather, what followed were “twenty years of lunacy ... anger and self-hatred” (51), during

which time he amasses a litany of petty convictions “for Drunk and Disorderly, Simple Drunk, penalty £2 fine. Drunk and breach of the Peace, £20 fine. Drunk and Loitering with Intent, Drunk and Unlawful Assault. Simple Drunk. Just Drunk. Drunk.” (JX,51). “Drunk I was, for twenty years — out of my head, off my trolley, twisted, stupefied, mankey, mindless, helpless, powerless, mad mad mad” (JX,50), he explains, enacting his struggle to block out his emotions as an aerial battle, a “dogfight” (JX,49), against himself. When “real feelings are about to impact” (JX,50), his response is to “have two interceptors ready to fire, two large Paddy’s with ice. Fire one, fire two, now fuck off feelings, fuck off pain, we have a direct hit” (JX,50), alcohol allowing his inner “turbulence” to be temporarily deferred.

In “Living with *States of Fear*: a liberation psychology response”, psychologist Geraldine Moane warns that “denial is ... a fundamental feature of abuse and of trauma generally”, but that “abuse will continue as long as individuals, institutions and society as a whole continue to deny abuse, whether through minimising, rationalising, outright denial or other forms of denial”.⁶⁰ Emotionally cauterising himself through alcohol — or as he puts it more colloquially, “drinking me bollix off numbed the pain away” (JX,51) — James now inflicts this abuse upon himself, revealing that he “cut myself up sometimes, many times, on my legs, my chest, my back, my face” (JX,50) during these decades of self-destructiveness. In exploring “the enduring impact of childhood abuse”, the Ryan Report notes that while some of those who testified to the Commission went on to enjoy “good relationships and successful careers” after leaving institutional care, others reported “adult lives ... blighted by childhood memories of fear and abuse ... marked by poverty, social isolation, alcoholism, mental illness, sleep disturbance, aggressive behaviour and self harm”.⁶¹ Thirty per cent of those presenting to the Commission did so with “a constellation of ongoing, debilitating mental health concerns, for example; suicidal behaviour, depression, alcohol and substance abuse and eating disorders”.⁶² James is well aware that he is not alone in his difficulties. Waiting outside the courtroom, James reflects: “I know that prisoner ... he’s never gotten out of prison, never got out of the system. I met him in the industrial school, now he’s doing life for murder. We’re all doing life. Most of the kids I met back then are dead or sick with heroin and alcohol” (JX,51), all similarly imprisoned by their past.⁶³

Although James asks himself in despair “is it ever going to end?” (JX,51), he is aware that “looking back, recalling to recover” (JX,14) provides the means to commute his psychological life-sentence. “Stay in the present, feel the feelings I am going through”, James reminds himself, “this is a reclaiming mission. Have to face this. Have to face me” (JX,50). As Moane explains, “fully acknowledging that abuse has occurred and accepting the tremendous trauma and psychological damage associated with abuse is ... the most straightforward way of

confronting denial”.⁶⁴ However, while “telling the story of the trauma plays a crucial role” in recovery, “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma”.⁶⁵ James provides this dialectic with vivid expression when forced to “remember what I don’t want to remember ... relive what I don’t want to relive” (JX,14) to testify in court. “Let me go, let me go, let me run. Let me hide away from my memory, remember? It happened! It happened! Didn’t, did, didn’t. Did so! No! No! (JX,28)”, he shouts, before conceding “Yes OK. Stop. Stop. It’s real. It’s true. I can face it now, smell the place, almost touch it” (JX,28) as he talks through and thus comes to terms with events. His narrative thus functions in what Nicholas Grene’s terms “a therapeutic strategy for bringing into consciousness the blocked-out terrors of the past” to achieve release.⁶⁶ Grene is discussing, however, not *James X* but Tom Murphy’s critically acclaimed *Bailegangaire* (1984), in which the elderly Mommo compulsively recites the same fragmented third-person narrative, “the story of Bailegangaire and how it came by its appellation”, without ever bringing it to a conclusion. As the play unfolds, it emerges that this is Mommo’s own story, but the guilt and grief which she feels about how her young grandson Tom, “had got the paraffin and ... sthollod it on to the embers” whilst in her care, and how “the sudden blaze came out on top of him ... and they took [him] away to Galway, where he died” impedes the story’s completion.⁶⁷ Recognising that “to complete the story will be to face the trauma which lies behind its obsessive retelling, and thus ... to free the family from its tragic inheritance”, Mommo’s granddaughters prompt her on to finish the tale and progress beyond this psychological paralysis.⁶⁸ A similar process occurs in *James X*, in that the psychologically stalled James reminds himself of his therapist’s counsel that, “all that I had to do was stop repeating. She said that I was only as sick as my secrets and that the truth would set me free” (JX,52).

To this end, the conclusion of the play acts as both coda and corrective to what has gone before. Anthony Roche posits that “in postmodern dramaturgy the phenomenon of storytelling has become the drama of action”.⁶⁹ *James X*, which after all consists of a single character recounting his life story, further evinces its postmodernity in its final moments by breaking with the invisibility for which the stage-space conventionally strives; James addresses the audience directly, remarking of the high-energy stream-of-consciousness performance he has just delivered, “that story I’ve just told you, that’s the same story I told to myself all my life. That’s my grandiose story, my euphoric recalling of the events of my life. If I hadn’t got that version I wouldn’t have survived”. As Patrick Lonergan observes, James’s “monologue is not an expression of the truth, but a shield from it — it is the story that his

character has devised over the years to control his sense of guilt and shame for the abuse he suffered”.⁷⁰

Now, however, James explains that “it’s time to tell the truth. The honest truth. This is my statement. My truth. The real story. The story I came to tell” (JX,52) — to reveal the full extent of what he has experienced. Whereas he had previously announced with a proud swagger that institutionalisation had left him with “no visible scars” (JX,45), a description already ironised by the “trauma and aftershock” (JX,38) by which he was visibly beset, he now reveals what his bravado has hitherto concealed; he has a “huge scar” (JX,52) across his stomach from an operation to correct the internal damage sustained when “a Brother ... kicked me in the stomach until I vomited” (JX,52). He also explains in a matter-of-fact fashion that “on the day I arrived [at Letterfrack] the Brother who drove me from the station orally raped me in the car. On another occasion ... the caretaker came to my bed at night and took me into the toilets. I was half-asleep and didn’t know what to do. He threatened me and took me by the hair. He held his hand over my mouth and he anally raped me” (JX,52).

Moane explains that “the role of witnessing and acting as an ally is essential” in the recovery from trauma, meaning that the audience is always central to the production of meaning in any dramatic performance.⁷¹ This is even more so in *James X*, as not only must James articulate and thereby confront the traumas of his past, it is equally important that he is listened to and believed, the documents adding to the plausibility and power of his narrative and moving the play between the modes of the fictional and the factual. James explains that “when I tried to tell people what happened in my childhood years, nobody wanted to know what happened to me and to the other people sent to those places. Nobody trusted us and nobody cared, we were all abandoned. Today all I ask is that you believe me. That justice be done” (JX,53). However, so consistently has James been failed by the State, and so pernicious have State interventions been for him, that he does not believe the court he is about to enter to be capable of delivering any such justice. As such, he decides not to proceed with his case, reasoning that “if I walk into that courtroom now I’ll never again walk back into my own life. They’ll give me the few bob, their financial redress, and push me back out on to the street. Plead Guilty and Sons [“me legal team” (JX,14)] want me to take a no-fault settlement — that’s like pleading guilty to something I didn’t do — right up their street!” (JX,54). Thus refusing to “throw myself at the mercy of the very system that I have been up against all my life”, he instead returns the file, as “property of the State, the Church, their servants and agents and you [the audience] the citizens” (JX,53-54), to the public sphere, and leaves. James’s relinquishing of the file and its devastating contents is thus the moment on which the play pivots, Fintan O’Toole emphasising that “the point of the

performance is that the file ... is, both literally and metaphorically, the property of the State”, and not that of James himself.⁷²

Noting that “the monologue was the primary form of drama by Irish male authors for the stage in the 1990s and in the early twenty-first century”⁷³, Brian Singleton asks:

When in real life do we ever use the monologue form?; publicly, in the performing professions (law, politics, religion, education), and privately, either in the confessional, or in the psychiatrist’s chair. In the latter, we are accorded the privilege of the unbroken narrative denied us in the public sphere of sociability where we are trained to contribute rather than hold forth. Our narratives are supposed to reveal sinful actions for which we seek absolution, or damaged thought patterns that the psychiatrist will try to challenge and correct.⁷⁴

However, the point of the monologue form as employed in *James X* is not to allow James to own up to any sins, crimes or failures of his own, but instead to point to those of others. This monologue form and dramatic space also allows James an unimpeded space in which to tell his story whereas in court his story will be taken away from him and framed within legal discourse, placed back within the operations of the State. He receives absolution, although this is not from the product of any “*mea culpa*”, but rather through the realisation that he was not to blame. James explains of “the wrongs that were done to me” (JX,53) that although “all my life I thought this was my fault”, he has come to realise that this is not the case, and that “this is not my shame anymore, it never was. I’ve carried it long enough. It is yours and today I am giving it back” (JX,54). George O’Brien terms such narratives “testimonies of innocence” in that they arrive at such self-absolution.⁷⁵ James’s self-exoneration is similar to the experiences of blues musician Don Baker, also from Dublin’s inner city, who was also resident in Daingean reformatory from 1963 to 65, about which he testified on *States of Fear*. In the RTÉ radio documentary “This place speaks to me”, Baker revisited Daingean, and commented of the beatings than he endured in the institution. “I always called it a ‘punishment’ in my innocence, thinking that I deserved what happened to me. It wasn’t until I watched that programme *States of Fear* and I heard the lady who was doing the, if you like, the commentary, or narrating it, say that Don Baker was, eh, beaten; that’s the first time that it struck me, oh my God, I was beaten. I always considered it to be a punishment. And I didn’t realise I’d been, I’d been, eh, abused that badly”.⁷⁶ It is only by having their experiences re-presented in narrative form that these individuals can distance themselves from the shame and stigma of these events.

O'Toole argues that Irish society's propensity for "unknown knowns" is a societal form of "dissociation ... where, in response to trauma, the mind distances itself from experiences that it does not wish to process".⁷⁷ The achievement of texts and performances such as *James X* is to unrelentingly bring institutional abuse back into the communal consciousness. As Richard Kearney notes, "only those who have done the narrative 'working through' of the past are really in a position to let go of it", be that on an individual or societal level, with the theatre providing a forum for both personal revelation and communal reflection.⁷⁸ Be that as it may, while James himself may have reached, however painfully, a measure of personal acceptance and forgiveness, his attitude towards Church and State remains one of anger, disillusionment and rejection. Flynn similarly contended of the industrial schools in 2009 that "there is no conclusion, there is no closure, there is no healing. Not yet", meaning that *James X* constitutes a preliminary exploration of, rather than final laying to rest of, events for dramatist and audience alike, focusing as it does not on the "state of the nation" but rather on the neglects and negligences of the State.⁷⁹

Lying at the opposite end of the emotional spectrum to both *Sinners* and *James X* is Bruce Beresford's film *Evelyn* (2002). Based on the 1955 case of Doyle versus the Minister of Education, *Evelyn* depicts the battle of Dessie Doyle (Pierce Brosnan), an unemployed painter and decorator from Dublin's inner-city, to obtain the release of his children Evelyn (Sophie Vavasseur), Maurice and Dermot from the industrial schools in which they are placed following the "unfortunate desertion" of their mother from the family home.⁸⁰ Like *James X*, *Evelyn* forefronts the role of the State in the industrial schools in that the occasion of the film is the taking of legal action against the State in relation to the schools. Also like *James X*, *Evelyn* emphasises that it was by State decree that the children entered into and remained within the institutions. However, James X was "starved, beaten and slaved on the nation's land" (JX,29), leading him to curse "those Christians who called themselves Brother, whose loving embrace was a slap in the face and the kiss of a leather slap" (JX,29), and to look upon the State with such ire. In *Evelyn*, by way of contrast, when Maurice and Dermot are placed with the Christian Brothers, receiving some forbidding religious instruction is the worst with which they must contend. Their sister's experience in St Joseph's Convent is similarly benign. Writing to her father from the school, Evelyn says "I like most of the nuns here, Sr Felicity is nice and kind and so is Sr Teresa", though conceding that Sr Bridget (Andrea Irvine) is "very scary". When a classmate of Evelyn's subsequently fails to learn her catechism by heart, and is unable to respond to the inquiry "Is God good, just and merciful?", she is hit by the enraged Sr Bridget, who provides the catechistic definition of God as infinitely good, infinitely just and infinitely merciful while she does so. Evelyn interjects that

“if God is infinitely merciful, He wouldn’t want you to do that”, an outburst for which she too is beaten. This, however, is the film’s sole incident of abuse, the over-zealous Sr Bridget being an aberration from, rather than a characteristic representative of, the regime.

