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Irish Identity through the Eyes of a Child in Memoir

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Práce bude obsahovat nástin vývoje irské historie se zvláštním zřetelem na katolicismus, anglo-irské vztahy a některé zásadní historické události tyto vztahy ovlivňující. Dále budou diskutovány specifické aspekty irské kultury a irské národní identity. Literární a teoretický rámec bude definovat otázku identity (především národní) a dále se bude zabývat žánrem memoáru a možnostmi, které toto literární vyjádření nabízí.

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ANNOTATION

This Master Thesis analyses the way in which four Irish memoirs, namely Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*, Patrick Doherty's *I Am Patrick*, and Tom Phelan's *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, portray their authors' inculcation with two major and interrelated aspects of Irish Identity, Irish Nationalism and Irish Catholicism between the 1940s and 1960s when the authors grew up in Ireland. In order to understand their narratives, theoretical background regarding various fields connected with Irish national identity and identity in general have been provided. These fields include the nature of the genre of memoir, the notions of nation and nationalism, Irish history from the perspective of nationalism and of the Catholic Church, as well as the nature of Irish Catholicism in Ireland in the period in question.

KEYWORDS

Memoir, Autobiography, Childhood, Irish Identity, Irish Nationalism, Irish Catholicism, Frank McCourt, Hugo Hamilton, Patrick Doherty, Tom Phelan

NÁZEV

Irish Identity through the Eyes of a Child in Memoir

ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce analyzuje způsob, jakým čtyři irské memoáry, konkrétně *Angela's Ashes* od Franka McCourta, *The Speckled People* od Hugo Hamiltona, *I Am Patrick* od Patricka Dohertyho a *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It* od Toma Phelana, zobrazují vstřebávání dvou klíčových a vzájemně úzce propojených aspektů irské identity, a to irského nacionalismu a irského katolicismu v době, kdy autoři v Irsku vyrůstali, tedy ve 40. až 60. letech dvacátého století. Pro porozumění jejich výpovědí obsahuje práce také teoretické pasáže týkající se různých oblastí spojených s irskou identitou i identitou obecně, především podstatu memoárového žánru, pojmy národa a nacionalismu, irskou historii z hlediska nacionalismu a katolicismu, a také charakter irského katolicismu v dotyčné době.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

memoár, autobiografie, dětství, irská identita, irský nacionalismus, irský katolicismus, Frank McCourt, Hugo Hamilton, Patrick Doherty, Tom Phelan

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¹ Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir of a Childhood* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 222.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE GENRE OF MEMOIR

The theme of Irish identity is going to be examined through the lens of memoirs by four Irish authors: Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, Tom Phelan's *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, Patrick Doherty's *I Am Patrick*, and Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*. For this reason, the chapter of Introduction is utilised to look into the nature of the genre of memoir: its place within literature and its specific features distinguishing it from other genres, particularly from novel.

Within the broadest categories of writing, memoirs belong in non-fiction, despite the fact that of all nonfictional genres, they find themselves closest to fiction on the nonfiction – fiction continuum, are often indistinguishable from it in form, and probably constitute a transitional genre. Professor Couser says: 'Memoir is not fiction. Memoirs are not novels. As a nonfictional genre, memoir depicts the lives of real, not imagined, individuals.'² Some theoreticians see memoir as a subcategory of autobiography, or as a genre similar to it; in their Encyclopaedia of Literary Genres, only the entry of Autobiography (not of Memoir) can be found. Its authors, Mocná and Peterka, say: 'Autobiography – as opposed to the fictional autobiographical novel – belongs in artistic nonfictional literature and (despite its subjective licence in the selection and interpretation of biographical motifs) insists on documentary trustworthiness about a real person.'³ On the one hand, autobiography/memoir belongs in nonfiction, on the other, the genre bears aesthetic or artistic qualities. Similarly, Soukupová sees memoir as a genre similar to autobiography (in her earlier work) and says that being a nonfictional genre, autobiography was not considered literature for a long time but was regarded as mere private notes without artistic aspirations, a genre interesting only from the perspective of history.⁴ She explains, however, that as understanding of works of literature advanced, autobiography came to be seen as an artistic text in its own right, which makes its categorisation problematic: 'on the border between fiction and document, novel and history.'⁵ She thus confirms findings of earlier researchers as Válek who cites Hrabák's view of the memoir as that of a transitional genre between fiction and nonfiction.⁶ Memoir can therefore be seen as a genre rooted in nonfiction, from where it tends to overgrow or overflow into fiction.

² G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

³ Dagmar Mocná and Josef Peterka, *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů* (Praha: Paseka, 2004), 28.

⁴ Klára Soukupová, "Autobiografie: žánr a jeho hranice," *Česká literatura* (1/2015): 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Vlastimil Válek, *Memoárový žánr ve světle odborné literatury*, (Brno, Univerzita J. E. Purkyně, 1984), 14, <https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/cs/handle/11222.digilib/122063>.

On the one hand, memoir belongs in the borderline area of nonfiction (and is often mistaken for fiction), on the other it constitutes part of the extensive family of so-called life writing, much of which is not even writing. Couser, who has studied life writing and memoir for forty years, explains that life writing has become an umbrella term used to refer to all nonfictional representation of identity⁷ where academics research objects or entities that most people produce in abundance: apart from memoirs and graphic memoirs, the much more usual diaries, obituaries and death notices, CVs, personal ads etc. but also visual forms of identity like portraiture and photographs, various oral accounts of the self, audio and video recordings, biopics (biographical feature films), bioplays, prosopography (accounts of people who share important characteristics) like reunion books or visual documentaries about groups of people, and even scrapbooks and DNA analysis.⁸ Memoir's belonging in this broad group of phenomena shows the important theme of individual identity at the heart of the genre, and as such is the reflection the western Anglophone and Christian culture's value of the individual. In Couser's view, memoir or autobiography develops only in cultures that attribute importance to the individual self and Christianity seems to have provided the most powerful impetus for self-writing in general.⁹ Nonfictional writing, telling and other depicting of the self, which most people of our western culture frequently undertake, has led an increasing number of them to try and enhance their narrative (to a lesser or greater degree) by the aesthetic aspect and write a memoir, which is 'a highly developed form of the narration of our real lives.'¹⁰ We find ourselves 'in an age – if not the age– of memoir,'¹¹ which Couser calls the most democratic literary genre, or even figuratively 'the most democratic province in the republic of letters'¹² and which he sees as an expression of democracy. Memoir, then, stems from the Christian value of the individual whose life it reflects, belongs in the vast field of so-called life-writing which encompasses all possible nonfictional and even non-written representations of the self, and has recently undergone an unprecedented boom.

The following paragraphs focus on the difference between the terms of autobiography and memoir. Mocná and Peterka mentioned above see autobiography as the hypernym to its subgenres, namely confession and apology. They go on to say that autobiographical tendencies manifest themselves in other genres related to autobiography, like memoir, notes, and

⁷ Couser, *Memoir*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-32; 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 181.

interview.¹³ Thus to them, memoir is merely related to autobiography and the relationship could be labelled as ‘of a similar kind’ – unless the memoir takes the form of apology or confession which it, however, very often does. In that case, the relation would be ‘a kind of’, presumably even for memoir.

Soukupová’s view of the difference between memoir and autobiography seems to have developed in time. It appears that in her article *Autobiography: genre and its boundaries*, she distinguishes between the two only to admit that they are very hard if not impossible to tell apart. Moreover, she applies criteria found nowhere else. To begin with, she says that autobiography concentrates on the inner development of the author while the centre of memoir is not the author himself but the people who surround him and the events he has witnessed: memoir does not narrate the story of an individual but rather reflects the time of the author’s life.¹⁴ She goes on to cite Bernd Neumann who says that in memoir, the author always speaks as a bearer of a social role and that autobiography describes the life of a yet unsocialized individual including the process of his/her growing into the society; memoir replaces autobiography at the point of his/her taking on a social role.¹⁵ Soukupová then admits that with such criteria, authors would need to write two separate volumes when writing about their whole life¹⁶ and acknowledges that the distinction between works about the inner life of an individual as opposed to those placing him/her into societal and temporal relations is problematic.¹⁷ In her later work *To Narrate Oneself: Theory of Autobiography* Soukupová does not mention memoir at all: having cited professor Lejeune’s seminal and still unsurpassed definition of autobiography as ‘a prosaic story of a real person who recapitulates his/her existence while stressing his/her personal life and its development in history’ she states that its related genres are biography, autobiographical novel, autobiographical poem, diary, portrait or essay.¹⁸ It appears that the two terms (memoir and autobiography) have merged into one under autobiography and she has abandoned her previous distinction by the social role or the individual’s inner life. Soukupová also points out that the term ‘autobiography’ was coined by the poet Robert Southey in 1809 to designate narratives previously labelled as life, curriculum vitae, confession, and memoirs.¹⁹ In this context, Couser points out that Franklin’s *Autobiography* was written as his *Memoirs* since the term of autobiography was not coined

¹³ Mocná et al., *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů*, 29.

¹⁴ Soukupová, “Autobiografie,” 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸ Klára Soukupová, *Vyprávět sám sebe* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 2021), 26.

¹⁹ Soukupová, “Autobiografie,” 57-58.

until after his death.²⁰ Both authors repeatedly admit that attempts at categorisation are always preceded by practice itself and so naturally lag behind.

Couser offers a different perspective on the distinction between memoir and autobiography. He says that autobiography can be seen as capturing the whole of the writer's life (as Franklin's *Autobiography* does) while memoir is more limited in scope and tends to focus on parts of his or her life. Similarly, autobiography can be seen as multidimensional, depicting a wider breadth of aspects of the writer's life, whereas memoir can be seen as less rounded, highlighting fewer dimensions of one's life.²¹ He explains, however, that the two terms are often used interchangeably and that memoir has recently become the term of preference while not so long ago their difference was that of quality: 'Memoir was minor and autobiography major, memoir sub-literary and autobiography literary, memoir shallow and autobiography deep...' In other words, memoir used to be perceived as inferior to autobiography but recently the two terms have undergone a reversal of roles.²² In conclusion, memoir and autobiography may be seen as synonyms, or memoir may be perceived as less exhaustive, more selective, and perhaps more subjective.

Couser explains that there is an identity claim at the very heart of the genre of memoir, from which the so-called autobiographical pact arises, a term coined by Lejeune in 1975.²³ The pact is 'a tacit understanding between the reader and the writer'²⁴ that the reader reads autobiography/memoir as opposed to fiction. The pact takes place when the narrator, the protagonist and the author are identical, when they all bear the same name. Soukupová clarifies that the three entities' unity may be expressed explicitly – the name of the first-person narrator is identical with the name on the title page, or implicitly – either the title clearly signals that the first person in the text refers to the author (the title contains words as 'autobiography', 'from my life,' 'memories') or the narrator declares his identity with the author in the opening of the text. Analogically, the author forms a fictional pact – when the three entities are not identical.²⁵ The pact determines the way the work will be read – either as a memoir/autobiography, i.e. referentially, or as a novel, i.e. fictionally, and the two readings differ due to the differences inherent in the genres of memoir and novel. The premise that novel and memoir differ with consequences is central to Couser's *Memoir: An Introduction*. The reason is the above-

²⁰ Couser, *Memoir*, 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁵ Soukupová, "Autobiografie," 60-61.

mentioned autobiographical pact and the ties of the autobiographical work to the real world that the pact implies. The identity of the author, narrator, and protagonist is anchored in the real world where the author (has) lived and which he attempts to mediate. Unlike novelists, memoirists as writers of a nonfictional genre are limited in their subject matter: their characters can only be real people known to the author (and not for instance extraterrestrials). As a general rule, therefore, novels tend to be more inventive, experimental, writerly, and intertextual.²⁶ Moreover, due to the ties of memoir to the real world, memoirists (unlike novelists) assume two kinds of responsibilities: to the historical record and to the people they represent.²⁷ Soukupová confirms it saying that facts in a nonfictional narrative may be verifiable by comparison to other documents and inaccuracies may be detected and pointed out, while this cannot be done in novels. She also clarifies that when parts of the text are found to be misleading or even false, the work does not cease to be nonfictional, does not become fiction.²⁸ The writer's responsibilities to the world (and people in it) are consequences of the autobiographical pact.

As far as real people represented in a memoir are concerned, the danger of harming them in memoirs is very real and ever-present and memoirists' responsibility even extends to considerations of harm inflicted on the reputation of the deceased.²⁹ The scholar Nancy Miller cites the critic A. O. Scott: 'In a way that novels rarely are, memoirs are governed – and constricted – by considerations of tact. The writer must judge how much exposure, of self and others, is appropriate.'³⁰ In this context Soukupová cites Solzhenitsyn saying that there is a number of pitfalls in publishing memories too fresh, the loss of friends being one of them.³¹ This danger stems from the relationality of the memoir. Couser says that today it is widely recognised that one person's autobiography is inevitably someone else's biography³² and Miller even purports: 'Perhaps it is time to understand the question of relation to others as being as important, foundational, to the genre as the truth conditions of the autobiographical pact.'³³ As has been said, these considerations are foreign to the novel.

Regarding (im)precise representation of facts, the extent to which memoirists yield to their artistic impulses matters a great deal. As Couser puts in: 'While utter fidelity to factual

²⁶ Couser, *Memoir*, 48 and 54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁸ Soukupová, *Vyprávět sám sebe*, 23.

²⁹ "Thomas G. Couser In Conversation with Craig Howes," Youtube, last modified October 31, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwx-BvodvA0>

³⁰ Miller, Nancy K. "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir." *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 541.

³¹ Soukupová, "Autobiografie," 53.

³² Couser, *Memoir*, 34.

³³ Miller, "The Entangled Self," 544.

truth in memoir is not possible, we also need to insist on some degree of veracity.’³⁴ Miller takes the same view stating that in memoirs ‘you expect to be reading the truth even if...you also realise that some of the details might not stand up to Googling.’³⁵ Striking the balance is crucial as readers’ tolerance cannot be strained excessively. This has been the experience of a number of authors, including James Frey: having failed to sell his *A Million Little Pieces* as a novel, he succeeded passing it for an addiction recovery memoir. Later on his embellishments transpired causing a considerable uproar.³⁶ The readers’ expectation to read (deliberately unembellished) truth under the autobiographical pact is not their whim: rather, it stems from the nature of the genre and its base in nonfiction. As Couser writes:

‘(Readers) resent having invested emotionally in a fiction, thinking it is a fact. If they did not invest differently in fiction and nonfiction, they would not feel betrayed. This reaction reveals an intuitive grasp of the difference that reading memoir makes.’³⁷

Memoir generates different expectations than novel and this fact cannot be circumvented.