Emphasising that *Evelyn* is “not one of these diatribes against the Catholic school [sic] or the government”, Beresford explains that he was aiming for “balance” with the film, wanting to show that there were “many levels of behaviour” within the religious-run industrial schools and that “a lot of [nuns] were very nice”.⁸¹ Producer Beau St Clair likewise remarks that “one of the things we attempted to do was to show that within the institution there were many different kinds of people, so that you had strict nuns that used force and you had more gracious nuns who were more loving”.⁸² Be that as may, the film was in the main unfavourably received by critics, dismissed by one reviewer, for example, as “Oirish Twaddle”.⁸³ It equally drew censure from Irish Soca, a support organisation for survivors of institutional abuse, who objected that the film “trivialises the awfulness of what happened” within the industrial schools.⁸⁴

In response, Evelyn Doyle herself — whose memoir, *Evelyn: a true story* (2002), was released in tandem with the film — explained that although, “since publication of my book, my publishers, and Irish Dreamtime, which made the film based on my story, have had to deal with complaints from people who have survived the system of industrial schools and Magdalene laundries, and seem to hold me personally responsible for their traumatic childhoods”, she had only “fond memories” of the two years she spent in residential care. “My brothers and I”, she stressed, “suffered no abuse whatsoever in the schools we were in”.⁸⁵ She emphasised that rather than producing any searing exposé of institutional abuse, “in writing my book, my only intention was to give recognition to my very brave father” and to draw attention to his “long and hard-fought battle against the might of the Irish State and Catholic church” to retain custody of his children.⁸⁶

Beresford’s film should similarly be understood as centred not on the industrial schools themselves *per se*, but instead as a championing of the heroism of fatherhood, as encapsulated in the homily of barrister Tom Connolly (Alan Bates) as he reminisces about his earlier days as a rugby international. Connolly explains how, during his career-ending game, “when my cartilage went and they were taking me off on a stretcher ... I looked up and I saw this father holding his little child up on his shoulders. They thought I was a hero, but you know something? I envied that man so much. He was my hero. All Desmond wants is to hold his kids up on his shoulder”. Furthermore, Evelyn Doyle was at pains to emphasise that although she wanted to pay homage to her father’s “heroic fight” to regain his children from the industrial schools, her father was nonetheless “a very volatile man — very explosive”, and

prone to violence.⁸⁷ Beresford's film does not whitewash Dessie entirely, as Dessie drinks heavily, tries to punch a priest while drunk and threatens to tear Sr Bridget "limb from limb" should she hit Evelyn again. But with Dessie's heavy drinking and short temper thus being reconfigured into, as one reviewer notes, "the kind of flawed hero that Hollywood loves", in *Evelyn*, the travesty of the industrial schools is not any abuse or neglect taking place, but rather that the retention of the Doyle children within the schools separates them from their father, with scriptwriter Paul Pender emphasising the "family values message" of the text.⁸⁸

"Family values" have, however, fallen somewhat from grace in modern Irish culture. Whereas *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, declared the family to be "a moral institution" and "the necessary basis of social order", contemporary legal commentators such as Patrick Hanafin have countered that "in a state which ... outlawed the sale of contraceptives and prohibited divorce and abortion, the family was more of a prison than an ideal type of social unit", Kathryn Conrad similarly describing the configuration as "the family cell".⁸⁹ "More than any part of the social landscape", Luke Gibbons observes, "the faultlines in the traditional Irish family, as idealised in romantic conceptions of faith and fatherland, have been exposed on the cinema screen. Almost every variation of family life has been explored as cinematic representations of women cut across the conventional images of 'Mother Ireland' or the virgin mother ideal", as was apparent, for example, in *Sinners*.⁹⁰

As such, *Evelyn* is somewhat at odds with other films of its time in that it upholds rather than interrogates family, faith and fatherhood, and reappropriates rather than rejects religious archetypes, namely by turning to the figure of St Joseph as a theological "family man". The film opens with Dessie accompanying his three children to a Christmas Eve carol service beside a Nativity Crib and when the young Dermot inquires if Jesus had a big sister, Evelyn explains that whilst He did not, He had "two daddies ... God the father and Joseph the carpenter", the description provided of the Holy Family thus circumventing mariolatry and maternity alike. Maurice then asks if Joseph ever undertook "a bit of painting and decorating like me da", thereby doubling the identification of Dessie with Joseph, the patron saint of both fathers and craftsmen. (Later on, when Evelyn is sent to St Joseph's Convent, a statue of the eponymous saint with the infant Jesus in his arms is located in the grounds. Upon seeing this statue of father and child, Evelyn announces that she will "pray to [St Joseph] to get us home, he'll understand". When Dessie subsequently arrives at the school, incensed about the beating his daughter has received from Sr Bridget, the statue of St Joseph symbolising paternal protectiveness again frames the shot.)

While Dessie occupies the traditional maternal role, settling the children to bed and casting a watchful eye over them while they sleep, the mother, meanwhile, does not engage

with the children. She goes to the pub with another man rather than attend the Christmas Eve service with the rest of the family.⁹¹ She remains equally at a remove when the family is joined by Dessie's father Harry (Frank Kelly) for Christmas Day; Dessie plays with the children, though having to explain that Santa "was a bit strapped for cash this year" when the children innocently enquire about the sparseness of their presents, and when Harry predicts that Dessie is sure to find obtain employment in the New Year, leading to an upsurge of economic fortune for "you and the kids", the mother hovers in the kitchen with a look of harried guilt, surreptitiously removing a wad of money from a biscuit tin. She leaves the family the following day.⁹²

This results in the children being placed in the industrial schools, as although Dessie's cause may be given theological succour by pointing to St Joseph, this is a socio-cultural paradigm where woman's "life within the home" is recognised by the Constitution as providing a particular "support without which the common good cannot be achieved", but fathers are accorded no equivalent legal or cultural recognition, thereby sidelining paternity. The authorities are unconvinced that Dessie is a capable guardian, as not only is he unemployed, but he and his father have no "female relatives to call upon" to assist them in caring for the children. As Alpha Connelly observes, the "particular ideology of the family" hegemonic in post-independence Ireland, in which "the woman's role was primarily that of child-bearer and child-rearer; the man's role was that of material provider and protector" had a "profound impact on Irish society and Irish law" and "although women lost out much more than men in this gendered allocation of social roles based on an idealised family unit" in that "their confinement to the private, domestic sphere ... resulted in their economic vulnerability, dependence and lack of control over their own lives", "men also were constrained by it".⁹³ Pending "a significant improvement in [Dessie's] domestic and financial circumstances", the children are committed to the industrial school system, in accordance with the 1941 Children's Act, the film here drawing attention to the precise legal status of the schools vis-a-vis the legislation of the State.

Dessie is further constrained by the fact that once the children have been committed to the industrial schools, he is powerless to remove them, as, under the provisions of the Children's Act, the signatures of both parents are required for the children's release. As the whereabouts of his estranged wife are unknown, her written permission cannot be secured. Outraged, Dessie enlists the help of solicitor Michael Beatty (Stephen Rea) to challenge this impasse in the High Court, but the Court rules that "provision of the Children's Act must be understood in its literal, grammatical meaning. 'Both parents' means exactly that." The Doyle children must remain in care until the age of sixteen. Dessie's right of appeal denied. Dessie

then recruits barrister Connolly and Irish-American “lawyer” Nicholas Barron (Aidan Quinn) to his cause, and, as per Connolly’s suggestion, they take the case to the Supreme Court on grounds of unconstitutionality, arguing that Dessie’s “God-given and inalienable right” to the society of his children as guaranteed by Article 41 of the Constitution, and his right to determine the course of their education, as detailed in Article 42 of the same, are violated by the retention of his children in the industrial schools. As Barron reminds the Minister for Education, the Constitution is “the document on which the authority of the Irish government and therefore your authority rests”, in other words that by which the actions of the State are legitimated or found otherwise, the State again taking precedence over the nation in this text.

Given this focus on the Constitution and the legal operations of the State, *Evelyn* might at casual viewing appear to conform to the generic codes of a courtroom drama in which the underdog takes on the system, thereby censuring the powerful alliance of Church and State in post-independence Ireland under which the ignominies of the industrial schools went unchecked. Beresford describes the Doyle case as a “landmark” and Pender similarly terms it as “a milestone in the whole social history of Ireland” in that the verdict in favour of Dessie “weakened the link between Church and State”, an alliance which he describes as a “monolith keeping people under control”.⁹⁴ Accordingly, Irish family law is described in the film by Beatty as a “cosy conspiracy between the Catholic Church and the Irish State” (as the “special position” of the Church was officially recognised by the Constitution, these intimations of subterfuge are somewhat misplaced) and he warns Dessie that “to take on Church and State is to take on Goliath”. However, in its attempt to both critique the relationship between Church and State in post-independence Ireland and at the same time uphold religious belief, *Evelyn* moves in conflicting directions.⁹⁵ For example, Dessie’s response to Beatty’s warning about the combined might of Church and State is that “David beat Goliath in the book I read”, and whilst on one level this might be a rousing one-liner in keeping with the “feel-good” tenor of the text, it is also a neat example of how the case is won not by challenging the religious ethos of the State but through the extent of the piety of Evelyn and Dessie alike.

This is most apparent in the film’s dramatic Supreme Court denouement, when Dessie is challenged by Senior Counsel Wolfe (John Lynch) as to how “as a single father and Catholic” he can “bring up [his] your children without a mother”, there being “no precedent in the religion in which you allegedly believe”. Dessie’s response is not to redirect attention towards the legislation upon which the case is being taken, but to instead clarify a theological point, declaring that the centre of his religion not the Holy Family, but rather the Holy

Trinity, the constituent parts of which are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He equates the Holy Spirit with “love” and argues that he has “become a better person to fill myself with the Holy Spirit” to raise his children as a single father. “Doesn’t the Holy Bible say faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love?”, he asks. Although he is taking his case on the grounds of unconstitutionality, and the Constitution indeed identifies “the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority [sic] and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and State must be referred”, Dessie’s invocation of the Trinity is less a canny ability to cite scripture for his own legal purpose and more a heart-felt public profession of faith. In this, the version of Catholicism espoused in *Evelyn* is curiously a Protestant one; a scripture-based theology in which the characters have a personal relationship with God and make frequent recourse to the Bible, and securing justification by faith alone, rather than deferring to the authority of the institutional church, reflecting Tom Inglis’s observation that “in becoming detached from the institutional Church, in developing their own relationship with God, and in deciding more for themselves what is right and wrong, [Irish Catholics] are, in terms of their religiosity, becoming more like Protestants”.⁹⁶ What is evinced in *Evelyn*, therefore, is how the religiosity of Catholicism is also being renegotiated in a post-Catholic State.

Beresford explains that Dessie’s “big moment” was not originally included in the film, but that he instructed Pender “you’ve got to find a moment for [Brosnan] in the court, it’s the climax to the movie” and that Pender accordingly scripted the speech.⁹⁷ However, while the speech might add to the film structurally, by providing the central hero with his rousing moment of triumph, it exemplifies how *Evelyn*’s declared criticism of the alliance of Church and State is compromised by filling the public spaces of the State with such declarations of religiosity. The young Evelyn remains just as devout. When Wolfe accuses her of lying about being hit by Sr Bridget, she cites the Commandments — “thou shalt not lie” — and asks if she should recount her prayer of the night before. Wolfe objects that this is “immaterial” to the case, but the presiding judges overrule his objection, instead describing Evelyn’s prayer as “material to the child’s character”, moral integrity here being linked to religious devotion. In her prayer, Evelyn asks the “Lord God” who “guide[s] the universe with wisdom and love ... may lasting peace be delivered and truth and justice flourish”, as unlike James X, her trust in neither “the wisdom of those who govern us” in “the beautiful country of Ireland” nor a benevolent deity. The case even revives the faith of the initially cynical Connolly: when Dessie first expresses his belief that “if there is a God, He’ll step in to help us”, Connolly response is that he is “touched by your faith but this [brandishes a glass of whiskey] is the only holy spirit I’ve found to be of any practical assistance”. However, when the men are gathered for the subsequent Supreme Court hearing, Connolly mutters that a verdict in

favour of Dessie would “help take this country out of the dark ages”. He pulls from his pocket a handkerchief, only to inadvertently reveal Rosary beads in his possession. Embarrassed, he hastily disavows their function — “when the verdict comes in, these are for counting the score” — but is subsequently seen fervently praying on them whilst the judges deliver their verdicts, his faith having been restored; a humorous but firm reproof to the renouncing of religion in the name of social progress.

Patrick Hanafin contends that “the divine and the secular are twin faiths which cannot live in harmony”.⁹⁸ *Evelyn* is pulled into conflicting directions by trying to reconcile these two strands. The film’s gender politics prove equally unstable by the film’s end. Although the main thrust of the film is to champion Dessie’s capabilities as a single father and to render the maternal as redundant, upon securing his legal victory, Dessie embraces a “cursory love interest” Bernadette (Julianna Margulies), at whose behest he has renounced alcohol, and she agrees to become his “housekeeper”, as has earlier been suggested.⁹⁹ The film closes upon the reconstituted Doyle family on Christmas Day, the snow softly falling outside, Dessie carving the turkey whilst Bernadette ushers the children to the table, the nuclear family here firmly reinstated and the more radical socio-familial dynamic the film had earlier edged towards now firmly negated, firmly demonstrating *Evelyn* to be a sentimental, well-meant, but ultimately confused exploration of Church-State relations and Irish family dynamics as underpinning and surrounding institutional care.

Standing in stark contrast as *Evelyn* does to texts like *Sinners* and *James X*, what thus emerges from the selection of institutional texts examined in this chapter is the diversity of ways in which post-Catholic Ireland is processing and presenting its past, repudiating and recuperating Church and State alike. Elizabeth Cullingford has coined the term “critical Catholicism” to describe those artists who “without losing sight of the negative effects of religious orthodoxy on women and gays, or of the appalling reality of clerical child abuse, they retain their connection to a religious tradition that, for better or worse, has helped to define the Irish experience. Like critical nationalists, they do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater” but instead to continue to draw on Catholicism in their work.¹⁰⁰ Certainly, *Evelyn* can be understood as one such text. However, the grievousness of events as presented in both *Sinners* and *James X* prevents any such remediation or recuperation for those texts’ creators, both tending to rejection and repudiation instead.

1 A section of this chapter is to be published as ““God the father and Joseph the carpenter”: faith and fatherhood in Bruce Beresford’s *Evelyn*”, *Nordic Journal of Irish Studies*, forthcoming.

2 Gibbons, “Projecting the Nation: Cinema and Culture,” 217.

3 For an overview of cultural representations of the industrial schools, see also Peter Guy, “Black Habits and White Collars: Representations of the Irish Industrial Schools,” *Etudes irlandaises* 36, no. 1 (2011).

- 4 Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (Routledge: London, 2002), 38.
- 5 Fintan O'Toole, "Passing the Shame from Victim to State," *Irish Times*, 30 May 2009.
- 6 Justice for Magdalenes, "Submission to the United Nations Committee against Torture," (2011), 2.
- 7 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 48. See also Luddy, "Unmarried Mothers in Ireland, 1880-1973."
- 8 See "Justice for Magdalenes" information booklet, 8. The four congregations operating the laundries were the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, Sisters of Charity and the Good Shepherd Sisters.
- 9 See for example, Steve Humphries' documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1997), which acted as inspiration for Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002), perhaps the most high-profile of the Magdalene texts; Patricia Burke Brogan, *Stained Glass at Samhain* (Knockeven: Salmon Publishing, 2003). A former nun, Burke is also the author of *Eclipsed* (Knockeven: Salmon Publishing, 1995), one of the earliest Magdalene texts. See also Steven O'Riordan's documentary, *The Forgotten Maggies* (2009) June Goulding, *The Light in the Window* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1998), is about Goulding's experiences as a nurse in the Mother and Baby home, Bessboro, Co Cork.
- 10 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 224.
- 11 Tom Dunne, "Penitents," *Dublin Review* Winter 2002-03(2003): 80.
- 12 For a discussion of this "legal double standard that evaded male culpability and condemned female victims criminals", see Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, xvii. Mary McAuliffe, "Irish Histories: Gender, Women and Sexualities," in *Palgrave Advances in Irish History*, ed. Mary McAuliffe, Katherine O'Donnell, and Leeann Lane (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 212.
- 13 Meaney, "Race, Sex and Nation," 53-54.
- 14 Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 194.
- 15 See Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, Nation*, 7.
- 16 Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Random House, 1976), 235.
- 17 *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Random House, 1976).
- 18 *Alone of All Her Sex*, 225.
- 19 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 36. A similar storyline occurs in Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed*.
- 20 Since the Second Vatican Council, the feast (which is celebrated on February 2) has instead been known as the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord.
- 21 Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 234.
- 22 The Magdalene Sisters has an almost identical storyline involving the character of Crispina (Eileen Walsh).
- 23 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 257.
- 24 Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, Nation*, 10.
- 25 Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland." Elizabeth Cullingford similarly argues that "the sexually repressive agenda of the Catholic Church in Ireland was reinforced by the material experiences of colonisation and famine"; Elizabeth Cullingford, "'Our Nuns Are Not a Nation': Politicizing the Convent in Irish Literature and Film," *ibid.* 41, no. 1&2 (2006): 34. Auxiliadora Perez-Vides also argues that "in a context where economic self-sufficiency and prosperity were another crucial factor for the assertion of national independence, this transaction constituted a suitable formula to keep legitimacy and the traditional inheritance system intact", Auxiliadora Perez-Vides, "Religious Prisoners: Convents and Workhouses for Irish Single Mothers in Marita Conlon-Mckenna's *the Magdalen* (1999)," in *Literature, Gender, Space*, ed. Sonia Villegas-Lopez and Beatriz Dominguez-Garcia (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2004), 56.
- 26 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 19.
- 27 Gerardine Meaney, "The Gothic Republic: Dark Imaginings and White Anxieties," in *Single Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultural, Historical and Social Essays*, ed. Maria Cinta and Auxiliadora Perez-Vides Ramblado-Minero (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 13.
- 28 Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, xxxiii.

- 29 Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland." Citing JJ Lee, Cullingford also remarks that "if the Irish church was 'the tenant farmers at prayer', their post-famine practice of familism (passing the land intact to the eldest son and dowering only one daughter) decreased legitimate marriage opportunities and made sex 'a far more subversive threat than the landlord to the security and status of the family'"; Elizabeth Cullingford, "'Our Nuns Are Not a Nation': Politicizing the Convent in Irish Literature and Film," *ibid.* 41, no. 1&2 (2006): 34. Cullingford also remarks that "although Irish society has historically been hyper-patriarchal, there is nothing essentially Irish about institutionalized misogyny, and ... the sexually repressive agenda of the Catholic Church in Ireland was reinforced by the historical experiences of colonization and famine.", "'Our Nuns Are Not a Nation': Politicizing the Convent in Irish Literature and Film."
- 30 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, xiii-xiv. Bacik observes that "women who do not conform to the Church/State model of married motherhood are subject to legal and societal sanction. This is demonstrated by revelations about the extent of infanticide in Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s, the routine incarceration of children of unmarried mothers in industrial schools for many decades, and the phenomenon of Magdalene Laundries for 'fallen women'". Bacik, "From Virgins and Mothers to Popstars and Presidents: Changing Roles of Women in Ireland," 102-03. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen laundries and the nation's architecture of containment*: 47. James M Smith, "Remembering Ireland's Architecture of Containment: 'Telling' Stories in *the Butcher Boy* and *States of Fear*," *Eire-Ireland* Fall/Winter(2001): 112.
- 31 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 8.
- 32 *Ibid*; Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2007), 7. Caitriona Clear similarly notes that "the three words 'de Valera's Ireland' are used to convey an oppressive, stagnant, uncomfortable social environment for women", Caitriona Clear, "Women in De Valera's Ireland: A Reappraisal," in *De Valera's Irelands*, ed. Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (Cork: Mercier Press, 2000), 104.
- 33 This technique of using pop lyrics to provide ironic counter-commentary to the events of the text is also employed by Patricia Burke Brogan's play *Eclipsed*, which features songs such as Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel".
- 34 James M Smith and Raymond Hill, "State Involvement in the Magdalene Laundries: A Summary of Jfm's Submissions to the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries," (Bailieborough: Justice for Magdalenes, 2012), title page.
- 35 http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/jfm_booklet.pdf "Residential Institutions Redress Board," www.rirb.ie.
- 36 Justice for Magdalenes information booklet
- 37 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, "Written answers", 7 October 2010.
- 38 "Assessment of the Human Rights Issues Arising in Relation to the Magdalen Laundries," (Irish Human Rights Commission, 2010), 10-11. See also "State Involvement in the Magdalene Laundries: A Summary of Jfm's Submissions to the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries."
- 39 "Assessment of the Human Rights Issues Arising in Relation to the Magdalen Laundries," 35.
- 40 Introduction, "Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries," (Dublin: Government Publications, 2013), xi.
- 41 Marie O'Halloran and Michael O'Regan, "Taoiseach Makes Historic Apology to Magdalenes," *Irish Times*, 19 February 2013.
- 42 Joe Humphreys, "Are Factual Inaccuracies in Movies Justified by Role in Highlighting Issues?," *ibid.*, 9 February.
- 43 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 146. See also "Irish Society Colluded in Betrayal of Magdalen Women," *Irish Times*, 1 September 2003.
- 44 *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 146.
- 45 "The Magdalene Sisters: Evidence, Testimony ... Action," *Signs: journal of women in society and culture* 32, no. 2 (2007). *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, 148.
- 46 Victoria Segal, "Critic's Choice," *Sunday Times*, 24 March 2002. Thomas Sutcliffe, "Nelson's Dream Navy — Hardly a Ship in Sight," *Independent on Sunday*, 31 March 2002. While commending the film as "television's most sophisticated attempt yet to imagine the human cost of the institutional and church abuse outrages that have been so central to modern Irish society", Liam Fay similarly contended that "the film also vividly demonstrated the crass limitations of conventional polemical drama in tackling such grievous subject matter" in that "in its eagerness to indict the authorities, the film gave us too many pantomime villains. The fiendish cruelty of some of the nuns in these institutions is well documented ... Nevertheless, an excess of truth makes for bad fiction. Drama has a mandate, maybe even an obligation, to give even the most reprehensible characters more slack than they'd deserve in real life", Liam Fay, "Clerical Terrors," *Sunday Times*, 31 March 2002.
- 47 Gerard Mannix Flynn, *James X* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2003).

- 48 Emilie Pine, "Powerful Theatre, Morally Essential," *Irish Theatre Magazine*(2010), <http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Features/Current/Theatrically-powerful--morally-essential.aspx>. See also Sheila McCormick, "The Darkest Corner: Documenting Institutional Abuse and Its Consequences at the Abbey Theatre," *Irish Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2012).
- 49 Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 50 Flynn, James X. Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama*, 1. See also Shaun Richards, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Richards opens his survey of twentieth-century Irish drama by noting that "the idea of 'nation', as both theme and setting, has haunted the development of Irish theatre", *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1; Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama*, 267.
- 51 Fintan O'Toole, "James X," *Irish Times*, 2 October 2004. "Afterword: Irish Literature in English in the New Millennium," in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 640-41.
- 52 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.
- 53 Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000*, 9.
- 54 As explained in the discussion of Sinners, the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was accompanied by the Residential Institutions Redress Board, whose remit was "to make fair and reasonable awards to persons who, as children, were abused while resident in industrial schools, reformatories, and other institutions subject to state regulation or inspection". However, individuals also retained the right to pursue their cases through the regular judicial process should they so wish.
- 55 *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation 1966-2000*, 8.
- 56 "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse." Lindsey Earner-Bryne similarly outlines how "Patrick Touher [author of *Fear of the Collar: my terrifying life in Artane*] recalled that the judge in his case would have preferred another option than committing him to Artane Industrial school: 'I can remember the judge asking some men "is there no other place we can send our friend Patrick to?'" The judge concluded: 'Well now, Patrick, it is the decision of this court to send you to Artane, as I can find no other suitable place for you'", Earner-Byrne, "Child Sexual Abuse, History and the Pursuit of Blame in Modern Ireland," 65. Patrick Touher, *Fear of the Collar: My Terrifying Childhood in Artane* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2001).
- 57 Fintan O'Toole, "Sorrowful Mysteries Etched into Bleeding Fingers," *Irish Times*, 1 March 1996. Gerardine Meaney similarly argues of the Ryan Report that "the terrible seeping sense of horror with which many in Ireland responded to the revelation of the systemic nature of the physical, emotional and sexual abuse and economic exploitation of children in 'care' ... has been deepened by the uncanny sense that this story was already known", that there had long been a suppressed societal awareness of the brutal conditions within the schools. Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, Nation*, xv.
- 58 Fintan O'Toole, "Time to Atone for the Sins of the Fathers," *Irish Times*, 28 December 2009. O'Toole elsewhere remarks that, "in Ireland, there was a refinement on Donald Rumsfeld's infamous ramblings about known knowns, known unknowns and unknown unknowns [made by Rumsfeld in his capacity as US Secretary of Defense in February 2002, with regards to the existence or otherwise of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq]. The Irish added another category: unknown knowns, things that were understood to be the case and yet remained unreal", *Ship of Fools: How Corruption and Stupidity Sunk the Celtic Tiger*, 180-81.
- 59 Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, xiii.
- 60 Geraldine Moane, "Living with States of Fear: A Liberation Psychology Perspective," in *Child Abuse in Institutional Care: Learning from the Past and Hoping for the Future*, ed. L MacAodha (Dublin: National Conference of Priests of Ireland, 2000), 12; "Living with States of Fear: A Liberation Psychology Perspective," in *Child Abuse in Institutional Care: Learning from the Past and Hoping for the Future*, ed. L MacAodha (Dublin: National Conference of Priests of Ireland, 2000), 11.
- 61 "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse."
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Aisling Walsh's *Song for a Raggy Boy* (2002), set in a reformatory school in the 1930s, also sets up comparisons between the reformatory and prisoners, when the only "crimes" that many of the boys are guilty of are those of poverty or circumstance. For example, an elderly Brother explains that the school building was "used for political prisoners in the old days", and a boy asks teacher William Franklin "will I send in the next prisoner?" to the classroom. The building used filming in Ballyvourney, Co Cork, was also used as a prison for Republican prisoners in the Civil War.
- 64 "Living with States of Fear: A Liberation Psychology Perspective," 12..
- 65 "Living with States of Fear: A Liberation Psychology Perspective," 15. "Living with States of Fear: A Liberation Psychology Perspective," 12.
- 66 Nicholas Grene, "Tom Murphy and the Children of Loss," in *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 216.

- 67 Tom Murphy, *Tom Murphy Plays: 2* (London: Methuen, 1993), 168-69.
- 68 Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama*, 227. See also Christopher Morash, "Irish Theatre," in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 334.
- 69 Anthony Roche, "Bailegangaire: Storytelling into Drama," *Irish University Review* 17, no. 1 (1987): 115.
- 70 Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 167.
- 71 Moane, "Living with *States of Fear*: A Liberation Psychology Perspective," 15.
- 72 Fintan O'Toole, "A Terrible Truth Laid Bare," *Irish Times*, 22 March 2003. See also Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*. Victor Merriman, "'To Sleep Is Safe, to Dream Is Dangerous': Catholicism on Stage in Independent Ireland," in *Breaking the Mould: Literary Representations of Irish Catholicism*, ed. Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 197.
- 73 Brian Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Theatre," in *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006), 276.
- 74 "Am I Talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Theatre," in *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006), 261.
- 75 George O'Brien, "Memoirs of an Autobiographer," in *Modern Irish Autobiography: Self, Nation and Society*, ed. Liam Harte (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- 76 John Quinn, *This Place Speaks to Me*, (Dublin: RTE Radio 1, 2000), Radio documentary.
- 77 O'Toole, *Ship of Fools: How Corruption and Stupidity Sunk the Celtic Tiger*, 180-81.
- 78 Kearney, *On Stories*, 83.
- 79 Gerard Mannix Flynn, "A Harsh History of the Horror," *Irish Times*, 30 May 2009.
- 80 The inclusion under the rubric of Irish Studies of *Evelyn*, a film scripted by a Scottish writer (Paul Pender), and directed by an Australian (Bruce Beresford) under the auspices of an Irish-American production company (Irish Dreamtime), may be queried. However, rather than adhering to Corkerean purity in selection principles, the category and canon of "Irish film" is protean and mongrel, as a scan at the bibliographies of many of the studies of Irish cinema will yield. Many "Irish" filmic classics have been variously directed, produced and financed by foreign bodies, agencies or individuals.
- 81 Bruce Beresford, "Evelyn: Audio Commentary," (Twentieth Century Fox, 2002).
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Anthony Quinn, "Also Showing," *Independent*, 21 March 2003.
- 84 David Hencke and Rob Evans, "Hollywood Gloss Conceals Scandal of the War Children," *Guardian*, 22 March 2003.
- 85 Evelyn Doyle, *Evelyn: A True Story* (London: Orion Media, 2002). "Don't Look Back in Misery," *Irish Times*, 17 August 2002.
- 86 "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times," *Irish Times*, 26 February 2003.
- 87 Miranda Fettes, "New Chapter for Author Who Finds the Grass Is Now Greener," *Evening News - Scotland*, 31 July 2003. See also Doyle, "Don't Look Back in Misery." Senay Boztas, "Doyle Recants on Her 'Hero' Father," *Sunday Times*, 3 August 2003. Steve Pratt, "How Daddy Saved the Family and Pierce Fooled Me," *Northern Echo*, 17 March 2003.
- 88 Vicky Allan, "Evelyn's Ashes," *Scotland on Sunday*, 24 March 2002.. Beresford, "Evelyn." "Making of" feature.
- 89 Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution." See also Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality, and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).
- 90 Gibbons, "Projecting the Nation: Cinema and Culture," 216.
- 91 Though credited as "Charlotte Doyle", the mother remains nameless throughout the film, referred to as variously "Mammy", "the children's mother", "your bloody daughter" and "that wife of his".
- 92 This aspect of the film drew much criticism from the second family of the actual Mrs Doyle, who had travelled not to Australia but to Scotland. They claimed that she had been the victim of domestic abuse whilst with Dessie, and left out of self-protection. Senay Boztas, "Author Admits Her 'Hero' Father Was Violent to His Children," *Sunday Times*, 3 August 2003.; "Mother's Pride Eases Doyle's Life of Pain," *Sunday Times*, 10 August 2003.. As Ivana Bacik notes, the Constitution contains "no mention of fathers", Bacik, "From Virgins and Mothers to Popstars and Presidents: Changing Roles of Women in Ireland," 101.
- 93 Alpha Connelly, "The Law and Private Life in the Republic of Ireland," in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke, et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 320.. For a discussion of how "woman is constitutionally identified as both mother and homemaker", see also Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution."