The greatest transgression ‘a memoirist’ can make, however, is not embellishing facts: it is the assumption of a false identity (and the writer cannot be termed ‘a memoirist’ then, hence the inverted commas). Couser explains that identity most frequently falsely assumed is that of a Holocaust survivor³⁸ and that such conduct constitutes an egregious ethical breach since it completely violates the autobiographical pact (unlike minor or major factual discrepancies). It is an existential fraud which undermines real Holocaust survivors’ testimonies: upon the revelation of the hoax, real Holocaust survivors’ position as individuals intending to publish their (real) testimony is logically aggravated. Secondly, on the level of the society, the hoax strengthens the cause of Holocaust deniers.³⁹ Some sins are mortal in the genre of memoir. In any case, memoirists are pulled to reality where novelists just spread their wings and fly. The genre of memoir then, unlike that of novel, exerts two ethical considerations on writers: a (relatively high) level of factual truth (while true identity is a must) and the feelings of people depicted. The factual side of the genre of memoir often limits its artistic rendering while novels know no such limitations.

Why write memoirs (fraught with dangers) and why read them (with the likelihood of their being less aesthetic and possibly even deceitful) is a question that seems to suggest itself.

³⁴ Couser, *Memoir*, 10.

³⁵ Miller, “The Entangled Self,” 538.

³⁶ Laura Barton, “The man who rewrote his life,” *The Guardian*, September 15, 2006.

³⁷ Couser, *Memoir*, 170.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 92-94.

The reader's perspective will be dealt with first. The historian's Paula Fass' question asks: 'Why read the personal at all, except for the sheer delight of meeting someone new?' Her own reply is 'sharp insight and important reflection.'⁴⁰ Couser speaks about insight and reflection as merits of the genre, too. Although memoir and fiction are 'two siblings which grew up together often borrowing each other's clothes,'⁴¹ they are distinct and work differently. In Couser's view, memoir has become progressively more novelistic over the past two centuries. He explains that novelistic means more 'scene' over 'summary', more 'showing' than 'telling', or 'mimesis' than 'diegesis' where 'scene' or 'showing' mean the use of abundant detail, verbatim dialogue, and often also the use of present tense. Memoirs which 'show' rather than 'tell' require the same suspension of disbelief as novels which militates against their genre: it is impossible to remember minute details shown. These details then, in their pursuit of verisimilitude, erode the plausibility of the work in general.⁴² Moreover, their 'showing' thwarts self-reflection of 'telling' that both Fass and Couser value in memoir. Couser says:

'The more a memoirist writes in highly detailed scenes, the less distance there is between narrator and protagonist, the less room for illuminating perspective, the less possibility for self-discovery and the achievement of self-knowledge. To me, such writing abdicates an important obligation of the memoirist. In any case, it sharply diminishes the pleasure I get from, and the respect I have for, memoir.'⁴³

Couser claims that memoirs can – if reflective rather than painterly – provide wisdom and self-understanding that novels by nature cannot.⁴⁴ That is a significant merit for an interested reader.

But memoirs perform distinctive work not only for their readers but also for their authors and the world. The most common subgenres are conversion narrative (its modern equivalent being substance abuse recovery, the best-selling form of autobiography according to Miller⁴⁵), apology, confession, bildungsroman, and testimony.⁴⁶ According to its subgenre(s), memoirs can confess, defend, witness and/or accuse with a more direct impact on the world than novels. The reader may accept or reject the author's stance and viewpoint evoked by various means. The novel, on the other hand, cannot do this for its author. Couser adds that the memoir can also memorialize a living (and hitherto unknown) person, the subject of a memoir (nearing the biographical end of the continuum on the autobiography – biography scale), acquaint the writer

⁴⁰ Paula S. Fass, "The Memoir Problem," *Reviews in American History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 109-110.

⁴¹ Couser, *Memoir*, 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 68-75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Miller, "The Entangled Self," 542.

⁴⁶ Couser, *Memoir*, 38-41.

with a person, even enact a relationship with a missing person, as was the case of Couser's memoir about his deceased father⁴⁷– or at least bring about the subjective perception of such a connection. Last but by no means least, memoir is a way the author self-discovers himself.⁴⁸ In all these performative dimensions, memoir differs from novel. On the wider level of the society, memoir puts on record all sorts of lives, including marginalised or disadvantaged members of the society (e.g. deaf or blind) who by the mere act of publishing a personal memoir proclaim this important message: 'I'm here and I can speak for myself.'⁴⁹ The democratic memoir puts a face on an ill or otherwise disadvantaged person (as well as on able-bodied people from all walks of life), whose voice speaks differently and more directly to the society than a novel would since 'a memoir of living with condition X stands in a different relation to the world than a novel about living with X.'⁵⁰ Memoir, in giving a voice to real people, has the potential to exert a more powerful leverage on the world than novel.

Moreover, memoirs are important sources of historical information. The historian Paula Fass asserts that memoirs are important historical tools for the reconstruction of lives of ordinary people⁵¹ despite the fact that many of the details are 'imaginative recreations rather than pure memory.'⁵² Indeed, Válek points out the problem of distortion of memories, the greater the more time passes between the depiction and the event depicted,⁵³ quite apart from the problem of memory being selective and tending to suppress some memories while idealising other.⁵⁴ Válek also cites Havránková's observation of the (largely unintentional) tendency of authors to self-fashion themselves.⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Soukupová writes that memory studies have cast doubt on the concept of memory as a reliable depository of past events: it forgets, is highly selective, manipulable and influenced by the current perspective and moment of evocation; it is permanently being (re)constructed in the act of remembering while the gaps are being filled on the basis of likelihood or collectively shared concepts.⁵⁶ And yet Fass deems memories invaluable. She says that 'the novelist may cull details from the past...but cannot remember that past as a memoirist does,'⁵⁷ that memories are 'precious objects of personal

⁴⁷ Couser, *Memoir*, 177-181.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵¹ Fass, "The Memoir Problem," 107-108.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵³ Válek, *Memoárový žánr ve světle odborné literatury*, 55-56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁶ Soukupová, *Vyprávět sám sebe*, 17.

⁵⁷ Fass, "The Memoir Problem," 120.

obligation'⁵⁸ and memoirs 'enshrine the past, not as better or purer but simply as real.'⁵⁹ Despite their (possibly huge) distortions, memories matter in a substantial way. They (although inaccurately and subjectively) record the past and form history which 'grows and develops from them.'⁶⁰ They are unique jigsaw puzzle pieces in the huge painting of real history that novels find inspiration in. This history, memories and individuals put on record include four Irishmen who have made use of the democratic genre of memoir and whose education in Irish national identity will be the subject of the thesis.

In conclusion, memoir is a nonfictional genre belonging in the broad category of life writing. Bordering on fiction, memoir can be visualised as the last or even transitional area on the nonfiction-fiction continuum. It is often considered synonymous with autobiography but can also be understood as less comprehensive and objective. The so-called autobiographical pact implies the genre's identity claim and its rootedness in the real world, which significantly limits the genre's subject matter and imposes ethical obligations on the author. In this, memoir greatly differs from novel. It may also differ in the amount of mimesis whereby it heightens its potential for self-reflection. It performs a number of tasks for the author and enriches the society by sharing the lives of various people. Its force on the world is more direct than that of novel which can be seen as its complementary sibling genre.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁰ Fass, "The Memoir Problem," 121.

2. LEARNING IRISH NATIONALISM

Following the clarification of the nature of the memoir genre, two crucial features of Irish identity transpiring through these memoirs and their inculcation in Irish youth are going to be analysed, namely Irish nationalism and Irish Catholicism.

Irish nationalism appears in three of the four memoirs (Appendix 1.) analysed and in two it reveals itself rather mightily; since it also provides the basis for the next chapter about Irish Catholicism, it is commenced with. Two memoirs reflecting the Irish nationalist theme most strongly are Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* and Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*. Both authors were raised by nationalist fathers and grew up in towns. The other two memoirists, Tom Phelan and Patrick Doherty, grew up on Irish farms which appears to account for the relative lack of the nationalist theme in their work: their families were daily occupied with farming duties to such an extent they appear to have lacked time and/or mental capacity for the abstract matter of nationalism. Thus Patrick Doherty mentions his father's sigh at the midday meal: 'If we didn't hev to ate or slep we'd hev more time for work.'⁶¹ At the same time and perhaps more importantly, the individualistic nature of their farming profession militates against the collective essence of national identity and thus fails to attract (at least some) farmers: when Tom Phelan longed to join the throng gathered in the local town on the occasion of the national hero Eamon de Valera's visit, Tom's father was unmoved by his tears: 'Look at me, Tom! De Valera won't sow our turnips. Now drive on.'⁶² Yet despite his rural upbringing, Tom was also educated in Irish nationalism, as will be shown in the next chapter. The two urban memoirists' education in Irish nationalism was more pronounced, however. Frank McCourt, whose bestselling memoir *Angela's Ashes* propelled him to international fame, was born in 1930 in New York to Irish parents but spent his childhood in Limerick where his family moved during the Great Depression. His father was an ardent Irish nationalist who tried to instil nationalistic attitudes in his children from infancy. Frank spent his childhood and youth in Ireland in the 1930s and 40s and left for the USA in 1949, four years before Hugo Hamilton was born. Hamilton, born in 1953, a son of a kind German mother and a strict Irish nationalist father, describes in *The Speckled People* his childhood experience of growing up in Dublin in the 1950s and 60s. He reveals the web of both national identities and nationalisms that he found himself entangled in and that he struggled with.

⁶¹ Patrick Doherty, *I Am Patrick: A Donegal Childhood Remembered* (Ballycastle: Clachan Publishing, 2022), 78.

⁶² Tom Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It: A Memoir of My Irish Boyhood* (New York: Gallery Books, 2020), 116.

Writing about the complex subject of Irish nationalism, the terms of nation and nationalism ought to be dealt with first. The origin and age of nations is a point of dispute among scholars as there are three schools of thought: primordialists or perennialists explain nations as always having existed and being natural or innate. Modernists, on the other hand, hold that nations are a modern phenomenon, created by nationalism after the French revolution. A. D. Smith's ethno-symbolic approach offers a reconciliation of the two approaches as in his view, modern nations are built on deep pre-modern roots, in particular on their ethnic core. This ethnic basis, he explains, possesses six attributes: an identifying name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories and traditions, one or more elements of common culture, a link with an historic territory or homeland, and a measure of solidarity, at least among élites.⁶³ Thus his definition of the nation as 'a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members'⁶⁴ explains the nation as a fairly modern phenomenon based on ancient ethnic foundations. In his view, pre-modern ethnic communities preceded modern nations which grew out of them. Thus ethnic communities may evolve into nations under favourable circumstances. Scholars agree that the first nation of the world was the English nation although they differ as to the time of the transition of the English ethnic community into the English nation. Hastings plausibly explains that ethnicities 'naturally turn into nations at the point when their specific vernacular moves from an oral to written usage to the extent that it is being regularly employed for the production literature, and particularly for the translation of the Bible,' in other words, that 'once an ethnicity's vernacular becomes a language with an extensive literature of its own, the Rubicon on the road to nationhood appears to have been crossed.'⁶⁵ He clarifies that it was the Bible that provided the original model of the nation and that without it and its Christian interpretation, nations and nationalism could never have existed.⁶⁶ In the case of the English nation, he sees it as having existed already in later Middle Ages, although the level of English national awareness significantly intensified during Reformation and Protestant diffusion of Bible knowledge. On the other hand, in Catholic societies less Biblically educated (as was the case of Ireland) the sense of nationhood is likely to have developed much later.⁶⁷ English agrees in stating that some eminent scholars consider

⁶³ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁵ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

Englishness an ancient phenomenon and that proto-national identity can surely be found in England as early as in the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ His careful use of ‘proto-national’ as opposed to ‘national’ testifies to his awareness of the long process or evolution by which nations come into being. Hastings also points this fact out in stating that ‘nations grow out of ethnicities, out of wars and religious divisions, out of emergence of literatures and nationalist propaganda and administrative pressures, but they do so bit by bit.’⁶⁹ English speaks about ‘proto-nations (first, primitive, ancestral) on which modern nations promoted by nationalists were built.’⁷⁰ It may be therefore concluded that ethnic communities or proto-nations evolved only very gradually into modern nations under favourable circumstances. This applies to the Irish nation, too. English speaks about ‘embryonic elements of an Irish national identity and of an Irish nation’ in the Middle Ages⁷¹ stressing the cultural element of the language of the ethnic community acting as a cohesive agent of the proto-nation⁷² and says that ‘by the thirteenth century, there was definitely at least some sense of national identity’ in Ireland.⁷³ This sense grew in strength not only with the mere passage of time but, importantly, with the events this time brought, above all the conquest of Ireland by the Tudors and the consequent religious division which turned Catholicism into the hallmark of the slowly emerging Irish nation.

As there is no agreement as to the origin of nations, so there does not quite appear to be a consensus on the origin of the phenomenon of nationalism. Hastings argues that England set a precedent both in forming a nation and in evincing nationalism. He says that ‘early forms of nationalism related to states already in existence, their defence, glorification or expansion and England was the quintessential example of this.’⁷⁴ He argues that it was the English model of nationalism that was adopted first by Scotland and later by America, France and elsewhere.⁷⁵ In Ireland, he points out that the Tudor and Stuart reconquest of the island was propelled by mighty nationalistic sentiment promoting the defence and expansion of the English nation state while there was, at the time, no comparable Irish nationalism as there was nothing like an Irish nation state.⁷⁶ He therefore sees nationalism as a phenomenon naturally evolving from the needs of a centralised nation state: a phenomenon first observed in England, and gradually emulated

⁶⁸ Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2007), 498.

⁶⁹ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 25-26.

⁷⁰ English, *Irish Freedom*, 492.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 496.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 497.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 498.

⁷⁴ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 27-28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

worldwide. Yet others see nationalism as a distinctly modern phenomenon and English even claims that ‘there is now among scholars studying nationalism a broad consensus that the phenomenon represents something comparatively recent.’⁷⁷ Smith, who is one of these scholars, defines nationalism as ‘a modern ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity, unity and autonomy of a social group some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation.’⁷⁸ It is possible that Hasting’s view has been surpassed by new knowledge in the field, just as it is conceivable that his views will be reconsidered in the future.

Irish nationalism started to emerge at the end of the eighteenth century, following the American and French revolutions, in an era when a number of other nationalisms started to appear. English claims that it was with the late-eighteenth century United Irishmen that we truly see the birth of nationalist Ireland.⁷⁹ Irish nationalism unfolded with the rise of Daniel O’Connell in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Liberator managed to politicise wild poor Catholic masses of Ireland and Killeen says that ‘from 1928 (when O’Connell won a by-election) on, the story of Irish nationalism is effectively a long footnote to the achievement of its founding father.’⁸⁰ Thus, Irish nationalism is, as English sums up, a modern phenomenon possessing historically embedded roots in the pre-modern period of the Irish proto-nation and drawing from its proto-national consciousness.⁸¹

If nationalist views are to last, they need to be passed on to successive new generations. This is achieved predominantly by instruction at home and school, and there the instruction is both intentional and spontaneous. In the two memoirs to be examined in this chapter, the boys listen to deliberate nationalist teaching by their fathers and teachers, as well as overhear their and other people’s spontaneous remarks. Thus, the nationalist society educates the new generations in its nationalist values and passes the torch of nationalism on. Children listen to narratives of nationalist interpretation of history and adopt it, looking up to adults as to the people who know. It is only when they start growing up and thinking for themselves, and/or when they hear conflicting views, that they start questioning perspectives hitherto indisputable.