- 94 Beresford, "Evelyn: Audio Commentary.", "Making of", "Behind the scenes".
- 95 Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution," 151.
- 96 Inglis, "Individualisation and Secularisation in Catholic Ireland," 69.
- 97 Beresford, "Evelyn: Audio Commentary."
- 98 Hanafin, "Legal Texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution."
- 99 Quinn, "Also Showing."
- 100 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 257.

**“MODERNISATION AND ALL ITS
EVILS”: SATIRICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY
IN ARTHUR MATHEWS’
WELL-REMEMBERED DAYS**

As the institutional traumas within the industrial schools, Magdalene laundries and other residential institutions were brought into public consciousness, not only did personal testimony prove powerful in documentaries such as *Dear Daughter* and *States of Fear* by putting a “face” to events and confronting viewers firsthand with the devastating stories of the individuals involved, but there also emerged a large number of autobiographies and memoirs in which the authors detailed their experiences. These included Patrick Touher’s *Fear of the Collar: my terrifying childhood in Artane* (1991) and *Scars that Run Deep: sometimes the nightmares don’t end* (2008); Paddy Doyle’s *The God Squad* (1988); Michael Clemenger’s *Holy Terrors: a boy, two Brothers, a stolen childhood* (2010); Bernadette Fahy’s *Freedom of Angels: childhood in Goldenbridge orphanage* (1999); and Sean Hogan’s *In Harm’s Way* (2008).¹

Liam Harte explains of these “abuse-survivor memoirs”, as he terms them, that:

Viewed collectively, these works demonstrate the radical uses of autobiography by marginalised subjects whose assertion of a personal narrative voice, which also speaks beyond itself, is a compelling means of cultural inscription. It is not just a matter of giving voice to grievance or setting the record straight. By situating personal accounts of pain and suffering within wider social and institutional contexts, these confessions critique larger cultural and political forces and so reconfigure the relations between self, nation and society in counter-hegemonic ways.²

As examined in the fictionalised versions and adaptations of such narratives in Chapter Four, the nation-state is repeatedly configured in such texts, Harte notes, as “a pathological entity capable of sanctioning violence, victimisation and exploitation”.³ George O’Brien similarly argues that “the self-inflicted diminished status of the master narratives of church and state” throughout this body of autobiographies is a sign of the “coming into being of, if not necessarily a post-Catholic, then a post-theocratic Ireland, an entity which is almost an inevitable counterpart of the post-nationalist nation”, and in which a cold eye is cast on these structures and ideologies which had been so hegemonic for much of the twentieth-century.⁴ This thesis, of course, argues that O’Brien’s equivocation around the term “post-Catholic” is unnecessary, and that a post-Catholic Ireland is precisely what is evinced, defined not as the wholesale disappearance of Catholicism from Irish life, but instead by the hugely altered nature of the relationship between Church and State, and also between individual and institutional Church, rather than blind deference to the hierarchy. As such, as evinced in these autobiographies, this involves an entirely new discourse and social imaginary in which the construction of the self takes place, one counter to rather than constituted by Catholic ideology.

However, these narratives are significant not only for contributing to this bringing into being of a post-Catholic Ireland, and their implicit and explicit critiques alike of Church and State, but also in that they took their part within the wider and prodigious “memoir boom” which took place in Ireland in the late Nineties and into the new millennium.⁵ This boom was, Harte notes, “spectacularly spearheaded by Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* (1996)”.⁶ An account of McCourt’s impoverished boyhood in the rain-lashed slums of Limerick, *Angela’s Ashes* became a surprise international bestseller, and “by the time its sequel, *Tis*, appeared in 1999”, Harte observes, “booksellers shelves were sagging under the weight of copycat texts”, a subgenre which has also earned the moniker “misery lit”.⁷ Harte adds that:

Parody followed, predictably. Arthur Mathews’s *Well-Remembered Days* (2001), the fictional memoir of one Eoin O’Ceallaigh, mocked multiple targets: the unrelenting dreariness of McCourt’s portrayal of 1930s Limerick, the angry objections to his doom-laden depictions, the revisionist derivatives the book inspired: ‘My own memory of Ireland in those years is that everyone in the country was blissfully happy all the time. The poverty that McCourt harps on about was confined to a handful of malcontents (probably no more than ten or twelve), who, if pressed, would probably admit that their lot was not so bad after all’.⁸

Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O’Ceallaigh’s memoir of a twentieth-century Catholic life, to give the text its full title, sees the nonagenarian O’Ceallaigh reminiscing from his Dublin nursing home about the events of his life and twentieth-century Irish history alike.⁹ Prior to *Well-Remembered Days*, the persona of O’Ceallaigh had also been employed by Mathews in early Nineties satirical pamphlet *Majority Ethos*, which urged for “Marriage, not Sex. Jobs, not condoms. Faith, not sodomy”, perhaps inspired by the Anti-Divorce Campaign’s posters in the 1986 divorce referendum, which declared “We Want Jobs, Not Divorce; Divorce Kills Love; God Says No”, and O’Ceallaigh remains just as dogmatic in *Well-Remembered Days*. Staunch traditionalist that he is, he is clear from the opening page of his memoirs about his “distrust of modernisation and all its inherent evils” (WRD,x). He is described by his creator as “your standard arch-Catholic/ Teetotaller/Believer in Physical Force Republicanism”.¹⁰

In locating the precise relationship between O’Ceallaigh as individual and O’Ceallaigh as symbol of the institutions of Church and State, extremely useful is Harte’s description of “the master trope of the Irish autobiographical tradition” as “the symbolic refraction of the life of the individual through the lens of nation and society”, pointing to the “nationalist autobiographical paradigm” in which “the record of personal experience [is] made to serve as a means of validating a particular ideology or bearing witness to shared privations and aspirations”.¹¹ Michael Kenneally similarly argues that “the tendency to explore and define oneself in terms of patriotic values and national goals, to equate one’s development with national destiny provides the central structural metaphor of twentieth-century Irish literary autobiographies”.¹² In his promulgation of “the three ‘s’s — strong religious faith, supernaturalism and superb love of the Irish language” (WRD,136), which offers a refracted version of Daniel Corkery’s trinity of “Religion, Nationality, the Land”, O’Ceallaigh is thus the exaggerated voice of a nation, or more precisely the voice of version of Irish identity hegemonic in the Free State.¹³ Furthermore, not only is O’Ceallaigh emblematic of this particular narrative of Irishness, but, as will be discussed, as he is a State employee in the Department of Irish Language and on the Censorship Board, and enjoying as he does close personal relations with such totemic figures as Éamon de Valera and Archbishop McQuaid as he does, this relationship between individual and institution is strengthened even further.

However, *Well-Remembered Days* is firmly tongue-in-cheek, thoroughly parodying both this version of Irish identity — in which Catholicism played so central a part, as evinced in the way the title of this text refers to “Catholic life” as opposed to “Irish life”, the terms operating seemingly interchangeably in O’Ceallaigh’s mind — and the autobiographical form alike. In her study of Irish autobiography, Claire Lynch argues that “history does not record the past, it provides a commentary and analysis of it from the perspective of the present, and

so an artificial narrative structure must be applied to histories of all scales — personal and national — in order that they become meaningful. The writing of autobiography provides perhaps the best example of this, compiling as it must the multiple histories of the self, others, cultures, and contexts into a workable narrative structure”.¹⁴ Nonetheless, even if autobiography always employs a degree of artifice in the selection and ordering of material, or as Lynch puts it, is “simultaneously fiction and fact, drawn from both memory and the imagination”, O’Ceallaigh is a particularly unreliable narrator above and beyond these normal historiographic constraints, with much of the text’s humour lying in the illogicality of his thinking and the attendant swift switches between historical accuracy and comic absurdity.¹⁵

For example, O’Ceallaigh explains of the mid-century period that “due to the increasing amount of spacecraft being launched into the atmosphere, this was a time when Irish weather began to get very bad” (WRD,145), and while the space race did indeed intensify in the 1950s and 1960s, and it would not be unfair to describe the Irish weather as largely inclement, no causal link exists between the two. The evidence that O’Ceallaigh presents for an argument also often works against him, as for example his endorsement of the 1950s as “a very exciting time in Ireland. Censorship remained strict, government, by whatever party, was deeply conservative, and the country remained largely an agricultural and rural-based society controlled by the Church” (WRD,112). Enthused as the arch-conservative O’Ceallaigh might be about such a state of affairs, this would not conventionally be described as “very exciting”. Rather, it instead tallies with Joe Cleary’s observation, as examined in Chapter Two, that “the decade is persistently configured in contemporary cultural debate” as “a grimly oppressive ‘dark age’” and has become “practically a byword for a soul-killing Catholic nationalist traditionalism”.¹⁶ O’Ceallaigh’s portrait of the decade indeed furthers rather than challenges this. As such, *Well-Remembered Days* encapsulates the post-Catholic modernising drive in its comic denigration of this era of the Irish past.¹⁷

Similarly, so zealous and uncompromising is O’Ceallaigh in his views, and to such extremes does he take them, that they are undercut by the comic gigantism also employed in *Father Ted*. This is not so surprising as, after all, Mathews was the co-writer of *Father Ted*. *Well-Remembered Days* shares much of the same cultural source material and employs many of the same comic techniques. For example, in “The Mainland” episode of *Father Ted*, Ted has to bail Mrs Doyle out of prison after a fracas with another elderly woman about who would pay for their tea. Father Ted laments that “there was a time when the police in the country were friends of the Church. Drunk driving charges quashed, parking tickets torn up, even turning a blind eye to the odd murder. But now...”. In *Well-Remembered Days*, O’Ceallaigh’s

unquestioned support for the Church likewise leads him to contend of a priest “re-arrested on arms and sex offences and detained in the political/paedophile wing of Portlaoise prison” (WRD,199) that “even if he was guilty, he should be released because he was a priest” (WRD,199). Indeed, such a perception of the Church as above the law of the State, or of priests as entitled to diplomatic immunity by dint of occupying holy office, emerged in many of the abuse investigations. For example, the Murphy Report found the Dublin Archdiocese “did its best to avoid any application of the law of the State” in response to abuse allegations.¹⁸ The Ryan Report similarly points to how “sexual abuse by members of religious Orders was seldom brought to the attention of the Department of Education by religious authorities because of a culture of silence about the issue. When religious staff abused, the matter tended to be dealt with using internal disciplinary procedures and Canon Law. The Gardaí were not informed. On the rare occasions when the Department was informed, it colluded in the silence”.¹⁹ The Murphy Report also details how “a number of very senior members of the Gardaí, including the Commissioner in 1960, clearly regarded priests as being outside their remit. There are some examples of Gardaí actually reporting complaints to the Archdiocese instead of investigating them”.²⁰ The Ferns Report likewise found that “before 1990 there appears to have been reluctance on the part of individual Gardai to investigate properly some cases of child sexual abuse that came to their attention”.²¹ Mathews describes *Well-Remembered Days* as “an adult version of *Father Ted*” in its inclusion of material that “that just wouldn't have fitted into the TV show”.²² *Well-Remembered Days* is thus more overt in its targeting of “the scandals” and the mutually collusive relationship between Church and State.

Similarly, in *Father Ted*, Ted chuckles about “those Protestants, up to no good as usual” when the Reverend Green is posited as the culprit in a game of *Cluedo* (“The Passion of Saint Tibulus”, S1). This mild sectarianism is amplified in *Well-Remembered Days* into O’Ceallaigh’s stridency about “Protestantism, and its malignant influence on Irish life” (WRD,38). O’Ceallaigh recalls how “my parents ... had taught me that to be a Protestant was to be in league with the very devil itself, and always to bless myself and cross the street if I came upon one. (My father would always have a bath, complete with lemon-scented disinfectant, if he suspected that he had seen a ‘Prod’ at first hand). Merely thinking about them gave me the shivers” (WRD,39). O’Ceallaigh describes “The Protestant Mind” as:

meticulous. It is ideally suited to tackle mathematical problems and algebraic puzzles ... [and] is confused by the spiritual world ... When it cannot comprehend the goodness and grace of the One True Faith of Catholicism, it takes refuge in the structural simplicity of Protestantism. The mind that might easily

spend several hours on a train journey pondering a crossword in *The Irish Times* [The *Irish Times* being described by Tom Inglis, “a daily newspaper with a Protestant, Anglo-Irish tradition which is read mainly by urban middle-class, well-educated liberals”] would be disturbed and disorientated by the notion that contraception is wrong” (WRD,40).²³

To this end, O’Ceallaigh proposes distributing an educational pamphlet “The Protestant Mind”, though his plans are quashed as the pamphlet “was judged to be, according to a (Protestant) official in the Department of Education who took offence at it, ‘as inherently fascistic as eliminationist anti-Semitism” (WRD,40). O’Ceallaigh also explains that ahead of the 1979 papal visit, he “wrote several letters to the newspapers proposing that Protestants in the country might wish to spend the duration of his visit with their brethren in Northern Ireland, thus rendering our little state ‘Protestant Free’, something that I’m sure would have thrilled the Holy Father greatly” (WRD,170).