Irish nationalism of the two memoirs offered a simple ethics: the English (or British) are evil, while the Irish are noble; the English are the villains, while the Irish are the victims. This simplified nationalistic interpretation of Irish history is magnified by the fact it is children who are being instructed: speaking to children always requires some measure of simplification of

⁷⁷ English, *Irish Freedom*, 504.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 501.

⁸⁰ Richard Killeen, *A Short History of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 2006), 45.

⁸¹ English, *Irish Freedom*, 504.

reality depending on the children's age. Thus, in *Angela's Ashes*, the English are portrayed as the source of all evil in Ireland as young Frank hears that 'the English did terrible things to us for eight hundred long years'⁸² and they 'were responsible for half the troubles of the world.'⁸³ He learns that 'flea discuss Ireland's woeful history with you' but only because they 'were brought in by the English to drive us out of our wits entirely.'⁸⁴ He observes that 'Paddy's father also blames the English for everything.'⁸⁵ The cleaner Seamus does not know what perfidy is but he is certain that 'if it is something the English did it must be terrible.'⁸⁶ One of the teachers, Mr O'Dea, tells Frank's brother Malachy 'how the English tormented the Irish for eight hundred long years.'⁸⁷ The anti-English sentiment of the time was such that 'if anyone in your family was the least friendly to the English in the last eight hundred years it will be brought up and thrown in your face and you might as well move to Dublin where no one cares.'⁸⁸ The hatred of England (or Britain) is stretched to Northern Ireland despite the fact that a significant percentage of its population is Irish Catholic and Irish nationalist, as is Frank's father. So Frank is led to believe that the region is inhabited solely by detestable Presbyterians who seem to near English wickedness in Frank's relatives' eyes, and they remark on Frank's father's place of birth at any suitable moment. Thus the county of Antrim where Frank's father comes from is 'a place crawling with Presbyterians,' Frank's father has a 'sneaky Presbyterian smile'⁸⁹ and is 'a disgusting specimen but what could you expect from the North of Ireland.'⁹⁰ Frank's father finds it difficult to find a job due to his northern accent⁹¹ and is always seen as foreign, as Frank once reflects in his plain statement 'Dad is a foreigner from the North.'⁹²

North of Ireland arouses considerable revulsion in Frank's relations, but it is England that is portrayed as the sole source of Ireland's misfortune. Only once does young Frank hear a less bigoted view, an event that nearly shocks him. His teacher Mr O'Halloran tells the class that 'the Battle of Kinsale in sixteen nought one was the saddest moment in Irish history, with atrocities on both sides.'⁹³ Frank finds it impossible to believe:

⁸² McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 63 and 102.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 248.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 236.

‘Cruelty on both sides? The Irish side? How could that be? All the other masters told us the Irish always fought nobly, they always fought the fair fight ... If they lost it was because of traitors and informers. But I want to know about these Irish atrocities.

Sir, did the Irish commit atrocities at the Battle of Kinsale?

They did, indeed. It is recorded that they killed prisoners but they were no better or worse than the English.

Mr. O’Halloran can’t lie. He’s the headmaster. All these years we were told that the Irish were always noble and they made brave speeches before the English hanged them. Now Hoppy O’Halloran is saying the Irish did bad things. Next thing he’ll be saying is the English did good things.’⁹⁴

Although Mr O’Halloran presented the Siege of Kinsale as the saddest moment of Irish history, he nevertheless gave his pupils a slightly less distorted account of the historical event. Frank does not reveal how he resolved this instance of cognitive dissonance, but he mentions how Mrs Purcell, the owner of the radio to which Frank occasionally listened with her, resolved her inner conflict between Shakespeare’s nationality and her admiration of him: ‘Do you know what, Frankie? What, Mrs. Purcell? That Shakespeare is that good he must have been an Irishman.’⁹⁵ The open ending of Frank’s inner conflict about Irish atrocities at Kinsale suggests that Mr O’Halloran may have instilled in Frank the search of true(er) versions of Irish history and critical evaluation of information in general. For (Irish) history is far from straightforward and in its complexity defies the simple narration preferred by masses. As English puts it:

‘There is always likely to be a certain distance between the forensic precision sought after by historians, and the needs of us as part of a wider public understandably keen on what popular memory can supply in terms of making sense of communal lives.’⁹⁶

English explains that this is due to the tendency of the human mind to create narrative interpretations of events, causal stories, which need to be relatively simple if they are to be widely accessible to the community and easily transmitted across time: hence the historical distortion and anachronism of so much nationalist history.⁹⁷ Thus, the Battle or Siege of Kinsale was not a battle where the Irish nation fell victim to the English one: as Kee points out, O’Neill, the Earl of Tyrone and one of the leaders of the rebellion which ended with the siege of Kinsale, had been brought up in London as Elizabethan gentleman and fought for his own local, if considerable, interest and ambition (although he left behind a powerful legend for myth to work

⁹⁴ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 236.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁹⁶ English, *Irish Freedom*, 448.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 445-446.

on); he had no patriotic objection to the theory of submission to an English king.⁹⁸ An excellent example of the simplified narrative interpretation of events of Irish history can be found in *The Speckled People*:

‘The master says Irish history is like a hurling match in Croke Park with his team, county Mayo, losing for a long time, right up until the end of the match when they start coming back and win the game at the last minute...He tells us the story of a man named Cromwell who was winning and sent the Irish to Connaught or Hell...The fools, the fools, he says, because then the Easter Rising happened and there was lots of fighting and dying and the British had to go home, even if they didn’t want to.’⁹⁹

In this extract, the Cromwellian rage in Ireland is interpreted as being in direct causal relation to the Easter Rising of 1916. The extract is also a fine example of teleology typical of the nationalist reading of history: the notion that there is a purpose, direction or even design to it,¹⁰⁰ in this case the final victory of Ireland over Britain. The Easter Rising, presented as the culmination of the Irish struggle with Britain, is re-lived and celebrated in Hugo’s description of its 50th anniversary:

‘There were celebrations everywhere in Dublin for the Easter Rising. It happened fifty years ago...and one day we saw the Easter Rising happening again in front of our own eyes. They were making a film of it and I saw Patrick Pearse coming out and surrendering with a white flag before he was executed by the British. There are pictures of Patrick Pearse in the windows of shoe shops and sweet shops. The shops had Irish flags, too, and copies of the proclamation which we all learned off by heart. We sold Easter lilies and there was hardly a single person in the city who wasn’t wearing one...on the buses there were little torches and swords and all the lamp-posts in the city had flags...the flags and the special stamps and the pictures in all the shops were there to remind everybody that the Irish were not the saddest people in the world any more, they were laughing now and nobody could stop them.’¹⁰¹

Both extracts reveal the utmost importance of the Easter Rising in the nationalist narrative: without it, Ireland would still be in thrall of Britain. The celebratory mood was achieved by the ubiquity of the various nationalist symbols throughout the town and the various events taking place in the commemoration of the Rising: the atmosphere thus produced was certain to elicit a mighty surge of nationalist emotions deepening national awareness and identity. The in reality eccentric Patrick Pearse was turned into a superhero so great that when Hugo’s class went to see a film about the Easter Rising, Hugo says that ‘it didn’t matter that James Bond wasn’t in it

⁹⁸ Robert Kee, *The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 13-14.

⁹⁹ Hugo Hamilton, *The Speckled People* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 121.

¹⁰⁰ English, *Irish Freedom*, 447.

¹⁰¹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 236-237.

because Patrick Pearse was in it instead.’¹⁰² The later so grandly celebrated Easter Rising was in fact, however, unpopular with the great majority of Irish people at the time and the sentiment towards the rebels only changed after their execution which turned them into national martyrs (even though the punishment was understandable in wartime, as English notes ¹⁰³). The rising was far from inevitable, as the nationalist interpretation had the public believe. Similarly, one could talk about the invasion of Ireland in 1169 which nationalists hold to be the beginning of the English occupation lasting eight hundred years: the invaders were not English but Normans who had earlier conquered England and parts of Wales and Scotland, and they came not in England’s but their own interest and at the express invitation of an Irish chief.¹⁰⁴ These facts are, nevertheless, superfluous for the simplified nationalist narrative and the collective national mind demanding straightforward interpretations and perhaps also an easily identifiable enemy. One could continue to research at length the distance between historians’ precision and the simple narrative of the popular Irish memory. This is not to say that Irish aversion to England (or Britain) is wholly unsubstantiated and without base; the author of the thesis merely tries to point out that, as in the examples of historic events mentioned above, the truth is mostly far from simple.

The presence of a neighbour (and a stronger one for that matter) is certain to pose many a challenge, but the neighbour need not always be (merely) an enemy. Thus, a subtle strain of admiration can be detected amidst all Irish bitterness in *Angela’s Ashes*. Frank says about the richest boys of Limerick attending the Jesuit school that ‘they have long hair which falls across their foreheads and over their eyes so that they can toss their quiffs like Englishmen.’¹⁰⁵ Frank reveals his admiration to and perhaps even envy of the richest boys who emulate fashion come to them from the bigger island. Frank’s mother Angela rejects the idea of calling her new baby Ronald saying: ‘It has to be Irish. Isn’t that what we fought for all these years? What’s the use of fighting the English for centuries if we’re going to call our children Ronald?’¹⁰⁶ Later, however, when they move house to her cousin Laman, some appreciation of England is revealed in her hopes: ‘We might be able to have a garden and sit outside with our tea the way the English do.’¹⁰⁷ The same admiration for ‘the ancient foe’¹⁰⁸ is shown when Frank and his brothers beg their father before he, like other Limerick men, leaves Ireland to work in English factories:

¹⁰² Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 238.

¹⁰³ English, *Irish Freedom*, 262.

¹⁰⁴ Kee, *The Green Flag*, 9-10 and English, *Irish Freedom*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 316.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

‘Don’t forget the RAF badges, Dad’¹⁰⁹ because Irish boys long to wear the RAF badges on their coats in spite of their anti-English upbringing.

With centuries old emigration from Ireland, many an Irishman had relatives in England. Kee even aptly points out that it is not easy to define who an Irishman is to begin with, as for example Sir Henry Wilson assassinated by the IRA was Irish and the Irish republican Erskin Childres was English.¹¹⁰ Neither is it possible to simply view Ireland as an English colony: throughout his article on the issue, Howe argues that the matter is far too complicated and multifaceted to be so simply answered.¹¹¹ Kee writes that Irish nationalism which saw England and Ireland as two separate and hostile countries, had only been in existence for a little over a hundred years in 1918 when de Valera claimed it to be seven centuries old.¹¹² This interpretation, however, has proved durable and perhaps even hard to resist: English clarifies that exclusivism is a natural part of nationalism since defining who we (which is good) involves who we are not (and that this is bad), which is why England was held villainous by generations of Irish nationalists who saw themselves as morally superior.¹¹³

Related to vilification of foes is the celebration of national heroes and martyrs, already shown above on the example of Patrick Pearse. A powerful means of commemorating them and their nationalist struggle are songs and ballads. In *Angela’s Ashes*, patriotic songs are mostly sung by Frank’s father, whose nationalist sentiment magnifies with his intoxication. So Frank says that ‘dad.. sometimes comes home with the smell of whiskey, singing all the songs about suffering Ireland’¹¹⁴ and that he ‘rolls up the stairs singing Roddy McCorley.’¹¹⁵ *Roddy McCorley* is sung to Frank by the cleaner Seamus in hospital because ‘there isn’t a song ever written about Ireland’s suffering he doesn’t know.’¹¹⁶ Even though no historical connection is known of Roddy McCorley and the Battle of Antrim, part of the 1798 rebellion, Roddy is celebrated in the latter version of the song from 1898, written to mark the centenary of the rebellion. Below is an extract from its lyrics:

‘Oh Ireland, Mother Ireland, you love them still the best
The fearless brave who fighting fall upon your hapless breast,
But never a one of all your dead more bravely fell in fray,

¹⁰⁹ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 253.

¹¹⁰ Kee, *The Green Flag*, 7.

¹¹¹ Stephen Howe, “Questioning the (Bad) Question: ‘Was Ireland a Colony?’” *Irish Historical Studies* 36, no. 142 (2008): 138–52.

¹¹² Kee, *The Green Flag*, 6.

¹¹³ English, *Irish Freedom*, 450-453.

¹¹⁴ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 15.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

Than he who marches to his fate on the bridge of Toome today.’¹¹⁷

Struggle is crucial in nationalism and Roddy McCorley is celebrated in a true nationalist fashion, as the valiant hero who died for Mother Ireland, despite the sketchy knowledge about him or the real cause of his death. Franks’s father is not content with his own singing of patriotic songs and demands that his children learn the songs and perform them, too, particularly on his return from public houses in the middle of the night:

‘Dad comes home singing and getting us out of bed to line up and promise to die for Ireland when the call comes. He even gets Michael up and he’s only three but there he is singing and promising to die for Ireland...I’m nine and Malachy is eight and we know all the songs. We sing all the verses of Kevin Barry and Roddy McCorley, The West’s Asleep, O’Donnell Abu, The Boys of Wexford.’¹¹⁸

In *The Speckled People*, Hugo also listens to *Kevin Barry* which his father plays,¹¹⁹ but it is at school that he encounters patriotic songs much more frequently. He mentions ‘a song about a man in Donegal who once wrote his name in Irish on a donkey cart. It was the time when Ireland was still under the British and it was forbidden to write your name in Irish.’¹²⁰ In fact, the only songs of Hugo’s account of his childhood are patriotic ones, as in this extract:

‘In school, they teach us to love our own country. They sing a song about the British going home. The *máistir* takes out a tuning fork and taps it on his desk...We hum the note and sing about the British getting out of Ireland. *Ó ró sé do bheatha ’bhaile*...It’s a funny song and very polite. It says to the British that we hope they’ll keep healthy and have a good trip home. When you sing this song you feel strong. You sit in your desk with all the other boys around you at the same time and you feel strong in your tummy, right up to your heart, because it’s about losing and winning.’¹²¹

The wording of the nationalist songs or ballads coupled with their tune and the presence of fellow singers cause a very strong emotional impact. Hugo describes the song as causing him feel ‘strong in his tummy, right up to his heart.’ Indeed, the attractiveness of nationalism lays significantly in its ability to saturate multiple human needs first famously described by Maslow in his hierarchy of human needs. Nationalism is capable of saturating most of them except for the lowest levels: the need of belonging, as English explains, to a perceivedly special community, as well as self-esteem or respect since belonging to this distinctive community

¹¹⁷ “Roddy McCorley – folk hero of the 1798 Irish Rebellion,” Irish Music Daily, <https://www.irishmusicdaily.com/roddy-mccorley>.