As outlined in the introduction, the Catholic Church consolidated its power in the nineteenth century in part by progressively affiliating itself with the nationalist movement. As a result, Catholicism, nationalism and ‘Irishness’ became increasingly conflated in the collective imaginary. Leeann Lane explains that “the key notion [arose] that to be national or Gaelic was to be Catholic” and that “this essentialist view of Irishness and Irish culture based on religion was to reach its zenith during the debates of the cultural revival ... in the words of DP Moran, the true Catholic was the true Gael”.²⁴ DP Moran was a turn-of-the-century writer and polemicist whose *Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (1905) — first published between 1898 and 1900 as a series of articles in the *New Ireland Review* — argues that “the Irish nation is *de facto* a Catholic nation”.²⁵ A corollary of this equation of Irishness and Catholicism, Paul Delaney explains, was that Moran looked upon Irish Protestants as “resident aliens”²⁶:

According to Moran’s logic, Protestants were “assigned the status of ‘the English who happened to be born in Ireland’. In Moran’s argument Protestants could never be truly Irish, regardless of acts of apostasy or cultural repudiation; they could never fully participate in the life of the nation, no matter how they might learn to speak or write Irish; and they would always be adjudged alien by so-called ‘thoroughgoing Irish’ considerations ... Denying the Protestant role in Irish nationality, he declared that non-Catholic knowledge of the indices of Irish identity ... was historically incongruous ... Moran found that since “he does not understand Ireland”, the Protestant cannot be considered Irish”.²⁷

As such, although Protestants were officially branded “heretics” by the Catholic Church until 1964 (the Second Vatican Council redefining them in that year as “separated communities”), O’Ceallaigh’s paranoia about Protestants can be understood as emanating not just from Catholicism in its purely catechistic or doctrinal form, but instead as an only slightly exaggerated version of this “Irish Ireland” mindset, and which “ensured that a very specific and narrow image of what constituted Irishness was carried into the independent State established in 1922”.²⁸ As such, as post-Catholic Ireland is undergoing a reassessment of its Catholic past and exploring the less savoury elements of this heritage, this religious sectarianism is one aspect of this past which now sits particularly uncomfortable and provides a particular target in texts such as *Well-Remembered Days*.

Lane also explains how, in the post-independent state, “political insecurity merged with cultural angst to aggressively promote the notion of a distinctly Catholic and Gaelic nation which had to be preserved from alien and immoral cultural influences”.²⁹ This protectionism is another aspect of the Catholic past which is targeted by Mathews from the post-Catholic consciousness, and lampooned via the mouthpiece of O’Ceallaigh. O’Ceallaigh is indeed virulent in protecting Ireland from the “corruption” of modernity and the outside world. In 1938, he takes up employment “on the National Censorship Board, which had been founded some years before after a recommendation by the Committee on Evil Literature, a body formed to combat the influx of modern novels and stupid ideas into the country” (WRD,78), explaining “our job on the board” was “simple: to ban as many books as possible” (WRD,79). He describes the board as “a way of keeping the devil at bay” (WRD,87).³⁰

His staunchest ally in this cultural protectionism is life-long friend Gloinn MacTire, whom he describes as “scourge of the liberal agenda, enemy of the contraceptive society” (WRD,69) and in possession of “a passion for his country and his religion that is lamentably rare in these dark days” (WRD,70). O’Ceallaigh recalls of their schooldays how he and Gloinn “discussed religion and that national question ... I say ‘discussed’ but we really just talked about how great it was to be an Irish Catholic in the 1920s”, and are united by their “unswerving conviction ... in a thirty-two county Protestant-free Catholic Republic” (WRD,37). They co-found a sodality entitled The League of the Mother of God Against Sin in 1935 as they “did not wish to see anti-Irish and anti-Catholic forces emerged without any agencies to combat their propaganda” (WRD,70). O’Ceallaigh also recruits the Irish language to his cause as a bulwark against foreign liberalism, again satirising the “Irish Ireland” mentality. Paul Delaney outlines how:

Perceiving Irish as a safeguard against the influence of foreign or ‘evil’ publications, Moran remarked that ‘its revival will help with the return of nobler

and more Christian ideals ... All nerves and energies must now be strained for an Irish Ireland ... The land has to be made an Irish-speaking land ... One language must be the vernacular, and language must be Irish. There is no other way. Irish as the vernacular of Ireland, as in the nature of things it must be, will clear up and clear out a lot of things automatically, and it will automatically call many desirable things into being'.³¹

O'Ceallaigh similarly vaunts the Irish language as purported evidence of Irish moral superiority, describing it as “probably the best language in the world” (WRD,9), and arguing that “there are no words in the Irish language for the more base experiments in sexuality. It proves to me that the Irish race is an essentially pure breed, and that the horrific onslaught of liberalism from England and America is essentially alien to us” (WRD,35), again demonstrating how, as Lane puts it, the “the traditional ‘story’ of Ireland ... designated all things Irish as worthy and all English cultural and other influences as negative, hostile and corrupting”.³²

Indeed, one of the main lines of inquiry of this thesis has been to examine the manifestations, consequences and critiques of how this “*catholicisme du type irlandaise*” has “generally seen desire, especially sexual desire, as a negative human quality, in need of repression”.³³ Like Mrs Doyle in *Father Ted*, O'Ceallaigh is simultaneously fixated upon and phobic about sex, which he describes as “at best a humiliating and at worst an utterly degrading experience” (WRD,143). Though he marries, he remains a life-long virgin, explaining that “myself and Noreen [his wife] had agreed not to consummate our marriage until we had received counsel and instruction from my parish priest” (WRD,72). The priest they consult advises O'Ceallaigh “not to make a move (on Noreen) until ‘the time was right’” (WRD,72), advice about which O'Ceallaigh comments “I knew that the time would never be ‘right’ for a move on Noreen, and I was thankful that one of the greatest gifts I could give to my new wife would be to free her from the threat of sexual conquest; the ‘lurking dark beast’ that has wrecked so many other marriages” (WRD,73). This satirically recalls Patsy McGarry’s observations, already cited in Chapter Two, that “sensuality was suppressed in the Irish consciousness ... Sexual pleasure was taboo. It was commonly described as ‘dirty’, ‘disgusting’, powerful evidence of an inferior animal nature which constantly threatened what was divine in the human”.³⁴

However, also like Mrs Doyle, for all that O'Ceallaigh trumpets his purported “lack of any recognisable sexual appetite” (WRD,118), and declares himself to have a “complete non-interest” (WRD,41) in matters sexual, sex permeates *Well-Remembered Days* from its opening lines, suggesting along Foucauldian lines — as did *Father Ted* — that this knee-jerk

repudiation of sex both masks and results in a neurotic sexual obsessiveness for laity and clergy alike. The text opens with O’Ceallaigh outlining how:

In 1997, as part of research for a book I was working on at the time, I found myself sitting in the living room of a clerical friend of mine, Father Bunny Long (also my co-author on the project), watching a videotape entitled ‘1,001 Blow Jobs’ ... To his great credit, Father Long - a man in his seventies, who has spent most of his life working as [a] parish priest in village of Dowerglass in County Limerick - despite being in obvious distress, soldiered on through the disturbing video with a grim determination to ‘get the job done’. (WRD,3)

Though O’Ceallaigh ostensibly recounts this anecdote as a lead-in to a homily about how early twentieth-century Ireland was sexually innocent (indeed, ignorant) by comparison, and to decry the subsequent sexual liberalisation, it instead points to a culture of pathological sexual repression. The priest whom O’Ceallaigh and Noreen consult for marital advice is similarly salacious, O’Ceallaigh explaining how the cleric “took a particular interest in Noreen’s innermost sexual thoughts, constantly urging her on to reveal more” (WRD,72). Mac Tire is likewise wracked by sexual frustration, and, like O’Ceallaigh, his marriage remains unconsummated; O’Ceallaigh explains that “[MacTire] once told me that he ‘loved sex’ and couldn’t stop thinking about it all the time. Crippling images of the tawdriest nature would leap into his head at all hours of the day and night and torment him so much that he even considered exorcism” (WRD,117). Sexuality is again configured as a disruptive, destructive and even demonic force.

Mathews also explains that allied to O’Ceallaigh’s purported “opposition to sex” is that O’Ceallaigh is “totally against women, in any form. In fact I was going to call the book *Against Women* as a play on [John McGahern’s acclaimed novel] *Amongst Women*, but didn’t in the end”, the paternalism of Father Ted developing into outright misogyny in *Well-Remembered Days*.³⁵ This is evinced in the abstract in O’Ceallaigh’s abhorrence of “feminesbiamism”, as is his neologism for the forces of Irish feminism, declaring that “the modern feminesbian is a vocal and abrasive propagandist for the overthrow of society” (WRD,206), and in the particular in his attitude towards his wife Noreen. Noreen is dogged by ill-health, and O’Ceallaigh details “the numerous illnesses and afflictions that would torment her constantly until the merciful relief of her long-overdue death” (WRD,104). However, rather than displaying any sympathy towards or concern for his wife, he is concerned only with “the considerable inconveniences and irritations that these caused *me*, and on more than one occasion I was forced to pray to God for an early release for my wife. Sadly it was not to be,

and her poor health would plague *me* for another thirty years [emphasis added]" (WRD,104). As with the clerics in *Father Ted*, O'Ceallaigh fails to attribute to women any subjectivity of their own, in that he can comprehend only how Noreen's ill-health and suffering will impact upon him.

Indeed, following one of Noreen's illnesses, they consult a doctor and O'Ceallaigh reports that "although he recommended a period of rest for Noreen, this was obviously unacceptable to me. To again quote Gloinn's enquiry concerning Mrs Benazir Bhutto's domestic situation: 'Who's going to make the dinner?'" (WRD,104), Gloinn having quipped that being elected head of state would distract Bhutto from her domestic duties. Such sexism appeared in Irish political life in the 1990s. Ailbhe Smyth explains of such logic that during Mary Robinson's 1990 presidential campaign:

There were several attempts made by the rival teams to scupper Mary Robinson's chances of election by implying that women are definitionally, even dangerously, unfit for political office ... The most extraordinary and wildly inept swipe was made by a government minister virtually at the eleventh hour. In a national radio programme on 3 November, Pádraig Flynn tried to undermine Mary Robinson's credibility by implying that her success in the campaign was attributable to clever image construction and had, furthermore, been achieved at the expense of her family responsibilities. None of us who knew Mary Robinson will have ever heard her claiming to be a great wife and mother. [She was] constructed [for the campaign] with new clothes and new look and her new hairdo and even a new interest in being a great wife and mother. (Pádraig Flynn, "Saturday View," RTÉ. Reported in the Irish Independent, 5/11/90)³⁶

However, as Smyth explains, "the minister's gratuitous attack backfired mightily, evoking the palpable rage of women voters especially. The incident has been seen as a turning point in the flow of votes towards Mary Robinson"³⁷ Flynn was also satirised in *Scrap Saturday* in a series of sketches entitled "The Flynnstones", in which Flynn was at the helm of a "hilarious stone age family", thereby mocking him as having prehistoric and comically outdated views on gender roles and the status of women, in which Flynn is aghast at the idea of carrying out domestic tasks, saying that in asking him to do the dishes, his wife might as well be handing him a rope.³⁸ Smyth further explains that:

In a culture where women's "place" is still tightly controlled and circumscribed by tradition and by compelling social and economic realities, a prominent, successful and powerful woman is a virtually inexplicable anomaly — she becomes a

"displaced" person, unclassifiable, an unknown quantity — and thus to be feared. This leads to a curious “double-think” tactics, designed to reduce the threat and limit the power: if politics ain't no place for a lady, then either our President is no lady (sub-text: she can't be a "real woman" because politics is a macho pursuit and automatically defeminising) or our Presidency is not "really" political at all.³⁹

This is precisely the attitude similarly targeted and satirised in *Well-Remembered Days* with O'Ceallaigh and MacTire's denigration of Bhutto's domestic capabilities, this being the only context or capacity in which they can comprehend women, and certainly not as realised subjectivities and capable beings in their own rights.

As previously examined, the media were instrumental in the shift from a Catholic to post-Catholic Ireland, and like *Father Ted*, *Well-Remembered Days* pokes fun at the relationship between the Church and the media, which O'Ceallaigh decries as “dominated by feminesbian thinking” (WRD,206) and “hairy heathens”. Reminiscing about the transitional decade of the Sixties, he explains that “sex, thanks in no small part to the arrival of *The Late Late Show* on television in 1962, was making inroads into Irish life, often causing confusion, despondency and fear as it had done in other corners of the world where it had reared its ugly head” (WRD,143). Diarmaid Ferriter describes the remark of “the redoubtable Fine Gael TD, Oliver J Flanagan” that “there was no sex in Ireland before television” as “the most hackneyed phrase to date about the history of sex in twentieth-century Ireland”.⁴⁰ Hackneyed as it may have become, it nonetheless conveys the challenge which the rise of the mass media, and television in particular, posed to Catholicism, in that, as discussed, in the Introduction and Chapter Three, television aired all sorts of views at odds with traditional Catholic thinking, Ferriter adding that “*The Late Late Show* will forever be associated with encouraging more frank and open discussion in this regard”.⁴¹ Louise Fuller explains that “the chat show was a very new genre in Ireland, and in a society where open and frank discussion was an entirely new phenomenon it was understandable that the show should become popular almost overnight. Cherished ideals could be demolished in the course of casual discussion. Television was no respecter of egos or reputations”, and it thus became, Ferriter notes, “the bane of upholders of ‘traditional’ values in relation to sexual morality”, such as O'Ceallaigh.⁴²

O'Ceallaigh equally decries how “the ‘bearded intellectuals’ ... coming into prominence in *The Irish Times* [in the Seventies] ... were desperately trying to loosen the grip of the clergy on the Irish people, through their whingeing columns and frequent television appearances where they would moan about censorship and priests ... Divorce, conversation [sic] and abortion were also ‘high on their agenda’, and it was that the country was about to

enter a dark age of liberalism unless the majority were prepared to put up a fight” (WRD,171). With some playful metatextuality on Mathews’ part, he refers to *Majority Ethos* as “a hard-hitting antidote to the, by now, almost pervasive liberalism in the media” (WRD,189). This is doubly ironic, given both his sexual neuroses and his hostility towards the media. O’Ceallaigh takes up employment as a sex columnist, explaining that “as a result of an article I wrote in *The Cork Examiner* about the changes being brought about by Vatican II, I was asked to become their sex correspondent” (WRD,142). The column is called “The Hornets’ Nest”, a title which again conveys his sense of sex as a social problematic.