¹¹⁸ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 191.

¹¹⁹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 35.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

ennobles us (and the community) in our estimation.¹²² Greenfeld sees the ability of nationalism to ennoble and enhance self-esteem as crucial for its appeal, saying that the essential quality of national identity is that it guarantees status with dignity to every member of the national community.¹²³ The two needs of dignity or self-esteem and that of belonging intersect and bolster each other strongly in nationalism. They probably also work in a similar manner in other groups to which people as biopsychosocial beings belong. Belonging to a nation, however, often seems to afford the strongest gratification of the needs due to the ability of nationalism to subsume all other, partial allegiances. According to English, nationalism's 'interweaving of particular kinds of community, struggle and power has persuaded people that nationalism can meet the needs of, for example, region, sex or class in ways that regionalism, feminism or socialism have been unable to do...it has been able to seem to meet the needs of those whom such rival -isms seem necessary to exclude.'¹²⁴ Moreover, and perhaps crucially for some individuals, it also saturates the highest need of transcendence or purpose in life.¹²⁵ English explains that nationalism always involves ongoing struggle, often for rectification of national grievances and generally the pursuit of (various forms of) freedom.¹²⁶ Greenfeld reveals that nationalism is secular, and in its focus on this world it desacralizes God and sacralises this world, and politics in particular.¹²⁷ The pursuit of the (imagined) sacred freedoms of one's sacred nation explains the ardour, indeed fanaticism of some nationalists, who have accepted the reversal of roles between religion and nationalism that Greenfeld uncovers to underlie nationalism: 'Rather than rejecting or expelling it from politics, secularisation reverses the relations between the two, subordinating religion to politics and putting it to its new use...it appropriates it as a national characteristic.'¹²⁸ This is certainly true of Irish nationalism which appropriated Catholicism as its essential feature. According to Hastings, the reversal of roles of religion and nationalist persuasion need not always happen. He says that nationalism does not necessarily imply that national values are placed above all other values and says that other communities (of religion, family or class) are occasionally given superior recognition as the requirements of the nation are mostly seen as limited in most nationalist's eyes (with the exception of extreme nationalists) by other requirements of morality, religion, or rights of other

¹²² English, *Irish Freedom*, 434-443.

¹²³ Liah Greenfeld, *Advanced Introduction to Nationalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 16.

¹²⁴ English, *Irish Freedom*, 481.

¹²⁵ "Transcending Maslow's Pyramid," The British Psychological Society, last modified September 7, 2020, <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/transcending-maslows-pyramid>.

¹²⁶ English, *Irish Freedom*, 456-482.

¹²⁷ Greenfeld, *Advanced Introduction to Nationalism*, 6.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

communities.¹²⁹ He nevertheless points out that nationalism ‘often exists as a latent presence, something which flares up extremely quickly in times of war or some real or imagined threat and can then become overwhelmingly and irrationally strong, only to subside in altered circumstances.’¹³⁰ It therefore appears that the danger of the reversal of roles between politics and religion is inherently present in the national awareness or identity of a nation’s members. Interestingly therefore, according to English, it was nationalism which has produced democracy:

‘Despite the frequent and understandable hostility of some liberal observers towards nationalism and towards its uglier, anti-democratic features, an argument could also be that nationalism has been the foundation stone upon which much effective, democratic experience has historically been built.’¹³¹

English then admits that ‘paradoxically, nationalism may be seen historically to have proved both essential to democracy and – all too often, in political practice – deeply anti-democratic’¹³² since ‘there has frequently emerged a clash between the imagined popular will of the nationalist zealot’s mind and the (usually milder and more mixed) will of the actually existing people of that zealot’s nation.’¹³³

This intersection of (anti)democracy and nationalism is the major theme of *The Speckled People*. It is essentially a memoir of a family suffering under the yoke of their father’s nationalist beliefs. His nationalist requirement that only Irish or German be spoken in his house and any use of English be punished resulted in the confusion, estrangement, and isolation of his children (at least the eldest) and his wife. There are strong parallels to be found between his behaviour and that of German Nazis who were in power at the time of Hugo’s German mother’s youth and young adulthood.

Hugo’s father’s hatred of Britain is no less intense than that of Frank’s contemporaries but manifests itself in a different way: as denial of anything connected with Britain, denial out of which his nationalist fervour bursts. His denial shows when Hugo’s father hides the photograph of his own father, a sailor in the British Navy in the First World War, after his children’s discovery of it: ‘My father’s voice filled the room and I felt the sting of his hand...the picture of the sailor disappeared and we never saw him again after that. Nobody mentioned

¹²⁹ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 32.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ English, *Irish Freedom*, 475.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 476.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 485.

him...our German grandparents are dead, but our Irish grandparents are dead and forgotten.’¹³⁴ Similarly, Hugo’s father does not allow his children to play near Wellington’s Monument in Phoenix Park because ‘it’s something the British left behind and forgot to take with them.’¹³⁵ When in the park, they pretend that the monument is not there (despite its enormity). In his nationalist zeal for the Irish language Hugo’s father denies the fact that English has irreversibly become the means of communication of the vast majority of the nation. Hugo says that at one point in his youth, his father ‘changed his name from Jack to Sean and spoke Irish as if his home town didn’t exist, as if his own father didn’t exist, as if those who emigrated didn’t exist...My father pretends that England doesn’t exist.’¹³⁶ Not only is the existence of England too painful for Hugo’s father to admit, but so is that of Ireland in its supposedly imperfect state:

‘One day, he said to himself, Ireland would be like Germany, with its own language and its own inventions. Until then, he said, Ireland didn’t really exist at all. It only existed in the mind of emigrants looking back or in the minds of idealists looking forward. Far back in the past or far away the future, Ireland only existed in songs.’¹³⁷

Hugo’s father made an equation between the nation and one cultural aspect of it, its language: ‘My father says your language is your home and your country is your language and your language is your flag.’¹³⁸ He brutally punishes his children for speaking any English they overhear in the streets, and on one occasion even for listening to English speakers. In his attempt to raise his children as perfect Irishmen, i.e. Irish speakers, he isolates them from any potential friends, aggravating their already difficult position of German speakers in the post-war Ireland and turning them into strangers in their own country. Naturally, Hugo resists his nationalist efforts: ‘But you don’t want to be special. Out there in Ireland you want to be the same as everyone else, not an Irish speaker, not a German or a Kraut or a Nazi.’¹³⁹ Outside, Hugo and his brother are bullied by street boys for being Nazis, inside they often fear their irascible father. Hugo’s father claims that ‘there will be no more fighting and dying, it’s time to live for Ireland’¹⁴⁰ (notice the God-like entity of Ireland to live for) yet it is he who behaves violently, who the boys imitate when fighting and who stifles their family’s happiness. Hugo’s mother, thanks to whom Hugo’s home smells not only of being afraid but also of being happy,¹⁴¹ often

¹³⁴ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 12-15.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 261.

suffers in her marriage: ‘My mother said we were not going to be trapped again...he closed the front door and said she was married now, so she sat down on her suitcase and cried.’¹⁴²

There is a stark contrast between Hugo’s father and Onkel Gerd, Hugo’s mother’s uncle in Germany, who looked after her and her sisters following the death of their own parents. When the time came when it was no longer possible for the girls to avoid joining the League of German Girls, the female equivalent of Hitlerjugend, Onkel Gerd reacted calmly:

‘Onkel Gerd called them all into the living room and asked them to sit down. He waited for a long time, quietly picking out his words before he slowly looked around at each of them individually and told them they had to decide for themselves. He was always calm. He didn’t trust things that were said with emotion, the way they spoke on the radio. Instead, he spoke slowly in clear sentences, breathing quietly and hardly moving his head, like a father. He said it was all right for him to make a sacrifice, but he would not force it on them.’¹⁴³

Onkel Gerd’s disposition and behaviour contrasts sharply with that of Hugo’s impulsive and fanatic nationalist father, who ‘knows what is good for Ireland,’¹⁴⁴ and who is happy one moment only to be angry the next at all the things that are not finished in Ireland.¹⁴⁵ In the post-war Ireland, Hugo’s father’s power reached only as far as his own immediate family; however, that might have been different had he not put his mind to the Irish language:

‘Then he started making speeches...The biggest crowd with the most hats going up was always outside the GPO for de Valera...My father wouldn’t throw his hat up for anyone, so he started making his own speeches at the other end of the street with his friends...He had his own way of bringing his fist down at the end of a sentence, like he was banging the table. Hats went up for him all right. He had the crowd in his pocket when he put his hand on his heart, and he could have stolen all the flying hats from de Valera and Larkin and Cosgrave, but he started speaking Irish and not everybody understood what he was saying.’¹⁴⁶

Hugo’s father is depicted as an immensely persuasive speaker whose rise to power was only thwarted by his own (nationalist) decision to speak the ‘right’ language which the majority of his audience did not understand. Hugo later reveals the direction in which his father and his comrades would have led the country had they gained the power they sought. One of his fellow party members was Gearóid, the publisher of the anti-democratic, totalitarian, and antisemitic newspaper called *Aiséiri*.¹⁴⁷ The outlook of the newspaper to which Hugo’s father also

¹⁴² Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 92

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹⁴⁷ Joachim Fischer, “Review: A Murky World,” *The Irish Review* (1986-), no. 44 (2012): 141–44.

contributed before his marriage, was unknown to Hugo's mother for a long time since Gearóid and Hugo's father always spoke Irish unintelligible to her. She and her children could, however, occasionally see Hugo's father in his nationalist fervour, as once after Gearóid's departure:

'My father tells us about the time he made a speech in Dublin, with thousands of people looking up at him...he takes off his glasses and starts making a speech at the dinner table. His face looks very different, like a different man in the house, a man I've never seen before...His eyes look smaller and darker, and his voice gets harder and stronger, like the radio...and he talks so fast that he has a little white blob of spit on his bottom lip. Every time Gearóid comes to the house he's like this afterwards. Happy and proud one minute, sad and angry the next, because not everybody in Ireland is doing what he told them to do.'¹⁴⁸

Ireland, fortunately, did not do what Hugo's father wanted, but his own family had to obey, and Frank's mother feels 'trapped in Ireland now as she was trapped in Germany once.'¹⁴⁹ Her only friend is her diary to which she confides all her thoughts for her children to read later on. Thus it originally could have been she who first noted Onkel Gerd's remark that people thought Goebbels and Hitler had rabies because they were always foaming at the mouth.¹⁵⁰ The silent suffering and oppression in Nazi Germany of Onkel Gerd and his family unfortunately repeats, if on a smaller scale, in the union of one of Onkel Gerd's nieces with an Irish nationalist:

'Sometimes they (Onkel Gerd and Ta Maria) huddled together and listened to jazz music from London in secret, like my mother does when my father is out at work. But that's dangerous, too. In our house, it's dangerous to sing a song and say what's inside your head. You have to be careful or else my father will get up and switch you off like the radio.'¹⁵¹

Hugo's mother silently suffered as she watched her husband forbid nearly all radio broadcasting apart from instances he himself allowed. She silently suffered as she watched him beating their sons and making them smile by pushing their lips apart with fingers until their teeth showed¹⁵² in the same way as her employer in Germany during the war had done to her after kidnapping and raping her.¹⁵³ She silently watched him 'talking and foaming at the mouth about all the things that are not finished yet in Ireland'¹⁵⁴ but it was with sheer horror that she discovered her husband's notes for his public speeches and an article in *Aiséirí* called *Ireland's Jewish problem*. The event seems to be a milestone in Hugo's life, too:

¹⁴⁸ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 118.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

‘When you’re small you know nothing and when you grow up there are things you don’t want to know...I don’t want people to know that he was foaming at the mouth. That the Irish language might be a killer language, too, like English and German. That my father believes you can only kill or be killed.’¹⁵⁵

Hugo’s mother implored her children not to defend themselves when attacked by street gangsters, not wanting her children to become ‘fist people’ like their attackers and Nazi Germans in her youth. Her husband did not stand up to their children either, preaching the need of national unity to the attacker’s family instead of asserting his children’s right for safety. Sadly, the need of unity of the nation did not prevent Hugo’s father from causing disunity in his very family when his nationalist fervour seemed to demand it. Instead of liberating, his nationalism severely constricted all within its reach. Paradoxically therefore, it was Hugo’s Irish father and not his German mother or German relatives who behaved like Nazis: Hugo’s father’s violent and impulsive nationalist behaviour contrasts distinctly with Hugo’s mother’s and Onkel Gerd’s calm and thoughtful behaviour, with their democratic outlook and amiable dispositions. Hugo’s father’s blob of spit or downright foaming at the mouth and frenzied behaviour at his speeches, his raging discontent with the state of the nation, his spreading of fear and repression of free speech and opinion, and lastly his revealed animosity against a different ethnicity are Nazi-like, are of the same essence. Hugo’s father’s Irish nationalism oppressed his family (and only his family as his party was not in power) in the same way as Nazi nationalism oppressed Onkel Gerd’s family, Germany, and the world due to its success in the struggle for political power. Hugo’s father’s nationalism is therefore depicted as bearing the same destructive potential as German Nazi nationalism. Hastings explains that the positive side of nationalism, the passion to defend and highlight the particularity of a given nation, may overgrow to blind its bearers to the same rights of others: ‘Nationalism is to be justified as an appropriate protest against a universalising uniformity, dominance by the other, but its consequence is too often precisely the imposition of uniformity, a deep intolerance of all particularities except one’s own.’¹⁵⁶ The demand for *lebensraum* of German Nazi nationalism to the detriment of all other nations and ethnicities provides one of the clearest examples of the enormous dangers of nationalism. Intolerance, however, is not a necessary consequence or trait of every form of nationalism: Hastings clarifies that nationalism grounded on *jus sanguinis* is inherently exclusivist and productive of intolerance, while nationalism grounded on *jus soli* is

¹⁵⁵ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 254.

¹⁵⁶ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 33-34.

inclusivist and integrating.¹⁵⁷ Although English notes that the ‘civic and ethnic definitions of the nation often compete, coexist and mingle with one another within the same nationalism, and distinctions between the two tend not to be absolute in practice,’¹⁵⁸ a point that only seems logical given ethnic bases of nations revealed by Smith, the distinction between the two appears to be most useful in directing one’s nationalist sentiments and beliefs: the grim and appalling consequences of ethnic nationalism as opposed to seeing the nation through the civic lens ought to be remembered and highlighted particularly at times of nationalist upsurges.

This chapter has explored the way in which two Irish memoirists were taught to see their country: through the prism of strongly anti-English nationalism inculcated in them both at home and at school, through instruction which vilified the English and celebrated their Irish opponents in ballads. At the beginning, the notion of nation and nationalism were briefly dealt with. Next, extracts from two memoirs were used to discuss the nature of nationalism, some of its features like exclusivism, narrative interpretation of history involving teleology, and merits to its bearers, i.e. the saturation of deep human needs: namely that of belonging and self-esteem, as well as, in some individuals, the need of higher purpose in life. It has been shown that the saturation of this latter need by nationalism can prove highly detrimental to the nationalist’s social environment, and the relation of nationalism to religion and democracy has also been discussed. The chapter is concluded by contrasting two types of nationalism, i.e. ethnic and civic. The education of Irish children in strongly anti-English nationalism was regarded as the *sine qua non* in Ireland of the time, and the same applies to their education in Catholicism, which constitutes the next chapter of the thesis.

¹⁵⁷ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 33-34.

¹⁵⁸ English, *Irish Freedom*, 451.

3. LEARNING IRISH CATHOLICISM

Catholicism is not only a firm but a crucial part of Irish national identity and of Irish nationalism, which is why Catholicism constitutes the next chapter of the thesis. The reasons for the central place of Catholicism in Irish national identity are deeply rooted in centuries of Irish history, the brief outline of which, from the point of religion, is the subject of the first part of the chapter. It is followed by the four memoirists' experience of Catholicism between the 1940s and 1960s when Catholicism and its practices were a natural and unquestioned way of life in Ireland.

Hastings explains that the decision of the Tudors to subjugate Ireland (as their control of it had shrunk to the small area of the Pale) was a natural consequence of the need of English nationalism to preserve the English nation-state: 'The war with Spain, the threat of a Spanish invasion of England and the manifest collapse of any sort of English state control of most of Ireland had produced a new determination on the part of government to subdue the island definitely.'¹⁵⁹ An important part of the island's subjugation was the attempted conversion of Irishmen to Protestantism, which, however, entirely failed. Jefferies states that the chief reasons for the failure of Reformation in Ireland were fierce and enduring opposition to it by the native Irish population and a massive lack of preachers for their conversion to the Reformed faith. He also clarifies that the nearly absolute lack of indigenous support of Reformation, together with the absence of a university in Ireland (Trinity College in Dublin was not founded until 1592), no pamphlets in circulation and nearly no preachers were, towards the end of the sixteenth century, coupled with Counter-Reformation efforts which sealed the country's Catholic character.¹⁶⁰ Luke lists ten reasons why Reformation in Ireland failed, among which there is racism, the then already centuries long disdain for Irishmen by Englishmen, as well as English political goals in Ireland¹⁶¹ which militated against the conversion of the indigenous population. Scally agrees and points out the fact that the local elite, the so-called Old English, were not won for the cause and that Reformation may have succeeded had they been converted.¹⁶² This is a point that Hastings rises, too, adding another issue of paramount importance: the refusal of Protestants to speak Irish, a point connected both to racism and the political goals mentioned

¹⁵⁹ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 81.

¹⁶⁰ Henry A. Jefferies, "Why the Reformation Failed in Ireland," *Irish Historical Studies* 40, no. 158 (2016): 151–70.

¹⁶¹ "Why Did the Reformation Fail in Ireland?," Irish Baptist College, last modified December 11, 2019, <https://www.irishbaptistcollege.co.uk/blog/why-did-the-reformation-fail-in-ireland/>.

¹⁶² John Scally, "Why did the Reformation fail to take hold in an Ireland under English rule?" *The Irish Times*, October 10, 2017.

above. Hastings clarifies that there was little enthusiasm to translate the Bible into Gaelic despite the fact that Elizabeth provided the money for its printing at the start of her reign. The New Testament did not appear until 1602 in a very small edition and was not reprinted until 1681, while the Old Testament was printed as late as 1685.¹⁶³ Hastings states that ‘the Church of England was far too committed to the Anglicisation of Ireland to be faithful to its own Protestant principles,’¹⁶⁴ an attitude going as far as their abhorrence of the Irish language:

‘Far from wanting to convert the Irish through their own language, they believed that the language was a basic part of the problem. Protestantism and English must go together. From the sixteenth to eighteenth century there were few Protestant clergy or laity who did not agree with Dean Swift that ‘it would be a noble achievement to abolish the Irish language.’’¹⁶⁵

The Church of Ireland agrees that the Reformers’ failure to speak Irish meant the betrayal of a crucial Reformation principle.¹⁶⁶ Its committed Englishness became, in Hastings’ words, ‘a saving grace for Irish Catholicism.’¹⁶⁷ As far as the Irish language is concerned, Hastings makes one more pivotal connection between it and Irish Catholicism: he insists that Catholicism became so important to Irish national identity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that it was later able to supplant the national language. The Old English played an important role the process: they were a small but very influential group who became crucial recipients and later producers of Counter-Reformation clergy. It was chiefly thanks to them that the Catholic clergy became English-speaking, and the Catholic laity simply followed suit. Due to their siding with the Gaelic speaking population in the matter of religion, the English language ceased to pose a threat to the Irish identity, unlike the Reformation principles imposed on the population by the English nation-state and in its interest:¹⁶⁸

It seems strange that Irish nationhood suffered so little from the abandonment of its strongest redoubt, the language, and it was only possible because Gaelic had in a very real way been replaced by an alternative principle, that of Catholicism. The fact that the threat to national identity in the seventeenth century was so clearly a Protestant one, and that Protestantism went necessarily with the dominance of England, inevitably identified Catholicism with Irish resistance to loss of national identity.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 86.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ “The Irish language and the Church of Ireland,” Church of Ireland, last modified 2014, <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/our-faith/church-teaching/the-irish-language-and-the-church-of-ireland>.

¹⁶⁷ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 87.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

In summary, the attempt at converting Ireland to Protestantism failed for a number of reasons. The chief of them were a fierce opposition to it by the native population which perceived it as a means of their subjugation rather than genuine interest in their salvation, immense lack of ministers, and the failure of those who did attempt to carry out Reformation to use the Irish language. These factors, combined with later Counter-Reformation, prevented the conversion of the Irish whose Catholicism became a crucial facet of their national identity.

The second half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century saw attempts at the plantation of Ireland, of which the biggest and the most successful (from the English point of view) was the plantation of Ulster. The plantation of Ulster sowed the seeds of modern troubles in Northern Ireland and of the political division of the island. In the Rising of 1641, thousands of the new Protestant settlers of all ages were massacred by embittered and dispossessed natives, and thousands more were driven out of their homes,¹⁷⁰ which imprinted siege mentality on the settler population in Ulster. Revenge of these atrocities was among the reasons for Cromwell's expedition to Ireland with his New Model Army, the finest fighting force in contemporary Europe. Cromwell's military barbarity in Drogheda and Wexford were followed by his Act of Settlement of 1652 whereby the debt incurred by his military campaign was repaid to his creditors. Hegarty writes that by 1660 between one-fifth and one-quarter of the Irish population had been wiped out by war and disease and that the Act of Settlement

'enabled the mass seizure of property and assets, with the result that the percentage of Catholic land decreased from seventy per cent in 1641 to less than ten per cent in 1660. The dispossessed were offered a choice of going 'to Hell, or to Connacht,' that is death, or stony-soiled reservations west of the river Shannon.'¹⁷¹

Winston Churchill assessed Oliver Cromwell's activity in Ireland as follows:

'By an uncompleted process of terror, by an iniquitous land settlement, by the virtual proscription of the Catholic religion, by the bloody deeds..., he cut new gulfs between the nations and the creeds. 'Hell or Connaught' were the terms he thrust upon the native inhabitants, and they for their part, across three hundred years, have used as their keenest expression of hatred 'The Curse of Cromwell on you.' ... Upon all of us there still lies 'the curse of Cromwell'.¹⁷²

McCulloch adds that the Cromwellian Act 'rewrote the demographics of Ireland to produce a society notable for its inequality and instability.'¹⁷³ It also created the Protestant Ascendancy,

¹⁷⁰ David Luke, "Why the Reformation Failed in Ireland," *Journal of the Irish Baptist Historical Society*, Vol.20, (2020): 7.

¹⁷¹ Neil Hegarty, *Irish History* (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020), 92.

¹⁷² Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 84.

¹⁷³ Joseph McCulloch, *A Pocket History of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2010), 97.

a caste of Protestant families who would control the lion's share of Irish assets in the future.¹⁷⁴ Cromwell spent nine months in Ireland, yet his legacy has rendered him arguably the most passionately hated villain of Irish history. This is why Frank writes that although his teachers could not agree on the best politician or the worst country, they were united in their opinion on Cromwell:

‘One master will hit you if you don’t know that Eamon de Valera is the greatest man that ever lived. Another master will hit you if you don’t know that Michael Collins was the greatest man that ever lived. Mr. Benson hates America and you have to remember to hate America or he’ll hit you. Mr. O’Dea hates England and you have to remember to hate England or he’ll hit you. If you ever say anything good about Oliver Cromwell they’ll hit you all.’¹⁷⁵

Frank later mentions appreciation of Cromwell among the greatest insults that his aunt was capable of devising for him: ‘Aunt Aggie torments me all the time...I’ll probably grow up and build an altar to Oliver Cromwell himself, I’ll run off and marry an English tart and cover my house with pictures of the royal family.’¹⁷⁶ Cromwell seems to embody in the national memory all tyranny suffered by Catholics from the hands of Protestants, or by Irishmen from the hands of Englishmen: the religious and national grievance have merged in one. The loss of the Jacobite cause in the Williamite War and with it the end of all hopes for the restoration of lost lands to Catholics concluded the, from the Irish perspective, disastrous century. The Williamite War ended with the Treaty of Limerick which promised religious freedom to Catholics, but it was not honoured. On the contrary, the very end of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century brought the Penal Laws to Catholics in Ireland.

The Penal or Popery Laws were a series of penal laws passed by the Ascendancy between 1695 and 1728 against Catholics and, to a lesser extent, Dissenters. The first two laws forbade them to keep weapons, to go overseas for education and to teach and run schools. The next required all regular clergy, bishops and others exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction to leave the kingdom; those allowed to remain were, under the next act, required to register, and further priests were forbidden to enter the kingdom. The Act to Prevent the Further Growth of Popery (the most important single penal statute) prohibited Catholics from buying land, inheriting it from Protestants, or taking leases for longer than 31 years. The estates of a deceased Catholic landowner were to be divided equally among his male heirs. Further legislation prohibited Catholics from practising law, holding office in central or local government, from membership

¹⁷⁴ Hegarty, *Irish History*, 92.

¹⁷⁵ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 85.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

in municipal corporations, and from service in the army and navy. Finally in 1728 Catholics lost the right to vote.¹⁷⁷ English notes that religious discrimination was the norm at the time and persecution of Protestants by Catholics elsewhere in Europe served as justification of the Laws in Ireland. He also states that although the laws had comparatively limited impact, their political and symbolic weight was enormous and they undermined respect for law in the majority of the population.¹⁷⁸ Strictly enforced, the laws would have caused the Irish Catholic clergy to die out in a generation but in practice there was no sustained attempt to enforce them, which is why by the 1720s priests and bishops operated freely, if discreetly, in most areas of the island,¹⁷⁹ and the laws in fact strengthened the bond between Catholics and their Church.¹⁸⁰ Agitation for the repeal of Penal Laws started in 1760 and Catholic Relief Acts were passed in 1778, 1782, and 1792-3, with the remaining formal disabilities being repealed by the so-called Catholic emancipation in 1829.¹⁸¹ In the meantime, in the aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion, the Irish Parliament was persuaded to vote for its own dissolution and Ireland became part of the United Kingdom under the Act of Union of 1800. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of Daniel O’Connell under whose leadership the Catholic Emancipation was passed. Killeen states that O’Connell set the tone for Irish nationalism, which was, thereafter, overwhelmingly Catholic, and careful not to offend the clergy.¹⁸² During the nineteenth century the Irish Catholic Church thrived to the extent that from the middle of the nineteenth century it dominated the Irish society; it continued to do so for over a hundred years (from 1850 to 1970) in what Inglis calls ‘the long nineteenth century of Catholicism.’¹⁸³

Inglis points out that less than eighty years after the (unsuccessful) suggestion of the British parliament to brand Irish priests on their faces by means of a hot iron or by castrating them (at the peak of the Penal Law efforts in 1719), a state-subsidised seminary was established in 1795: the National Seminary in Maynooth.¹⁸⁴ By 1850, Maynooth College became the largest seminary in the world,¹⁸⁵ a fact that well demonstrates the spectacular growth of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century. Inglis explains that one of the chief

¹⁷⁷ “Penal Laws,” in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, ed. S. J. Connolly, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 462-463.

¹⁷⁸ English, *Irish Freedom*, 84-85.

¹⁷⁹ “Penal Laws,” 462.

¹⁸⁰ English, *Irish Freedom*, 85.

¹⁸¹ “Penal Laws,” 463.

¹⁸² Killeen, *A Short History of Ireland*, 47.

¹⁸³ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁸⁵ “A Brief History of the College,” St. Patrick’s National Seminary Maynooth, <https://seminary.maynoothcollege.ie/about/a-brief-history>.

reasons behind this monumental growth to the point when by mid-nineteenth century the Catholic Church constituted a major power bloc in the Irish society was utter failure of all previous attempts at pacifying the Irish population by means of Penal Laws, Protestant proselytism, Protestant education, policing, and state-subsidised emigration: the state gradually surrendered to the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland, handing it the task of civilising Irishmen to the detriment of Protestantism.¹⁸⁶ Hastings clarifies the reasons behind the decline of anti-Catholicism in Britain after 1800: apart from Catholicism no longer posing a threat it was the fact that the now multi-national empire could not afford to be discriminating in religion: ‘English nationalism had been decidedly Protestant...but British nationalism was essentially secular.’¹⁸⁷ Irishmen, for their part, allied themselves with the Catholic Church to become as refined, educated and moral as Protestants while avoiding Protestantism: by using the Catholic Church to become civilised, they avoided becoming Protestant and fully Anglicised. In the European context, it was unique for Ireland that their whole civilising process took place in and through the Catholic Church.¹⁸⁸ Elsewhere in Europe, the civilising process had become secular and only in Ireland people learnt to become polite and well-mannered (solely) through the Catholic Church. As has been said, adherence to the Catholic Church and its rules was a means of achieving civility while keeping national distinctiveness. Becoming civil was a means to attain political freedom, i.e. home rule as well as economic survival, i.e. ownership of land.¹⁸⁹ Due to their gaining civility through the Church, Irish Catholics remained legalistically religious rather than secularly civil for over a hundred years.¹⁹⁰

One of the most important aspects in the emergence of the Catholic Church as a power bloc in Irish society was the control it gained of education and discipline of Irish children from 1750.¹⁹¹ Under the Penal Laws, Catholics were denied education with the intention of keeping them ignorant and uncouth: according to Inglis, this was the central aspect of the demoralising process behind the Penal Laws.¹⁹² It was then that the famous ‘hedge schools’ came into existence, so named because ‘the masters taught their pupils clandestinely in makeshift classrooms, sometimes consisting of little more than a shelter of a hedge or barn.’¹⁹³ Hedge

¹⁸⁶ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 97-128.