O’Ceallaigh’s sexual obsessiveness similarly colours his description of historical figures and events. He describes John F Kennedy as “one man who, as we discovered some years after his death, absolutely loved sex” (WRD,143) and remarks of Kennedy’s 1963 presidential visit to Ireland — “an absolutely huge moment in the history of country” (WRD,143) — that:

As he good-naturedly knocked back the tea and sandwiches ... it is strange to realize now that he was probably thinking about riding Judith Exner.... It is likely, though unprovable, that President Kennedy had an erection the entire time he was in Ireland, even when he was at events that would have been unlikely to ‘turn him on’, such as the laying of a wreath in commemoration of the 1916 martyrs at Arbour Hill. Even while listening to a mind-numbingly dull address by the Mayor of Galway, he probably managed to ‘keep it up’ by fantasising about being in bed with Marilyn Monroe. (WRD,144)

Although much speculation has abounded about Kennedy’s extra-marital affairs, O’Ceallaigh’s own sexual fixations are also strongly apparent in speculation. Conversely, O’Ceallaigh fervently insists upon the sexual purity of Irish historical actors, decrying the “disturbing trend amongst modern revisionist historians ... to portray Padraig Pearse as a homosexual just because he never had any girlfriends and wrote poems about being in love with young boys. This is like saying that someone who goes into a shop, holds up the shopkeeper and takes money from the till, is a thief” (WRD,52) — his logic again working against him and in fact serving to endorse that which he seeks to challenge. O’Ceallaigh is here referring to the controversy aroused by Ruth Dudley Edward’s *Patrick Pearse: the triumph of failure* (1977), in which Edwards claimed that Pearse had latent homosexual tendencies of which he was unaware.⁴³ Retrospectively speaking about the controversy, Edwards describes revisionism as the project of “detach[ing] ourselves from the unremitting nationalist propaganda that distorted our thinking during the 20th century and look[ing] honestly at our past”, and contends that “it is a sign of our increasing self-confidence as a nation that we are

at last beginning to debate without hysteria the sexual inclinations, the failings and the complexities of our traditional heroes".⁴⁴ "Can we accept that our nationalist icons Tone, O'Connell, Parnell, Casement, Pearse and all the rest of them were living, fallible people, not plaster saints?", Edwards asks. O'Ceallaigh's answer to such a question, however, would be a resounding "no". He describes Pearse as "my hero" and decries how revisionism has challenged the "the once unquestioned acceptance of [Pearse's] greatness as a scholar, poet and leader of the Irish people", contending instead that "such was his single-minded determination to die for Ireland under the bloodiest possible circumstances that I doubt if he ever had any thoughts about sex at all" (WRD,52-53).

O'Ceallaigh's portrait of de Valera is similarly hagiographic. As examined in Chapter Four, de Valera functions in contemporary Irish culture as "the secular expression of the dominance of the Catholic Church in the life of the state".⁴⁵ *Well-Remembered Days* offers mock tribute to this dominance, O'Ceallaigh describing how he "once asked [de Valera] if he was forced to make a choice between God and country, which one would he choose. He didn't pause for a second before replying that since God and Ireland were on the same side, he would never be put in such a position" (WRD,81), again configuring Irishness and Catholicism as synonymous. O'Ceallaigh also explains of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* that "[de Valera's] recent constitution made it plain that Ireland would be no place for the non-Catholic" (WRD,81), and that de Valera "saw [the censorship board] as important cogs in the machine of anti-pluralism" (WRD,81) and thereby enforcing the cultural and theological homogeneity of the Free State.⁴⁶ In examining how "de Valera is perceived as having retarded the political, social and economic development of the country" in contemporary culture, Dermot Keogh cautions that "it is relatively easy to 'go with the flow' and make a scapegoat out of [De Valera]. It is possible to inflate and distort the personal influence of de Valera ... on the development of Irish society. Bad biography will tend to follow that particular line".⁴⁷ As *Well-Remembered Days* is deliberately and comically "bad" biography in O'Ceallaigh's skewed and propagandist re-telling of Irish history, this is precisely how de Valera is depicted; O'Ceallaigh approvingly describes de Valera as "an arch conservative who made no secret of the fact that an unthinking devotion to religion should be the main concern in an Irishman's life. He had governed the country in accordance with his own deeply held religious convictions and had quite rightly prioritised the building of churches at the expense of food production, industry, or any kind of prosperity. He had seen that material wealth in other countries had invariably led to the spread of atheism, and was determined that this would not happen in Ireland" (WRD,128), thereby configuring Ireland's pre-Lemassian economic impoverishment as a direct and deliberate consequence of de Valera's piety.

De Valera's political career was a lengthy one and despite losing his eyesight, he remained in public office until his death. O'Ceallaigh details how:

1975 saw the death of Eamon de Valera. He had been blind and mad for decades, but had still spent most of that time in public office. In his later years, as President, he would meet and greet visiting heads of state, most of the time not having the remotest clue who they were. On shaking hands with Charles de Gaulle, the French president was quizzed on questions about golf, camels and Dorothy Lamour. Apparently Dev thought he was Bing Crosby. (WRD,167)

He also describes de Valera signing bills into law under the moniker of "Deputy Dawg". Elizabeth Cullingford describes de Valera as a "lightning rod in the debate between tradition and modernity" and in examining the unfavourable portrait of de Valera in Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996), she argues that "in discrediting all that de Valera stood for [the film] shares the revisionist impulse towards modernity".⁴⁸ *Well-Remembered Days'* savage iconoclasm similarly situates it within this "modernizing social and political critique of de Valera" and the post-Catholic repudiation of the past.⁴⁹

If de Valera has become in contemporary discourse a symbol for the stifling conservatism and conformity of "traditional" Ireland, then so too has John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin and accordingly prelate of Ireland from 1940 to 1972. He also knew de Valera, first as a colleague at Blackrock College, and then entering into correspondence with him during the drafting of the 1937 constitution. Holding, as McQuaid did, a great deal of political influence and temporal power, he has become, Diarmaid Ferriter observes, "for many the ultimate symbol of clerical domination of Irish life" and "the towering figure of twentieth-century Irish Catholicism", the comically bombastic *Well-Remembered Days* likewise presenting him as "a man who bestrode the Ireland of much of this century like some kind of giant, oversized colossus" (WRD,107).⁵⁰ Just as Mathews attempted to disavow any political readings of *Father Ted* because of its "silliness" (a disavowal firmly challenged in Chapter Three), he declared that *Well-Remembered Days* is "too silly to be taken seriously. I don't really have any particular axe to grind with the Catholic Church... some people have difficulty telling the difference between something that is surreal and something that is satirical ... This book is not a satire, it's a surreal autobiography".⁵¹ While the term "surreal" is a back formation from the surrealist movement in art and literature, which sought "to express the subconscious mind by any of a number of different techniques, including the irrational juxtaposition of realistic images, the creation of mysterious symbols, and automatism", the term has taken on more general meaning beyond this specific artistic

movement, and instead operates as a byword for the absurd, comically incongruous or the “silly”, as Mathews terms it.⁵² However, surreality can also be a destabilising technique, for example as when O’Ceallaigh describes having been abducted by aliens “just outside Tullow” (WRD,113) in March 1950, before gravely declaring that “many other people have confined in me, claiming to have been the hapless victims of abductions by creatures from distant planets. This list includes our old friend Archbishop John Charles McQuaid ... ‘captured’ while saying a novena in the grounds of Blackrock College” (WRD,115). The humour and “surreality” of this moment lies in the juxtaposition of alien abduction and so formidable a figure as McQuaid, the incongruity thereby undermining McQuaid’s gravitas via the same comic subversion wrought on de Valera. As Umberto Eco astutely notes, “Let us be realistic, there is nothing more meaningful than a text which asserts that there is no meaning”, and even such ‘silly’ details as McQuaid’s UFO encounter both betoken and contribute to an altered post-Catholic consciousness.⁵³

At the same time, other aspects of McQuaid’s persona and personality targeted by *Well-Remembered Days* are more pointed and cannot but be described as satirical, if “satire demands a heightened state of awareness and mental participation in its audience (not to mention knowledge)”, further refuting Mathews’ claims to political disengagement.⁵⁴ Noel Browne, who described the archbishop as his “most powerful and uncompromising opponent” in the Mother and Child Scheme episode of 1951, bitterly remarked of McQuaid’s Drumcondra residence that “a mansion of such proportions might seem contrary to McQuaid’s priestly vow of poverty but it fitted his perception of his special status as Primate of a Catholic nation”.⁵⁵ O’Ceallaigh — who is also the beneficiary of an all-expenses paid trip to Rio de Janeiro, courtesy of the prelate — likewise recalls of a 1945 visit to the episcopal palace that McQuaid’s “palatial living room ... was filled with leopard-skin rugs, busts from ancient Rome, hunting trophies, original masterpieces by Titian and Vermeer” (WRD,108). Such opulence is contrary to the instruction in the Catechism that “detachment from riches is obligatory for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven”.⁵⁶

This is not the most damning detail about the furnishings, however. Rather, O’Ceallaigh describes how adorning McQuaid’s living room were “signed photographs of Mussolini, Franco, and various Hollywood film stars. He did not yet have an autographed picture of Hitler, but was expecting one by return of post — although he feared that ‘Adolf’ (I was impressed that they seemed to be on first name terms) might be preoccupied with other matters” (WRD,108). As post-Catholic Ireland has, as discussed in the Introduction, become more “Protestant” in its shift away from the Church’s authority towards individualism and private morality, Ferriter notes that McQuaid is looked upon as “very much an enforcer of

what today is often depicted as a suffocating, repressive and authoritarian church”⁵⁷ In a special issue of Jesuit journal *Studies* devoted to McQuaid, editor Noel Barber regretfully notes McQuaid’s status as a “symbol of the bad old days when church and state were linked in an illiberal alliance”, but seeks to contextualise McQuaid’s authoritarian mien by emphasising that “he was certainly autocratic but that was then the way of eminent ecclesiastics. He grew to maturity during the Age of the Dictators: Franco, Salazar, Mussolini, Hitler, on some of whom the Church looked benignly”⁵⁸ Of course, while this may contextualise McQuaid’s politics, it nonetheless casts the institutional Church in a less than exemplary light with regards to its accommodation towards fascism, and exemplifies how adept Mathews is at picking up on and amplifying aspects of Ireland’s Catholic past that sit particularly uncomfortably in an altered social climate.

John Cooney, whose controversial biography of the archbishop was published in 1999, also described McQuaid as “totally obsessed with sex”, as manifested in:

The imposition of a very severe code of sexual conduct, the opposition to ‘filthy’ books and the opposition to the great writers, the snooping on people about their sexual mores, the obsession with purity, segregation of boys and girls, that girls have to be primarily trained in domestic education, to be housewives and so forth, the very fact that he’s against mixed sports ... he’s almost like Ceausescu [Romania’s former dictator] or any of those Eastern European leaders — he’s bringing Ireland more and more under a kind of spiritual terrorism that is austere, that is backward-looking and which is also pretty strict theologically.⁵⁹

Ferriter, in contrast, stresses that that “increased sexual permissiveness was not [McQuaid’s] only preoccupation ... McQuaid was, more often than not, preoccupied with controlling discussion of religion. Sex was only one of the areas with which he was concerned, and he was sometimes preoccupied with it precisely because he realized there was a growing resistance to traditional Catholic teaching in relation to sexual morality” as the shift from a Catholic to post-Catholic Ireland got underway from the 1960s onwards.⁶⁰ An image of McQuaid as zealously intolerant of any sexual expressionism has nonetheless engaged the popular imagination in the post-Catholic moment. For example, McQuaid is described in the media as “surely ... turning in his grave” about a 2010 Sexuality Studies conference which took place in Dublin City University — close to his former episcopal residence as DCU is located — as such frank discussion about and acceptance of diverse sexualities is firmly in contrast to his stringent repressiveness.⁶¹

This image of McQuaid also leads itself to caricature particularly easily, such as in *Well-Remembered Days*, when the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is printed in abbreviated form as “Immac” on a devotional calendar. This is brought to the Archbishop’s attention by the ever-vigilant O’Ceallaigh, as “Immac, of course, was a popular product used to stop hair growing out of women’s legs. It may have been an innocent enough mistake, but it was also an error which could easily cause offence to many parishioners” (WRD,109). The calendar is duly withdrawn from circulation. Similarly, when RTÉ produces a documentary on illegitimacy, O’Ceallaigh explains that McQuaid “began to mutter that there was such a thing as a just war and that often people have to die in order for the greater good to triumph. He also used terms such as ‘rub them out’ and seemed to be familiar with aspects of machine gunning. Later, myself and Gloinn both agreed that the Archbishop must have been a big fan of the American television programme *The Untouchables* [an early Sixties crime series]” (WRD,109). McQuaid is thus presented as so despotic a figure, and so absolute about enforcing an environment from which sexuality is absent, that even discussing illegitimacy is unacceptable. His portrait in *Well-Remembered Days* is thus an example of what Deirdre McMahon describes as “the crude caricatures of hidebound Catholic reaction with which McQuaid has become identified since his death”.⁶²