¹⁸⁷ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 65.

¹⁸⁸ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 136-137.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-101

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁹³ “Hedge Schools,” in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 249.

schools are indelibly seared onto the national consciousness, as Frank recounts in his father's morning lecture:

'He (Frank's father) tells me about the old days in Ireland when the English wouldn't let the Catholics have schools because they wanted to keep the people ignorant, that the Catholic children met in hedge schools in the depths of the country and learned English, Irish, Latin and Greek. The people loved learning... The masters risked their lives going from ditch to ditch and hedge to hedge because if the English caught them teaching they might be transported to foreign parts or worse.'¹⁹⁴

Hedge schools dominated Irish education until the establishment of the National School system in 1830s.¹⁹⁵ The number of hedge schools increased rapidly in the latter part of the eighteenth century, which was undoubtedly aided by the Relief Act of 1782 (restoring to Catholics the right to teach in schools). At that point hedge schools became known as pay schools with teachers under priests' supervision.¹⁹⁶ Inglis clarifies that the state system of National Schools was introduced in Ireland four decades before its introduction in England or Scotland as a means of civilising Irishmen after all previous attempts, listed above, failed. The census of 1821 showed that the Irish population had grown to 6.8 million, more than half the population of England, and the number of potentially rebellious 'savages' posed a threat to industrial Britain, which realised the potential of the Catholic Church for the pacification of the Irish masses.¹⁹⁷ This is why, when the system of National Schools was introduced in 1831, the state did not really object to its quiet takeover by the Catholic Church despite the schools' formal non-denominational status. The initially massive opposition to 'godless schools' by the Church gradually evolved, through the system of patronage, to the point when the Church exercised control over the vast majority of the schools, ensuring that they no longer posed a threat to its dominance of education in Ireland. Thus from mid-nineteenth century, the Catholic Church was in control of Irish education: the state paid for schools and by and large handed their control over to the Church.¹⁹⁸ So it was ensured that it was the Catholic clergy and religious orders who would educate generations of Catholics to come. Moreover, the Church took over and expanded the health system now run by religious orders of nuns, as well as orphanages, asylums, and other social institutions. Thus the Church became a major power bloc next to the state, and, since the establishment of the Free State in 1922, in 'a happy marriage' with the state, each

¹⁹⁴ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 238.

¹⁹⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 105.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

maintaining the power of the other.’¹⁹⁹ This was reflected in the Irish Constitution of 1937 which recognised ‘the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of faith professed by the great majority of the Citizens,’ (an article deleted in the 1972 referendum).²⁰⁰ The proportion of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland increased steadily throughout the twentieth century until it reached a peak of 95% in 1961²⁰¹ by which time ‘Catholic’ and ‘Irish’ had long been practically synonymous. It is at this time, when the Catholic Church was at the height of its power in the Republic, that the lives of the four memoirs are recounted. Not surprisingly were they all raised in Catholic homes and the Catholic faith was as natural to them as, and indeed taught to be synonymous with, their Irish nationality. Geographically, their distribution throughout Ireland is even: Frank McCourt lived in the southwest in Limerick, Tom Phelan in the centre of the island near Mountmellick, Hugo Hamilton on the eastern coast in Dublin, and Patrick Doherty on the northernmost tip of Ireland near Malin Head (Appendix 2). Their experience of their Catholic upbringing is the subject of the next part of the thesis.

Catholicism was so common a part of the memoirists’ lives that it transpires naturally in their everyday language. Exclamations, such as ‘Mother o’ God, what are you doin’ in me dead mother’s dress?’²⁰² or ‘Oh, Mother o’ God...what’s up with you?’²⁰³ are ubiquitous in the memoirs, just as were ‘Jesus, Mary and (Holy St.) Joseph;’²⁰⁴ Patrick also mentions the vernacular version ‘Jasus, Mary and Joseph.’²⁰⁵ Tom noted ‘Holy Mother of God!’²⁰⁶ and even ‘Mother of Mary!’²⁰⁷ Expressions as ‘thank(s be to) God and His Blessed Mother’²⁰⁸ or ‘with the help of God and His Blessed Mother’²⁰⁹ are also frequent. Catholicism also enabled its believers to devise specific threats, as when Laman threatened Frank: ‘I’m telling you, sure as God made little apples, that if I get up from this table you’ll be calling your patron saint.’²¹⁰ The same applies to the formation of similes, as in Hugo’s *The Speckled People*: ‘The rain was whispering...and rushing away into a drain like the sound of the rosary being said all night.’²¹¹

¹⁹⁹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 77-78.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰² McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 358.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 275 and 409.

²⁰⁵ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 46.

²⁰⁶ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 62.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁰⁸ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 366.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 343.

²¹¹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 22.

Tom uses a simile no less original: ‘The mare drooled, trembled all over, danced her rear end at the stallion, and lashed herself with her tail like a Spanish penitent in a Lenten procession.’²¹² Moreover, Tom noted that a local woman ‘clasped her chest like she was at the Consecration of the mass’²¹³ and an unpopular member of the farming community ‘would address those who had the misfortune to encounter him with assuredness of the infallible pope.’²¹⁴

Inglis clarifies that there are three main types of ethical behaviour in Christianity:

1. Magical-devotional – fulfilling traditional prescriptions and formulas in order to achieve material transformations in this world;
2. legalist-orthodox – adhering to the institutional rules and regulations of a Church; and
3. Individually principled ethics – methodically following an individually reasoned set of ethical guidelines.²¹⁵

According to Inglis, the three forms of religious behaviour may be also seen as developmental stages (both in terms of individuals and societies), with individually principled ethics being the most rational and advanced stage. During the nineteenth century, the prevailing magical-devotional type gradually gave way to legalist-orthodox religious behaviour which dominated in Ireland from the middle of the century until about the 1960s when it began to be replaced by the third type, i.e. individually principled ethics.²¹⁶

Magical practices ‘are based on the enactment of a formula or ritual which, if performed correctly, will coerce the god into bringing about the desired results.’²¹⁷ Magical practices and objects are so-called sacramentals (i.e. in imitation of sacraments), examples of which are relics, medals, holy water, novenas, and pilgrimages.²¹⁸ To a certain extent, sacraments also belong to the magical-devotional type of religiosity: Inglis gives the example of transubstantiation whose belonging in the magical-devotional category increases with the degree to which it is taken to be physical (not symbolic) and depending on precise repetition of actions and words.²¹⁹ Sacraments, however, are also a crucial part of legalist-orthodox behaviour as they are central to Church’s teaching on salvation.²²⁰ Magical practices were only eliminated by the Church if posing a direct threat, otherwise they were incorporated into the Church’s teaching: in fact the ability of the Catholic Church to combine magical practices and superstitions with the

²¹² Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 143.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

²¹⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 21.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-22

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

predominantly legalist-orthodox religious ethics aided the growth of the institutional Church both in Ireland and elsewhere.²²¹ O'Collins explains that sacramentals are material things that become sacred signs, i.e. holy practices, prayers, and various popular devotions and objects officially approved by the Catholic Church, for instance Stations of the Cross, saying the rosary, incense, and holy water.²²² All magical practices and objects mentioned above can be found in the four memoirs. According to Inglis, holy water, associated with protection, is the most common sacramental object used in Ireland.²²³ Patrick writes about his encounter with it early in his childhood on the occasion of his grandfather's decease:

'What's in that bowl? Mammy?'

'Holy water,' dippen two fingers in an sprinklen it ivrywhere with a flick a her wrist.

'What's that for?'

'Blessing the room before Granddad comes home.'²²⁴

Apparently, holy water is also used in burials as both Patrick and Frank observe. 'Father Kelly sprinkles holy water into the hole. He grabs a handful of soil an draps it in,' says Patrick about the burial of his grandfather. In the same way Frank, watching the interment of his girlfriend, sees a priest sprinkling her coffin with holy water.²²⁵ Patrick shows that holy water is also used for making the sign of the cross (another sacramental) and for sprinkling people or their vehicles before their journey. Before one of his brothers left for a seminary, his mother 'grabbed the holy water font from the sitten room door frame. She dipped her finger in an sprinkled it on the car.'²²⁶ She did the same for Patrick as he remembers upon his return to her house as an adult:

'The old statue of Our Lady, with the holy water font at her feet, still hung on the door frame. I dipped my finger in it and made the sign of the cross. How many fingers had dipped into it and how many visitors had Mammy sprinkled with it? She had sprinkled holy water on me as I left for Manchester when I was a student.'²²⁷

Holy water combines well with other magical objects as an elderly woman waiting for a medical examination with Frank's mother demonstrated: Frank's eye infection was to be cured by caul, which is 'a class of hood, rare and magical and which babies are born with on their heads', put on Frank's head any day that has three in it, together with making Frank hold his breath for three minutes while sprinkling him with holy water three times head to toenail.²²⁸ Holy water

²²¹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 26.

²²² Gerald O'Collins, *Catholicism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108-109.

²²³ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 29.

²²⁴ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 4.

²²⁵ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 381.

²²⁶ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 126.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

²²⁸ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 259.

may have helped to legitimise this superstitious procedure both in the eyes of the narrator and of the audience.

Learning to use another sacramental, the sign of the cross, is noted by both Patrick and Tom. Patrick notices people at his grandfather's wake 'making the sign of the cross like they are waften dung flies away.'²²⁹ Tom remembers a nun teaching him to make the sacramental:

'My religious indoctrination began in Sister Genevieve's class...I was taught how to perform my first religious rite – making the sign of the cross. 'Children, you can only bless yourselves with your right hand. It's a sign of the devil to bless yourself with your left.'²³⁰

Hugo watched his uncle Ted, a Jesuit priest, make the sign of the cross to him and other members of his family when they were ill.²³¹ He was also taught to perform the sign when passing a church,²³² as was Patrick: 'The tractor hurtles over the rough tarmac on the brae outside the chapel. We all make a quick sign of the cross.'²³³ Patrick also shows that the sign was used at wakes along with another sacramental, the rosary:

'Mourners filed along the side of the coffin, stopped near the middle, making a quick sign of the cross, giving a sudden jerk of the knee and mumbled...The women held rosary beads.'²³⁴

O'Collins explains that the rosary (Appendix 3.) was popularised by Dominicans and commemorates events involving Christ or his mother Mary. There are five 'mysteries' to the string of beads used to count the prayers involved and each mystery includes the 'Our Father (once), the 'Hail Mary (ten times), and the 'Glory be to the Father' (once).²³⁵ Inglis says that the rosary is the most traditional form of common ritual prayer sharing similarities with pagan practices, i.e. the ritual counting of beads as one proceeds in a circle, and its use has shifted from a ritualistic enactment of a coercive religious formula to a penitential act of supplication and entreaty.²³⁶ Since the dead may be interceded for in Roman Catholic piety, the rosary was used at wakes. At his father's wake, Patrick observed his mother as 'she threaded her rosary beads between her fingers stopping to caress each bead as if encouraging it to speak.'²³⁷ Hugo mentions a rosary among the items found on his mother's dressing table²³⁸ and she, in turn, found a rosary that used to belong to her husband's mother while looking through his

²²⁹ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 6.

²³⁰ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, 67.

²³¹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 94 and 115.

²³² *Ibid.*, 99.

²³³ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 92.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

²³⁵ O'Collins, *Catholicism*, 21.

²³⁶ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 27.

²³⁷ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 137.

²³⁸ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 8.

documents.²³⁹ Just as holy water, the rosary could be used to make the sign of the cross²⁴⁰ and the cross of the beads could be kissed: ‘The women bow their heads...they kiss the cross on their rosary beads.’²⁴¹ The rosary was among the numerous items Patrick’s mother bought her son Cahir before he left for the seminary in Maynooth: ‘Finally, she went to the Derry shops to buy two blacks soutanes, rosary beads an a leather backed bible.’²⁴² The rosary was the one object a deceased person held in his coffin: Patrick sees that his grandfather’s hands ‘haul his rosary beads’²⁴³ and Tom explains that ‘except in Protestant homes, Nurse Byrne weaved a set of rosary beads through the cold fingers and clamped the dead hands together in an attitude of prayerful humility for eternity.’²⁴⁴ This is why Tom’s elderly neighbour, Mrs Fitz, recounting her fall in a ditch, says to Tom’s mother that she endeavoured to ‘get out before the fairies think I’m dead and start winding the rosary beads through me fingers.’²⁴⁵ Apart from this use of the beads, Frank watched his classmate’s mother trying to heal his friend’s nose with it:

‘Mrs Slattery comes in with her rosary beads in her hand... She touches his nose with the cross on her rosary beads and says a little prayer. She tells us the rosary beads were blessed by the Pope himself and would stop the flow of a river if requested never mind Patrick’s poor nose.’²⁴⁶ When in hospital, Frank heard ‘the swish of Sister Rita’s habit and the click of her rosary beads.’²⁴⁷ Sister Rita scolded Frank for speaking to the girl in the neighbouring ward instead of saying the rosary: ‘You could be saying the rosary’²⁴⁸ because ‘hundreds of boys said the rosary for you and offered up their communion.’²⁴⁹

Holy pictures and statues were similarly ubiquitous in Irish homes. Frank reveals that the only picture on the walls of their home in was a picture of the Pope Leo the Thirteenth.²⁵⁰ Hugo, too, writes that before his father got married, there was no furniture in his house, only a table and two chairs in the kitchen and a statue of the Virgin Mary.²⁵¹ It may have been this statue kept on their kitchen window sill during his childhood,²⁵² or there may have been more

²³⁹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 251.

²⁴⁰ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 4.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴⁴ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 11.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁴⁶ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 177.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 217 and 220.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 323.

²⁵¹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 40.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 157.

of them. There was also a picture of Virgin Mary in their hall.²⁵³ Hugo writes that the bottom of his parents' wardrobe revealed 'boxes full of letters and postcards...and holy pictures'²⁵⁴ during his play with his siblings. In Patrick's house, a statue of Our Lady held a holy water font at her feet.²⁵⁵ In Tom's rural home, there was a Sacred Heart Lamp and the widely popular magazine *The Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*.²⁵⁶ Frank describes his first encounter with holy pictures, statues, and the Sacred Heart Lamp:

'There is a picture on the wall by the range of a man with long brown hair and sad eyes. He is pointing to his chest where there is a big heart with flames coming out of it. Mam tells us, That's the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and I want to know why the man's heart is on fire and why doesn't He throw water on it? Grandma says, Don't these children know anything about their religion? and Mam tells her it's different in America. Grandma says the Sacred Heart is everywhere and there's no excuse for that kind of ignorance.'²⁵⁷

Frank says that under the picture of Jesus, there is also a shelf with a red glass holding a flickering candle and next to it a small statue of Baby Jesus, the Infant of Prague.²⁵⁸ The red Sacred Heart lamp (later electrified, see appendix 4.) was a traditional object in Catholic homes in Ireland since the nineteenth century and devotion to the Sacred Heart was an important feature of Irish Catholicism.²⁵⁹ Frank's classmate Fintan's flat was similarly adorned: it was 'like a chapel', with a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as well as a picture of St. Francis of Assisi, and 'all kinds of religious magazines: *The Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, *The Lantern*, *The Far East*, as well as every little book printed by the Catholic Truth Society.'²⁶⁰ The pictures and statues could also be prayed to, as in the instance when Frank ate his grandmother's lodger's lunch: 'Every day... grandma makes me kneel to the statue of the Sacred Heart and tell Him I'm sorry.'²⁶¹ When Frank attempted to watch his friend's naked sisters, Frank's mother made him kneel before their picture of the Pope and swear to the (by then long-not-in-office) Pope that he had not looked.²⁶²

²⁵³ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 97.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁵⁵ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 122.