In addition to caricaturing McQuaid as authoritarian, quasi-fascist and sexually repressive, *Well-Remembered Days* also offhandedly mentions that McQuaid has posthumously been dogged by “the usual rumours” of paedophilia and homosexuality attaching themselves to members of the clergy in Nineties Ireland. This alludes to the controversy aroused by Cooney’s biography of the prelate, which, based on private and unpublished papers of Noel Browne, alleged that McQuaid had paedophilic tendencies. Commentators objected that Cooney’s information and sources were biased, uncorroborated and vague. Kevin Myers, for example, wryly noted that he had never envisaged himself coming to the defence of McQuaid, instead ranking it alongside the likelihood of “rub[bing] salt in my eye ... or stick[ing] my tongue in a live-socket”, objected that “we seem able to convict a man of being a pederast on evidence so risible that it wouldn’t even pass muster in a Stalinist show trial”.⁶³ Cooney’s response was that not only did he have an “academic duty” to include the allegations in his book, but that the strength of feeling which they aroused was “a reminder that the censorious shadow of Archbishop McQuaid still permeates the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger.”⁶⁴ (It subsequently emerged, however, that “two child sex abuse complaints against ... McQuaid, as well as a separate ‘concern’, were brought to the attention of the Murphy commission, which investigated the handling of clerical child sex abuse complaints in the Dublin archdiocese”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, regardless of McQuaid’s personal

culpability or otherwise in perpetrating abuse, a damning picture of him emerges from the Murphy Report. The report found that in dealing with “Fr Edmondus” — “the pseudonym”, Patsy McGarry explains, “used ... for Fr Paul McGennis, who abused Marie Collins in 1960 when she was a patient at Our Lady’s Hospital for Sick Children” and who was discovered to have taken sexually explicit pictures of children — McQuaid’s actions “were aimed at the avoidance of scandal and showed no concern for the welfare of children”.⁶⁶ Furthermore, McQuaid’s failure to act set a pernicious precedent, in that “the apparent cancellation by Archbishop McQuaid of his original plan to pursue the priest through the procedures of canon law was a disaster. It established a pattern that lasted for decades of not holding abusers accountable. Firmer treatment of this priest might have avoided much abuse in the future”.⁶⁷)

If, as Cooney argues, McQuaid’s reputation operates as “an index by which to measure the subsequent dramatic decline of the Catholic Church’s influence in society”, and if in the archbishop’s falling-from-grace the shift from a Catholic to post-Catholic climate can be traced, O’Ceallaigh himself is keenly aware of this shift.⁶⁸ Having explained that “censorship in Ireland ... had gone to hell by the 1990s. Basically, everything was allowed and it was almost impossible to stem the flow of filth coming at us from all sides” (WRD,195), O’Ceallaigh recognises that “in Ireland of the new millennium ... there is precious left of the Ireland of my youth, except for Gloinn and the constant begrudgery” (WRD,201). “The country as I first knew it is dead and gone” (WRD,201), he laments, lost to “the full horrors of Sixties liberalism” (WRD,161). O’Ceallaigh’s lament for the past also satirises the conventions of contemporary Irish autobiography: Clare Lynch notes that the past is consistently configured in this body of work as entirely “other” to the present, be that as an example of the “bad old days” which have disappeared, or alternatively as a more innocent age whose demise the author laments⁶⁹:

Whatever the author’s response to the past explored through the autobiography, it was by necessity always in direct contrast to the present ... [This] distinction, which constructs the past as a place and time crucially ‘other’ to the present, forms the basis of modern Irish autobiography’s narrative structure. Whereas autobiography is commonly understood to link the two, thereby constructing a unified narrative of the author’s life, late twentieth-century Irish autobiographies often emphasise seemingly insurmountable contrasts between the two time zones ... Late twentieth-century autobiographers were divorced from their past and their past selves by both symbolic and geographical distances perhaps more so than any previous generation of writers.⁷⁰

One of the main reasons for this generational divide, as has been argued consistently throughout this thesis, has been the shift from a Catholic to post-Catholic habitus, and the societal turnaround regarding the role of the Church. O’Ceallaigh is aware that his views are no longer hegemonic, and that, to borrow a phrase from another Irish autobiography, *nach mbeidh a leitheid ann arís*. The “Catholic life” of the title is no more, having been thoroughly satirised and rejected throughout, with “Catholic” functioning not in the lower-case “catholic” sense of wide-ranging and inclusive, but rather as a byword for intolerance, prejudice and exclusion. Of all the texts examined throughout this thesis, *Well-Remembered Days* is the most scornful of the Catholic past and this narrative of Irish identity, and one which is unremitting in its rejection of the Church and Catholic ideology in Irish life.

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- 1 Touher, *Fear of the Collar: My Terrifying Childhood in Artane. Scars That Run Deep: Sometimes the Nightmares Don't End* (London: Ebury, 2008). Paddy Doyle, *The God Squad* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1988). Michael Clemenger, *Holy Terrors: A Boy, Two Brothers, a Stolen Childhood* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2010). Bernadette Fahy, *Freedom of Angels* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1999). Sean Hogan, *In Harm's Way* (London: Arrow Books, 2008).
 - 2 Liam Harte, "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment," in *Modern Irish Autobiography: Self, Nation and Society*, ed. Liam Harte (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 12. Claire Lynch similarly situates these texts by explaining how “Linda Anderson has examined the implications of using autobiography as a form of both self-defence and cultural preservation, arguing that autobiography “can become the ‘text of the oppressed’, articulating through one person’s experience, experiences which may be representative of a particular marginalised group” so that it becomes both a form of “testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition”, Claire Lynch, *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, ed. Eamon Maher, Reimagining Ireland (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 10.
 - 3 Harte, "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment," 12.
 - 4 George O'Brien, "Memoirs of an Autobiographer," *ibid.*, 233; "Memoirs of an Autobiographer," 232.
 - 5 See for example Lynch, *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*. Roy Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It up in Ireland* (London: Penguin, 2001).
 - 6 Harte, "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment," 1.
 - 7 *Ibid.*
 - 8 "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment," 2.
 - 9 Michael Kenneally differentiates memoir, which he describes as “essentially a record of one’s participation in public events” and in which “personal feelings and responses are recounted to explain, clarify, or perhaps justify actions in the external world”, from autobiography, as concerned primarily with the “private significance of public experiences, the role they have played in shaping individual consciousness developing through historical time”. However, Claire Lynch counters that a firm distinction between memoir and autobiography does not hold in the Irish context, as the genre has been strikingly concerned with wider national events, and not just private experience in isolation. Lynch, *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, 140. Arthur Mathews, *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O'ceallaigh's Memoir of a Twentieth-Century Catholic Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001). All page numbers refer to this edition of the text.
 - 10 Brian Boyd, "It's Not a Satire, It's Surreal," *Irish Times*, 10 March 2001.
 - 11 Harte, "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment," 3. See also Lynch, *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*. Harte, "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment."
 - 12 "Introduction: Autobiography and the Irish Cultural Moment," 3.
 - 13 Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, 25.
 - 14 Lynch, *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, 9.
 - 15 *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, 7.
 - 16 Cleary, "Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology in Contemporary Irish Culture," 108. *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland*, 7.
 - 17 See also Terry Eagleton's review of the text, Eagleton, "A Side-Splitting Spoof."

- 18 ""Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," 4.
- 19 "Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse," 23.
- 20 "Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," 24.
- 21 Murphy, Buckley, and Joyce, "The Ferns Report, Presented by the Ferns Inquiry to the Minister for Health and Children," 253.
- 22 Boyd, "It's Not a Satire, It's Surreal."
- 23 Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 216.
- 24 Lane, "Ireland: Identities and Cultural Traditions," 230-31.
- 25 DP Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish-Ireland*, ed. Patrick Maume (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006). Lane, "Ireland: Identities and Cultural Traditions," 230.
- 26 Paul Delaney, "Dp Moran and *the Leader*: Writing an Irish Ireland through Partition," *Eire-Ireland*, no. Fall/Winter (2003): 190.
- 27 "Dp Moran and *the Leader*: Writing an Irish Ireland through Partition," *Eire-Ireland*, no. Fall/Winter (2003): 191; "Dp Moran and *the Leader*: Writing an Irish Ireland through Partition," 194.
- 28 Foster explains that subsequent to the Second Vatican Council's 1964 session on ecumenism, "no longer were Protestants defined as heretics and schismatics, but as 'separated communities'". Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 231.
- 29 Lane, "Ireland: Identities and Cultural Traditions," 238.
- 30 Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 31 Delaney, "Dp Moran and *the Leader*: Writing an Irish Ireland through Partition," 200.
- 32 "Dp Moran and *the Leader*: Writing an Irish Ireland through Partition," 238.
- 33 O'Brien, "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse," 50-51..
- 34 Patsy McGarry, "The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland," *ibid.*
- 35 Boyd, "It's Not a Satire, It's Surreal."
- 36 Smyth, ""A Great Day for the Women of Ireland..." The Meaning of Mary Robinson's Presidency for Irish Women," 64-65.
- 37 ""A Great Day for the Women of Ireland..." The Meaning of Mary Robinson's Presidency for Irish Women," 65.
- 38 Morgan et al., *Scrap the Collection*.
- 39 Smyth, ""A Great Day for the Women of Ireland..." The Meaning of Mary Robinson's Presidency for Irish Women," 64.
- 40 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 374. See also Ronan McDonald, "Irish Literature: Tradition and Modernity," in *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century British Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 653.
- 41 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 374. See also Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution*, 8. Fuller, "The Irish Catholic Narrative: Reflections on Milestones," 175.
- 42 *Ibid.* Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 374.
- 43 Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977), 127. For a more recent biography of Pearse, see Joost Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse: The Making of a Revolutionary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 44 Ruth Dudley Edwards, "The Terrible Legacy of Patrick Pearse," *Irish Independent*, 14 April 2001.
- 45 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 8.
- 46 In de Valera's partial defense, Cullingford points out that "although it was his Cumann na nGaedheal opponents who introduced censorship in 1929, de Valera showed no desire to increase the freedoms of the press or of literature", *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 224.
- 47 Dermot Keogh, "Towards a Biography of an Archbishop," *Studies: an Irish quarterly review*, no. Winter (1998).
- 48 Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 8. *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 233..
- 49 *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, 9.
- 50 Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004), 411.
- 51 Boyd, "It's Not a Satire, It's Surreal."
- 52 OED definition.

- 53 Quoted by Abate, "Taking Silliness Seriously: Jim Henson's *the Muppet Show*, the Anglo-American Tradition of Nonsense, and Cultural Critique," 594.
- 54 Gray, Jones, and Thompson, "The State of Satire, the Satire of State," 15.
- 55 Keogh, "Towards a Biography of an Archbishop," 205.
- 56 Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2556.
- 57 Diarmaid Ferriter, "Sex and the Archbishop: John Charles McQuaid and Social Change in 1960s Ireland," in *Turning Points in Twentieth-Century Irish History*, ed. Thomas E Hachey (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 137.
- 58 Noel Barber, "A Remarkable Figure in Post-Independence Ireland," *Studies* 87, no. 348 (1998): 335.. Ferriter also cautions against making McQuaid "(along with deValera) a scapegoat for an authoritarian, repressed and censorious society" by contextualising him in his time. Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, 520. See also Brian Fallon, "Reflecting on Ireland in the 1950s," in *Ireland in the 1950s: The Lost Decade*, ed. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea, and Carmel Quinlan (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004). Patsy McGarry, "Journal Deplores 'Bias' in Hostility to McQuaid," *Irish Times*, 29 December 1998.
- 59 Quoted in Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 338-39.
- 60 *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 340-41. See also "Sex and the Archbishop: John Charles McQuaid and Social Change in 1960s Ireland."
- 61 Alison Healy, "Flip Side of Church Bowing out of Sex Issues," *Irish Times*, 16 March 2010.
- 62 Cited in Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, 339.
- 63 Kevin Myers, "Irishman's Diary," *Irish Times*, 1 December 1999.
- 64 "Author Criticises Media Distortion," *ibid.*, 18 November..
- 65 Patsy McGarry, "Archbishop McQuaid Subject of Child Sex Abuse Complaints," *ibid.*, 8 December 2011.
- 66 "McQuaid's Actions Aimed at Avoiding Scandal – without Concern for Young," *Irish Times*, 8 December 2011. "Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," 11.
- 67 "Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin," 206.
- 68 John Horgan, "McQuaid Has Been Betrayed by His Voluminous Archive," *Irish Times*, 12 May 2003.
- 69 Roy Foster, for example, offers a sardonic contrast between the versions of the Irish past offered in *Angela's Ashes* and Alice Taylor's bucolic *To School Through the Fields*: "Charity is cold [in McCourt's text], the kindness of strangers almost non-existent, and the remnants of the family end up living with a repulsive cousin, whom the passive and exhausted mother is forced to sleep with ... Simultaneously, in a parallel universe, little Alice Taylor is out there in the countryside saving the hay and milking the cows and quenching the lamp. It would all come as something of a surprise to her". Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It up in Ireland*, 168.
- 70 Lynch, *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, 22; *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*, 141.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to propose, develop and interrogate the concept of turn-of-the-millennium Ireland as post-Catholic. By “post-Catholic”, it did not seek to imply that Catholicism has disappeared entirely from Irish life or culture, or that there has been a wholesale abandonment of faith. Rather, it emphasised that the Catholic Church had occupied so powerful a position in the post-independent State, and Catholicism had been so central to Irish society and the national self-identity alike, but that recent decades had seen profound changes in the relationship between both Church and State, and between individuals and the institutional Church. It outlined how, while changes in the position of the Catholic Church in Irish society had been underway since the 1960s, given the wider social transformations both domestically and abroad, the “scandals” of the Nineties and into the new millennium heightened the sense of crisis and expedited this process. It argued that the dissolution of the Church’s hegemony therefore constituted a paradigm sociopolitical shift, one which could best be described as the transition from a Catholic habitus to a post-Catholic society.