²⁵⁶ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, 16 and 22.

²⁵⁷ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 57.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ "Sacred Heart lamp, 1960s," National Museum of Ireland, <https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Folklife-Collections/Kitchen-Power/Kitchen-Power-Online/Impact-on-the-kitchen/Sacred-Heart-lamp,-1960s>.

²⁶⁰ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 174 and 176.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 214.

Other magical-devotional practices like pilgrimages, novenas, and the Stations of the Cross are also encountered in the memoirs, even if only passingly. Hugo writes that his mother ‘ran away to Ireland to become a pilgrim in a holy country’²⁶³ and that once she and Hugo’s father ‘went up to a famous mountain in Ireland called Croagh Patrick to pray’, saw others climb in their bare feet and heard them pray the rosary at the top.²⁶⁴ According to Inglis, Croagh Patrick (Appendix 5), the climbing of which in one’s bare feet is a penitential activity, belongs among the most popular places for pilgrimage in Ireland.²⁶⁵ A novena is a nine day period of saying a set form of prayer, often through intercession of the Virgin Mary or a saint, to obtain special favours (‘novena’ is derived from the Latin ‘novem,’ nine).²⁶⁶ Frank mentioned his aunt Aggie hoping to have children in the future: ‘Even if I have to do a hundred novenas to the Virgin Mary and her mother, St. Ann, or if I have to crawl from here to Lourdes on me two bended knees.’²⁶⁷ Frank’s aunt demonstrates typical aspects of Catholic piety: a pilgrimage and prayers to Mary and saints. The Stations of the Cross (Appendix 6.) are found in churches as a series of 14 small icons or images to be used as a mini pilgrimage as one moves from station to station, reciting specific prayers at each image.²⁶⁸ According to O’Collins, the Stations of the Cross were propagated by the Franciscans²⁶⁹ and Frank says that he did the Stations several times, together with multiple repetitions of a number of other devotional activities when desperately interceding for his deceased friend Theresa.²⁷⁰

Memoirists were also taught about the sacredness of relics and medals. A medal was used to help to cure Tom’s disease: ‘When I got ringworm on my face...a ‘special’ medal from the nuns was held against my face. Later, Mam told the nuns the medal had worked a miracle.’²⁷¹ Relics are the physical remains of a saint (or a person considered holy but not yet officially canonized) as well as objects ‘sanctified’ by the saint’s touch.²⁷² Frank learns at school that ‘next to a relic of the True Cross the Communion wafer is the holiest thing in the world.’²⁷³ Tom, listening to his parish priest’s fiery anti-English sermon, hears about the relics of Oliver Plunkett (Appendix 7.):

²⁶³ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 18.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²⁶⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 27.

²⁶⁶ “What is a Novena? The prayer tradition explained,” Faith Counts, <https://faithcounts.com/novena-explained/>.

²⁶⁷ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 76.

²⁶⁸ “Stations of the Cross,” Catholic Online, <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/station.php>.

²⁶⁹ O’Collins, *Catholicism*, 21.

²⁷⁰ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 381.

²⁷¹ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 11.

²⁷² “What Are Relics?” Catholic Straight Answers, <https://catholicstraightanswers.com/what-are-relics/>.

²⁷³ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 135.

‘God showed how wicked the English are, and how right Irish Catholics are, by preserving Blessed Oliver’s head and not letting the flesh rot of it. His holy head is now in a glass case in Saint Peter’s Church in Drogheda, and after all these centuries the hair still grows on it. Every Irishman and Irishwoman should visit that sacred head and kneel and pray in Irish to show their Irishness and to remember that the English are savages. *A n-anamacha leis an diabhal!* May the devil take their souls!’²⁷⁴

This extract as well as the whole sermon on Oliver Plunkett’s suffering demonstrates not only the Catholic veneration of saints and their relics but also the fact that the national and the religious cause merge in the case of Ireland to such an extent that they become inseparable. Secondly, it demonstrates that if the rural population was not educated in anti-English and anti-Protestant attitudes at home (due to reasons suggested at the beginning of the chapter about Irish nationalism), the priests and presumably also schools provided the lessons. Tom writes that the priest’s sermon took place yearly on the Sunday closest the feast of Blessed Oliver Plunkett, which is why ‘some parishioners had heard it so many times that they mouthed the words along with the priest at the memorable places.’²⁷⁵ Tom reveals the comfort of knowing the outcome of Oliver’s fate: ‘Whenever I realized Father McCluskey was heading into the death throes of Oliver Plunkett, I listened anxiously, but assured, like a child knowing the outcome of an oft-told Jack the Giant Killer story at bedtime.’²⁷⁶ During the sermon, however, he touched his ears and lips, hugged his stomach and held his crotch as the priest’s description of the mutilation of Oliver Plunkett’s body parts proceeded. Being a son of a farmer Tom was familiar with the sight of removal of animals’ intestines which made the priest’s description of Oliver’s disembowelment all the more vivid to him.²⁷⁷ The imprint of the yearly sermon on Tom was such that a whole chapter is dedicated to it in his memoir and the sermon undoubtedly left a similar trace on the nationalist and religious consciousness of other parishioners, yearly assured about the innate barbarity of the English nation, ‘heretics’ or downright ‘heathen.’²⁷⁸ Father McCluskey failed to find inspiration in the meek nature of Oliver Plunkett (the Irish patron saint of reconciliation) and preferred to revel in his deathly agony and in hatred of his executors.

The attitude of the majority of Irish Catholics towards their Protestant compatriots was, fortunately, not as harsh as their sermons against Protestant Englishmen. When Patrick and his

²⁷⁴ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 98.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-97.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

relatives arrive in ‘Ireland’s tidiest town of Malin, a plantation town,’ Patrick notes that ‘Cuhoons petrol station is open. They’re Protestants. Boggs butchers is open. They’re Protestants too.’²⁷⁹ These quotes reveal that Protestants in the Republic of Ireland were always noted as different or other, and Catholic children found it hard to combine the difference in creed with mutual cooperation in business. The conflict is clear in Patrick’s use of an adversative conjunction in the sentence about his mother’s favourite butcher: ‘She doesn’t trust any butcher apart from Bertie Boggs in Malin Town, even though he’s a Protestant.’ Patrick’s inner conflict is even more evident in his note about new sheep bought by his father: ‘I don’t understand why he buys sheep from Bobby. He’s a Protestant.’²⁸⁰ Although Protestants were clearly perceived to be different, Patrick was surprised by the level of animosity between the two creeds in Northern Ireland when his friend from Derry told him that ‘he had never played cowboys and Indians, only Catholics and Protestants.’²⁸¹ Frank’s experience of Protestants was similar to Patrick’s. When the lodger Bill Galvin is brought into Frank’s grandmother’s house by her mentally deficient son Pat, she ‘barks at Uncle Pat for not telling her he was dragging a Protestant into the house...there will be gossip up and down the lane and beyond.’²⁸² Her aversion to Bill is, however, soon softened by the fact that his late wife was Catholic, by Bill’s conflict-free nature, and presumably also by the money paid by him. Frank’s neighbour Nora Molloy uses the presence of a Protestant charity in Limerick to threaten the officials of the St. Vincent de Paul Society: ‘I’ll go to the Quakers. They’ll give me charity.’²⁸³ Her strategy works, and Nora gets three pairs of boots for her children from officials claiming to have none. When her baking humour comes upon her, Nora turns her threat into reality calling at Protestants among various other people to beg for flour.²⁸⁴ These examples show that even in the ‘holiest town of Limerick’ Protestants were peacefully communicated with. Also Frank reveals his compassion for them rather than hostility:

‘On Sunday mornings in Limerick I watch them go to church, the Protestants, and I feel sorry for them, especially the girls...Outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation. Outside the Catholic Church there is nothing but doom. And I want to save them. Protestant girl, come with me to the True Church. You’ll be saved and you won’t have the doom.’²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 93.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸² McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 150.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

Tom's rural experience of Protestants was better still, and he witnessed cooperation surpassing religious differences: 'When the Angelus rang out at noon and six o'clock, Isaack (a Protestant neighbouring farmer) leaned on the handle of his pitchfork and looked at his feet while the Catholic men took off their caps and prayed.'²⁸⁶ Tom also recounts the sad fate of a local man, Paddy Cleary, who died on the feast of the Epiphany (the sixth of January) while helping his Protestant friends saw wood: the blade broke out of its moorings and split open his head. Naturally, Catholics saw Paddy's death as punishment for his working on a holy day, yet the fact that 'Paddy had grown up with his neighbours' children, had played cowboys-and-Indians...had eaten in their house as often as they had eaten in his,'²⁸⁷ and thus to him 'the only difference between Protestants and Catholics was that he got more days off'²⁸⁸ reveals how cordial relationships between the two creeds may have been, at least in rural Ireland. This was in spite of the fact that children were strictly separated for education, as Tom explains: 'All the Catholic children in Mountmellick began their formal education in the Presentation Convent School...The Protestant children...had their own building farther up the town.'²⁸⁹

The already mentioned veneration of Mary and of saints is another Catholic practice. Unlike Protestants, Catholics do not perceive the worship of and prayers to God and to Mary and saints as mutually exclusive. O'Collins explains that 'it is typically Catholic to embrace 'both/and,' and hold together things that some other Christians tend to oppose to each other.'²⁹⁰ He clarifies that 'like members of Orthodox Churches, Catholics do not accept an 'either/or' in the case of Jesus and his Mother...they want Jesus *and* his Mother as they...feel themselves understood and cherished by this woman and mother.'²⁹¹ The same applies to the veneration of saints. Prayers to Mary are an essential part of Catholic prayers including evening prayers. Young Patrick says: 'I know all the words aff by heart from kneelen on the floor ivry night an resten me elbows on the hard chair. I don't understand the words. Hail Mary, full of grace...'²⁹² Frank, too, prayed to Mary in his evening prayers with his father:

'After the story Dad...kneels with us while we say our prayers. We say the Our Father, three Hail Marys, God bless the Pope. God bless Mam, God bless our dead sister and brothers, God bless Ireland, God bless De Valera, and God bless anyone who gives Dad a job.'²⁹³

²⁸⁶ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, 154.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁹⁰ O'Collins, *Catholicism*, 112.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 7.

²⁹³ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 239.

Even angels may or perhaps even ought to be prayed to as Tom was instructed: ‘I learned I had to pray to my guardian angel every day: Angel of God, my guardian angel, to whom God’s love commits me here, ever this day, be at my side to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.’²⁹⁴ As has been said, saints are also widely prayed to by Catholics and believers often attempted to determine the saint most suitable for their situation; in describing the difficult birth of his mother, Frank states: ‘My grandmother switches her prayers to St. Ann, patron saint of difficult labor. But the child won't come. Nurse O'Halloran tells my grandmother, Pray to St. Jude, patron saint of desperate cases.’²⁹⁵ St. Jude is also prayed to by Frank’s father when Frank’s mother sets out to beg for an onion to cure their toddler Oliver’s illness: ‘Did you get the onion?... I knew you would. I said a prayer to St. Jude. He's my favorite saint, patron of desperate cases.’²⁹⁶ And again, when Frank falls ill with typhoid, he recounts his father being ‘sure St. Jude pulled him through the crisis because...he was indeed a desperate case.’²⁹⁷ Reading a book about saints, Frank concludes that ‘St. Wilgefortis is the one you pray to if you’re an Englishwoman with a troublesome husband.’²⁹⁸ When asked to pray for the delay in death of his friend’s sister dying of tuberculosis, Frank considers the best statue to pray to in the church: ‘...they have statues of St. Joseph himself as well as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower. I pray to the Little Flower because she died of the consumption herself and she’d understand.’²⁹⁹ Frank often prays to his patron St. Francis; he is assured by his classmate Fintan, who himself intends to become a saint,³⁰⁰ that on the feast day of St. Francis ‘you can ask St. Francis for anything and he’ll surely give it to you.’³⁰¹ When Frank borrows the dress of his deceased grandmother, he prays to St. Francis to keep his grandmother in the grave and promises him a candle when he starts a job.³⁰² The most remarkable of Frank’s prayers to his patron saint is, however, when Frank is placed in a younger class having missed school due to his illness. Despite his frailty, Frank sets out on a pilgrimage to a statue of St. Francis:

I know I have to go to the statue of St. Francis of Assisi. He’s the only one who will listen...It’s a penny to light a candle and I wonder if I should just light the candle and keep the penny. No, St. Francis would know...I light the candle, I kneel at his statue and beg him to get me out of

²⁹⁴ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 67.

²⁹⁵ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 4.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 353.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 358.

fifth class... St. Francis doesn't say a word but I know he's listening and I know he'll get me out of that class. It's the least he could do after all my trouble coming to his statue, sitting on steps, holding on to walls, when I could have gone to St. Joseph's Church and lit a candle to the Little Flower or the Sacred Heart of Jesus Himself.'³⁰³

The last examples show that Catholics probably deemed their prayers more effective when a candle was lit whilst praying to the saint, and Inglis clarifies that lighting a candle to a saint is a magical practice due to 'the highly ritual format used to obtain the favour: there are special saints to whom one prays and specific acts done to obtain the favours.'³⁰⁴

In conclusion, Catholic children learnt to use of a number of sacramentals from a very young age. These magical-devotional practices included the use of holy water and medals, the making of the sign of the cross, the saying of the rosary, the presence of various objects in Catholics' homes (mainly pictures, statues, and lamps), as well as undertaking pilgrimages, praying novenas and the Stations of the Cross, venerating saints and their relics and praying to them, often lighting a candle. While the Church's rhetoric was often fiercely anti-Protestant in its anti-Englishness, the day-to-day coexistence of Irish Catholics with Irish Protestants was mostly peaceful, and at times even very cordial.