Furthermore, by adopting the Cultural Studies approach that culture is one domain in which a society manifests its anxieties, concerns – and, in the case of institutional abuse, its traumas – this thesis proposed that this shift has been keenly evinced in literature and popular culture, with social change being not only reflected in but also effected by culture. As Angela McRobbie notes, “the superficial does not necessarily represent a decline into meaningless or valuelessness in culture”, and what has emerged from the analyses undertaken in this thesis are the various and varying ways in which both Catholic ideology and the institutional Church have been challenged, pilloried, satirised, rejected, and remediated across a variety of popular cultural forms, from pop music to chick-lit novels to sitcom to television drama.¹ Chapter Four cited Luke Gibbons’ observation that the task fell

to Irish cinema of the 1980s to “discharge the excess that could not be accommodated within the language of broadcasting, journalism or indeed the courtroom” vis-à-vis the divorce and abortion referenda, and a central finding of this thesis has been that popular culture has operated similarly in more recent years, allowing Irish society a space in which to work through the traumas, upheavals and indeed liberations of the shift to a post-Catholic habitus. In this sense, popular culture has functioned as somewhat of a ‘release mechanism’ for the collective psyche, acting as a discursive forum in which to come to terms with these emotive and distressing events.

Firstly, this thesis examined how Marian Keyes’s skillful negotiation of the chick-lit novel allows Keyes to write back against conservative Catholicism and the maternalisation of Irish women, supplanting the “Irish Catholic Mammy” with a younger, sexually active generation of Irish women who do not define their subjectivity in terms of their maternal duties. Keyes’ championing of female sexuality and her exploration of topics such as abortion and divorce further aligns her with the “modernising” move away from the Church. In Keyes’ hands, the chick-lit novel becomes a vehicle for feminist critique, proving that chick-lit does not necessarily mean that Irish women writers have become depoliticised, but rather are continuing feminist resistance to Catholicism and the Catholic ethos of the State in contemporary form.

This thesis then turned to the work of Maeve Binchy, highlighting how Binchy similarly explores discourses of female sexuality and desire in opposition to the traditional Catholic discourse of sin and virtue, albeit in a less overt and explicit fashion than Keyes. It demonstrated how by focusing a keen observational eye on Irish sociosexual norms and social formations, Binchy’s work highlights the difficulties and dilemmas faced by her protagonists in negotiating these cultural codes. Furthermore, Binchy shows the enormous transformations in the authority ceded to the Church and the transition from a Catholic habitus to post-Catholic society to have import for clergy and laity alike; that which was scandalous in one decade, forming a central plotline in Binchy’s earlier novels and short stories, goes largely unremarked upon in another, and is simply mentioned in passing in her later work, for example illegitimate pregnancy and laicisation.

In *Father Ted*, meanwhile, “the idea that the Church has some sort of negative attitude towards women”, as Ted indignantly puts it, is exploited for comic purpose. This thesis focused on how *Ted* satirises and thereby subverts Catholic doctrine and Church teachings on issues such as contraception and homosexuality, with Mrs Doyle being the exemplar of repressed sexuality under a severe and Jansenist cultural code. It also explored how the

sitcom format of *Ted* variously allows for satire, ribald farce and comic set-pieces, all of which undermine the Church's traditional authority further.

While the high-profile cases of priests fathering children provided the plotlines for episodes such as "The Passion of Saint Tibulus" in *Father Ted*, the programme made only fleeting reference to the abuse scandals, such material perhaps lying outside the bounds of sitcom. At the same time, the institutional abuses in both the industrial schools and Magdalene laundries acted as the basis for a large body of films and plays, a selection of which was examined in Chapter Four. Victoria Connor notes that "*States of Fear* acted as the catalyst for a barrage of texts – autobiographical and fictional – that simultaneously led and reflected attitudes towards the industrial schools and the children who had been incarcerated in them. The subject has now moved into the national consciousness and as such has begun to be appropriated for 'entertainment' in genre fiction and film. While this raises ethical issues, it demonstrates the absorption of the stories of the children of the industrial schools into the national narrative".² This thesis outlined how this national narrative of abuse has not at its heart not the "imagined community" of the *nation*, but rather the civic entity of the *State*, with *Sinners*, *James X* and *Evelyn* all drawing attention to the role of the Irish State in the institutional regimes. In addition, as per Connor's remarks, this chapter also explored the competing ethical and aesthetic demands on such texts. For example, Aisling Walsh's commitment to revealing the full ignominies of the Magdalene regime in *Sinners* meant that the film earned criticism from reviewers for its unremitting bleakness, in terms of both its dramatic arc and visual feel. Conversely, *Evelyn's* intentional "feel-good" tenor incurred censure from survivors of institutional abuse. What also emerged from this chapter were the intersections between message and medium in the institutional narratives. The visuality of film, for example, allows for innovative engagement with theological figures in both *Sinners* and *Evelyn*, in that both frame shots of religious statues at key moments in the text, *Sinners* to configure the Virgin Mary as the theological basis for the Magdalene regimes, while in *Evelyn* to champion the figure of St Joseph. The performativity of *James X* equally furthers the power and political import of the play as a whole, as breaking with the traditional "fourth wall" of the stage to inculcate the audience as representatives of the State into the performance both allows James to distance himself from what he has experienced, and indicting further the State for its negligence towards those in its "care".

Finally, Chapter Five turned to *Well-Remembered Days: Eoin O'Ceallaigh's memoir of a twentieth-century Catholic life*. It outlined how this mock-lament for the Church's demise simultaneously parodies the prolific Irish autobiographies of the late Nineties "memoir boom" and rejects the entire narrative of post-independent Irish identity predicated upon,

“the three ‘s’s – strong religious faith, super-nationalism and superb love of the Irish language” and in which Irishness and Catholicism were synonymous. This it does by creating such an unsavoury narrator in O’Ceallaigh, who is by turns misogynistic, sectarian, and culturally xenophobic, and presenting such savagely iconoclastic portraits of such totemic figures as Éamon de Valera and John Charles McQuaid. As Roy Foster observes, “the notion of Catholicism as indivisible from Irish nationalism and even from Irish identity might be counted as one of the casualties of the last thirty years’ cultural upheaval”: *Well-Remembered Days* constitutes a post-Catholic distancing from and repudiation of this earlier alliance.³

In Habermasian terms, these texts thus collectively constitute a “public sphere”; through the accumulation of opinion and discussion generated by these popular texts, a discursive space is created in which the dominant entities of Church and State can be critiqued and in which, either explicitly or implicitly, alternative social imaginaries are offered to the previously hegemonic cultural code of conservative Catholicism and the synonymy of Catholicism and Irishness.⁴ As Charles Taylor observes, the public sphere is “a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these”.⁵ Crucial to the notion of the public sphere is its independence from the offices of power, Taylor emphasising that the public sphere is “a space of discussion which is self-consciously seen as being outside power. It is supposed to be listened to by power, but it is not itself an exercise of power. Its in this sense extra-political status is crucial” [sic].⁶ Peter Kuch similarly stresses that “the ‘public sphere’ is ... a liminal politico-cultural space where opinion forms, a space that opens up between, on the one hand, the free expression of individual points-of-view and, on the other hand, the formulated public pronouncements of organizations, clubs, political parties, or any special-interest group that organises itself to the extent that its structures, rules and regulations to some extent control the free expression of its constituent members”.⁷

That the public sphere is distinct from and independent of the entities of Church and State is strongly evident throughout this thesis, in that the popular culture texts examined have variously disclosed, dramatised, criticised and contradicted State inquiries, court ruling, changes in legislation and press revelations. Several of the texts examined bring events and experiences—officially authenticated by the State—into the ‘public sphere’ in such a powerful way that they challenge and critique both Church and State. In *James X*, for example, James’s narrative provides a counter-narrative to the official version of events endorsed by the State, while *Sinners* critiques the role of the State in the Magdalene regime. Marian Keyes’ engagement with the politics of abortion in *Angels* similarly implicitly

challenges the political and cultural silence surrounding this aspect of female experience, meaning that all the texts examined in this thesis have disrupted and displaced the Catholic habitus in the move towards and into a post-Catholic social imaginary instead.

However, if, as this thesis has demonstrated, the Catholic Church no longer occupies a hegemonic position in Irish society and Catholicism no longer constitutes a key component of Irish identity, then what does post-Catholic Irish identity consist of or look like? While the economic going was good, it perhaps appeared that the Celtic Tiger offered an alternative identity or ideology: one of mass consumerism, hypercapitalism, affluence, cosmopolitanism, conspicuous consumption, and high levels of personal debt.⁸ However, the economic crash of 2008 put paid to this, proving this cultural code to be temporary and illusory. As such, as Fintan O'Toole explains, the crash had psychological as well as financial impact: "the sudden demise [of the Celtic Tiger] has been a psychic, as well as an economic shock. Booms always engender hysteria, but what made the Irish one so extreme was that it was filling a void. The Celtic Tiger wasn't just an economic ideology. It was also a substitute identity. It was a new way of being that arrived just at the point when Catholicism and nationalism were not working any more".⁹

Hence, with neither Catholicism nor the Celtic Tiger "working any more" as a dominant "way of being", what is strongly emerging in the post-boom moment is the sense that Irish society is not only financially straitened but also culturally and ideologically adrift and urgently in need of some new mooring points. In "Irish national identity after the Celtic Tiger", Gerry Smyth contends that:

The cornerstone of any new definition of Irish identity must be the development of a new moral vision. By this I mean a model of Irish national identity in which ideas such as responsibility and sustainability have a positive resonance; a model in which the concept of 'value' is not so completely dominated by economics; a model in which the question of what it might be right or wrong – acceptable or unacceptable – to do in any given situation is not left to politicians, bankers or civil servants. But where is such a vision going to come from? Who's going to be responsible for its conception and articulation? Now, traditionally it has been one of the roles of the Catholic Church to provide moral guidance for the society it services; as we've already seen [both the abuse scandals and the stringent sexual codes], however, so far from contributing to a solution to the nation's ills, the Catholic Church constitutes a significant part of the problem in modern Ireland.¹⁰

Smyth is far from alone in offering such counsel, and reflecting upon what collective values or moral code Irish society is to adopt in the wake of the Church's demise. In 2009, for

example, Theo Dorgan compared contemporary Ireland to the glasnost period in the USSR, in that a previously dominant, unquestioned, and unimpeachable ideology had become subject to scrutiny and, ultimately, rejection; “as with Catholicism, so with communism”.¹¹ Like Smyth, Dorgan offered the warning, that “we can already see the damage done in our country's short-lived flirtation with mammon. We have seen what happened when the post-Gorbachev USSR turned to gangster capitalism. We would do well to begin thinking clearly, and very soon, about what we will choose for the moral foundations of a post-Catholic Ireland”.¹²

This thesis does not claim to be able to offer a clear moral blueprint for post-Catholic, post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. However, before arriving at a solution or way forward, one must first understand the problem, take accurate stock of the current situation. Hence, this thesis has insisted upon the centrality of Catholicism to any examination of contemporary Ireland, in that to even begin to decide what values should be adopted and which aspects, if any, of Ireland's Catholic heritage should be carried forward to the post-Catholic State, one needs to first understand how and why Catholicism has been discarded as the dominant cultural code, and what has given rise to such widespread anger and hostility towards the Church. In addition to the grievous abuse scandals, the profound changes in sexual mores and discourses of sexuality which both precipitated and accompanied the dissolution of the Church's hegemony are also particularly important, and although this thesis has focused largely although not exclusively on women's experiences in the face of the enshrinement of Catholic teaching in the legislature of the State, the strict sexual mores and conservative gender norms, these also had implications for men as well, as examined in relation to *Evelyn*. Other valuable studies could explore the intersections between Catholicism and masculinities in more depth, particularly for those who deviated from heteronormativity and proscribed social roles. As such, a feminist cultural criticism is not an optional addendum if Irish Studies is to retain any relevance to the object of its study, i.e.; Ireland, but is central to understanding the State we're in and deciding on the post-Catholic future which awaits. Most pertinently, however, by examining how cultural representations and critiques of the Catholic Church have reached a wide range of Irish people through a wide variety of media with fictive or actual experiences that not only resonate with aspects of common experience but are also substantiated by judicial and governmental enquiries, this thesis has demonstrated how this significant shift in Irish consciousness, instigated by scandal, has been and is still being propelled, enriched and enlarged by popular culture.

1 Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

- 2 Victoria Connor, "A School for Bad Boys': The Representation of the Industrial School System in Patrick Mccabe's *the Butcher Boy*," in *Ireland and Victims: Confronting the Past, Forging the Future*, ed. Eamon Maher (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 175.
- 3 Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*, 37.
- 4 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991).
- 5 Charles Taylor, "On Social Imaginary," <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/swiss/archive/Taylor.pdf>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Peter Kuch, "Theorising the Irish on the Australasian Stage," (Irish Society for Theatre Research, 2010). Unpublished paper.
- 8 Gerry Smyth notes that "the speed with which the Catholic Church's reputation and status dissolved in Ireland is startling ... interestingly, this process of disintegration overlapped significantly with the life of the Celtic Tiger, and many people have speculated as to the relationship between the two trends". Smyth, "Irish National Identity after the Celtic Tiger," 134.
- 9 O'Toole, *Enough Is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, 3.
- 10 Smyth, "Irish National Identity after the Celtic Tiger," 136. Similarly concerned with the moral foundations of Ireland of the future, O'Toole looks to the virtues of austerity: "It is certainly true in Ireland that we have no great choice but to adopt austerity. Equally though, we have a very specific need for it, one that is largely unrelated to the economic collapse. If we think of austerity as a 'public ethic', it can begin to fill the hole that is left where a different kind of ethical system used to be. Morality in Ireland was outsourced to the Church, which defined it for the most part around issues of sexuality and reproduction and paid little attention to public or commercial ethics. Irish people accepted the Church's notion that what happened in the bedroom was of much more moral concern than what happened in the boardroom". O'Toole, *Ship of Fools: How Corruption and Stupidity Sunk the Celtic Tiger*.
- 11 Theo Dorgan, "Scandals Could Undermine the Church's Foundations," *Irish Times*, 14 December 2009. Also cited in Littleton and Maher, "Introduction," 14.
- 12 Dorgan, "Scandals Could Undermine the Church's Foundations."

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