According to Inglis, magical-devotional practices prevailed until mid-nineteenth century and after the Famine were to a great degree superseded by legalist-orthodox religiosity. Demography was one of the reasons for the change in religious behaviour as labourers and cottiers who were oriented towards magical practices who constituted the vast majority of the population before the famine were virtually eliminated.³⁰⁵ Another reason was the profound reorganisation of the institution of the Catholic Church in the second half of the nineteenth century: under the leadership of archbishop Cullen the Church was reshaped in organisation, discipline and devotion along the Roman lines.³⁰⁶ Thus legalist-orthodox practices became the dominant form of religious behaviour in Ireland from 1850 to 1970, in the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism. Legalist-orthodox behaviour is based on adherence to a stable, systematic doctrine enunciated by the Church: obedience of the doctrine or law is a means of winning God's favour and any infraction of the doctrine constitutes a sin as the rules and regulations of the Church are believed to be divinely ordained.³⁰⁷ Grace of God is received and maintained through regular performance of rituals, good works and prayer: the more one prays,

³⁰³ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 232.

³⁰⁴ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 28.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

receives the sacraments and otherwise follows the teaching of the Church, the more likely it is that one will be saved.³⁰⁸ Salvation is the sole preserve of the Church experts who solve moral problems of laity in confession and assess whether or not salvation can be attained; thus the rigid legalist does not follow his or her conscience.³⁰⁹ The more legalist-orthodox behaviour prevails, the smaller the gap between official discourse of the Church and the life of ordinary Catholics;³¹⁰ in the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism, Irish Catholics differed from those in other western European societies by a very high level of institutional adherence to the Church, especially in terms of sacramental attendance. This is probably the reason why they also differed in the general acceptance of the Church as the arbiter of morality. Another difference was the persistence of many magical devotional practices described above.³¹¹ According to Inglis, of all the rules and regulations of the Catholic Church, the one most essential was attending Mass on Sundays and obedience of this rule became a litmus test as to whether a person was a practicing Catholic.³¹² Tom remembers the obligation of going to Mass as follows:

‘On Sundays and holy days the morning bell reminded everyone to begin the struggle into their Sunday clothes before setting out to mass on foot, on bike, in donkey-and-cart, in pony-and-trap, and by one Model T Ford...On Sunday mornings the footpaths became moving streams with walkers on their way to obey the First Precept of the Church: ‘to respectfully and devoutly assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.’ To ignore this precept meant committing a mortal sin and roasting in hell forever unless you made it to confession before you expelled your final breath.’³¹³

Patrick only notes: ‘It’s the Feast of the Assumption an we hev to go to Mass agen.’³¹⁴ Frank even goes to four Masses on one Sunday³¹⁵ and he says that his classmate Fintan’s holiness manifests itself in his ‘going to Mass and Communion rain or shine’³¹⁶ and confessing to the Jesuits every Saturday.³¹⁷ Inglis explains that going to Sunday Mass established a person’s status of a member of the community and was a major public event when people wore their best clothes, made sure their children were well-behaved, and talked to each other politely.³¹⁸ Tom

³⁰⁸ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 29-30.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 and 35.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹³ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 181.

³¹⁴ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 35.

³¹⁵ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 381.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

³¹⁸ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 70.

shows that preparations for Sunday Mass required effort of both his parents: ‘On Saturday nights in our kitchen, preparations were made for attendance at mass the next morning. Dad shaved, Mam polished shoes, Dad washed the children, Mam dried us and fine-combed our hair for fleas, and Dad trimmed our nails.’³¹⁹ Not going to Sunday Mass set a person apart (negatively, just as receiving Holy Communion did so in a positive sense), as Frank reveals in the case of the Meagher family who never receive money from their husband and father in England: ‘They don’t even go to Mass on Sunday mornings...Mrs. Meagher is in a constant state of shame over the rags they wear.’³²⁰ One can only imagine the desperation of Mrs Meagher, torn between the obligation to attend Mass and the humiliation of appearing there in rags, torn between the religious and the social function of Mass. Frank does not say how Mrs Meagher avoided other parishioners informing on her absence at the celebration of Mass but Inglis writes that fellow Catholics, in search of their priest’s recognition, often informed him of moral laxity or blatant defiance of the Catholic moral code in their community.³²¹ It is this supervision by the community that Tom describes:

‘Besides the fear of eternal punishment, there was social pressure to attend Sunday mass, so great moral courage was demanded of the stay-abed. Neighbours, fearful for the soul of a recalcitrant, whispered in priestly ears, and before long a clerical visit to the sinner’s home would be observed from behind lace curtains.’³²²

Despite this alertness, some inconspicuous-enough parishioners managed to avoid Mass, Jimser Scott, Tom’s neighbour, being one of them. Dressed in his best clothes every Sunday, he cycled to a bridge, waited for Mass to end, and headed for a pint in the local pub.³²³ There was one more aspect of Mass important to Catholics, and that was prayers said for them in Mass upon their death. It appears that prayers uttered in Mass were considered more powerful or effective than prayers said in privacy, or that perhaps the perceived privilege of being mentioned and prayed for by name in public and/or by the priest himself drove Catholics to desire these prayers. Tom writes that his elderly neighbour Mrs. Fitz used to tell him: ‘When you’re a priest, Tom Phelan, you’d better remember me in your first mass or I’ll come hack to haunt ya.’³²⁴ And again, when he was leaving for the seminary, she reminded him of her wish: ‘Just in case I die before you come home again, Tom, remember you promised you’ll pray for me poor soul in

³¹⁹ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 15.

³²⁰ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 256.

³²¹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 49.

³²² Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 181.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 182.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

your first mass.³²⁵ Similarly, Frank remembers Mrs. Finucane desiring to be prayed for in Mass so earnestly that she weekly attempted to pre-pay the act:

‘Mrs Finucane says she’s not long for this world and the more Masses said for her soul the better she’ll feel. She puts money in envelopes and sends me to churches around the city to knock on priests’ doors, hand in the envelopes with the request for Masses... She sends money, she hopes the Masses are said, but she’s never sure.’³²⁶

Mrs. Finucane’s behaviour seems to suggest that prayers said in Mass were believed to be capable of securing salvation to the deceased.

The Mass was served in Latin before the Second Vatican Council, which took place from 1962 to 1965 and permitted the use of vernacular languages in liturgy. This is why young Patrick said: ‘Mass begins. I don’t know all the Latin.’³²⁷ Perhaps due to its exclusive use in Mass, some Catholics, as for instance Frank’s father and Frank’s teacher Mr Benson, believed the language to be superior or even holy. Mr Benson would have preferred to teach catechism in Latin as it is ‘the language of the saints who communed intimately with God and His Holy Mother’ and thus, in his view, ‘Irish is fine for patriots, English for traitors and informers, but it’s the Latin that gains us entrance to heaven itself.’³²⁸ Frank’s father, too, believed in innate sacredness of the Latin tongue:

‘Dad says...it's time for me to be an altar boy... Every evening after tea I kneel for the Latin and he won't let me move till I'm perfect. Mam says he could at least let me sit but he says Latin is sacred and it is to be learned and recited on the knees. You won't find the Pope sitting around drinking tea while he speaks the Latin.’³²⁹

Being an altar boy was a matter of prestige, and Frank imagines ‘everyone in St. Joseph’s looking at him and admiring his ways,’³³⁰ until the priest rewards his effort by the brusque ‘We don't have room for him’ and by closing the door.³³¹ The prestige of appearing by the altar was, according to Frank’s mum, bestowed not on boys from lanes but on ‘the nice boys with hair oil and new shoes that have fathers with suits and ties and steady jobs.’³³² Patrick does not feel attracted by the altar boys’ status due to his elder brothers’ experience:

³²⁵ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, 196.

³²⁶ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 416.

³²⁷ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 9.

³²⁸ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 130

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *Ibid.*, 167.

‘Cahir says Father Kelly scares him on the altar. I don’t want to be an altar boy like him. I don’t like Father Kelly. After my big brother Willie came home from Chicago, he told me Father Kelly hit him across the face on the altar when he didn’t carry the bible properly.’³³³

Tom, on the other hand, enjoyed learning the Latin responses of altar boys thanks to the amiable disposition of the instructing nun. It is likely that he would not have found the mystery of Latin or the circumstances of its learning so charming had it not been for the nun’s kindness:

‘Learning the responses for the Latin mass was a time of warmth, love, and delight: warmth, because our group of eight potential altar boys sat outside on the steps of the sacristy in the autumn sun; delight, because I was being let in on the mysterious priestly language that rolled exotically around the tongue; and love, because I fell in love at age ten with the sweet voice, beautiful face, and slender soft fingers of Sister Carmel, the nun who was instructing us.’³³⁴

Tom recalls that as the lessons progressed, ‘not even the bully Paddy Connors’s schoolyard jeering muddied his feelings of specialness, of being one of the chosen’³³⁵ and it is this quote that best depicts the social status of altar boys in Irish Catholic society. Moreover, in a community where everyone went to Mass on Sunday and nearly all schools were Catholic, there was another advantage to being an altar boy, as Patrick reveals, i.e. enjoying the favour of the priest teachers on schooldays:

‘If you are good at Maths ye sit on the right and if ye’re not ye sit on the left. I am always on the left. I’ll never have a chance to sit on the right. Some of the boys on the right are not that good. He (Father Campbell) likes them because they’re altar servers. I don’t serve Mass. He doesn’t like me. I’m from Malin Head. I don’t like him either. In fact, I hate him.’³³⁶

In conclusion, the legalist-orthodox behaviour of Irish Catholics manifested itself most expressly in their regular and unquestioned attendance of Mass on Sundays and other holy days. In the memoirists’ childhood Mass was served in Latin and the prestige and social advantages of altar boys was well understood and sought for by the boys and their families.

Patrick’s and other memoirists’ experience of priests and the Church in education hinted at in the last extract will be dealt with presently; the immediate paragraphs will zoom out and in a broader perspective explore the sources of power of the Catholic Church in Ireland, of which education was part. Inglis explains that there were three chief ways of its gaining and sustaining power: organisational manpower and resources, the Church’s dominance in other social fields (mainly in Irish education and health), and the role of being a good Catholic in the

³³³ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 5.

³³⁴ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 85.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

³³⁶ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 101.

struggle of Irish Catholics for social and other capital.³³⁷ This last way is going to be explored first, the Church's manpower will be looked into next and lastly, the educational field is going to be dealt with.

It has been said that Mass attendance was a necessary prerequisite of being an accepted member of the community and Inglis clarifies the social role of going to Mass in more detail. The Church used both religious coercion (denial of salvation) and social coercion (loss of social prestige, excommunication) to ensure Mass attendance of laity; it was very difficult for a Catholic to be regarded the same as the rest of the society and maintain basic respect of others without going to Mass on Sundays. Mass attendance was therefore not a purely religious or private matter but was as much a public affair. It meant acting as a good Catholic, which bestowed minimal religious capital on individuals and families and was a key strategy in maintaining this form of cultural capital. In Ireland, unlike in other European societies, religious capital remained an important form of cultural capital, and could therefore be traded for other forms of capital. That is to say that in Ireland, religious capital defined a person's social position to a much higher degree than elsewhere in Europe. Thus adherence to the rules of the Church was tied in with the acquisition of social, political, and economic capital: being a good Catholic was crucial to getting a job or contract, to being accepted, elected, educated, or well-known.³³⁸ Frank demonstrates this connection in several places more or less directly. On the most direct level, Frank shows that getting a job involved a letter of recommendation from a priest: 'I'm thirteen going on fourteen and it's June, the last month of the school forever. Mam takes me to see the priest Dr. Cowpar, about getting a job as a telegram boy.'³³⁹ When at the post office, Frank explained that his mother had brought a note from the parish priest, which is why there was a job for him.³⁴⁰ When Frank was dismissed following lies about his demeanour, his mother pleaded for Frank to no avail until the post office received a letter from the priest again: 'She gets a letter from the parish priest. Take the boy back, says the parish priest. Oh yes, Father, indeed, says the post office.'³⁴¹ It is evident from these quotes that a parish priest's approval of a person and thus his recommendation of him or her was indispensable for the person's economic survival. It was also desirable to be a good Catholic to receive material aid from the charity organisation of St. Vincent de Paul (since not every woman possessed the ability to threaten the charity officials with the Quakers as Nora Molloy did). This is evident from

³³⁷ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 17.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11, 47, 66-70.

³³⁹ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 338.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 362.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 385.

Question Quigley's explanation of the reason for joining the Arch Confraternity of the Holy Family in Limerick:

'The Question says you have to join the Confraternity so that your mother can tell the St. Vincent de Paul Society and they'll know you're a good Catholic. He says his father is a loyal member and that's how he got a good pensionable job cleaning lavatories at the railway station.'³⁴²

Joining the Confraternity is clearly shown as capable of bestowing additional religious capital on its members, to be traded for economic capital when needed. The prefect of Frank's section of the Confraternity, Declan, intends to trade his capital gained there for the job of a shop assistant: 'Father Gorey, the director, can easily get Declan the reward of a job at Cannock's if he's a good prefect and has perfect attendance in his section and that's why Declan will destroy us if we're absent.'³⁴³ When the cleaner Seamus disagrees with Sister Rita's decision to move Frank to a lonely ward upstairs following his communication with a girl in another ward, Seamus 'has a good mind to go to the Limerick Leader and tell them print the whole thing except he has this job and he'd lose it if ever Sister Rita found out.'³⁴⁴ These examples demonstrate that obedience of the Church and the acquisition of religious capital thus gained was largely employed in attaining (the prospect of) economic capital. Irishmen did not dare openly challenge the Church, lest their social position should be endangered. People were either silent, muttered to themselves, or left, as Patrick shows when remembering their parish priest forcing his flock to take part in a sporting afternoon. 'When we arrive at the door of the chapel Father Kelly is standen there. He has a sheet in his hand. He writes on it as he talks to people entren. He'll be checken who's comen to the sports.'³⁴⁵ Having asked several parishioners about their attendance at the event, the priest turns to Patrick's mother: 'And you'll be doing the teas, Lizzie?' She lucks at him. She smiles. She doesn't speak. Mammy doesn't go to the Sports Day. She stays at home by herself.'³⁴⁶ Patrick's mother found it impossible to contradict the priest and defend her free afternoon: she solved her conflict by silent disobedience. Inglis explains that coercive strategies of priests included home visitation, denial of absolution, and public denunciations which (carried out informally through the parish grapevine or formally from the pulpit and rarely through excommunication) were most feared by the members of the community.³⁴⁷ Patrick reveals this fear of parishioners when the priest reads out the names of

³⁴² McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 163.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁴⁵ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 33.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁴⁷ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 47.

the men who failed to help with the preparation of the field: people cough and shuffle and ‘Mickey Bulben waalks to the back an laves.’³⁴⁸ Mickey opted for a silent departure as public opposition was inconceivable. In the four memoirs, only one person is shown to have had the courage to stand up to a priest, and that was (the jubilee) Nurse Byrne in Mountmellick:

‘She had the same respect for the poor and not-poor, and if a tongue-lashing was deserved, then it was fearlessly delivered. She shouted at Father Kelly in public for allowing his dog to run free and knock Missus Fitz off her bike and break her hip, reduced him by her form of address: ‘If you can’t control your dog, *Mister* Kelly, then don’t keep a dog. You have no respect for other people.’³⁴⁹

This one instance of loud expression of disapproval with a priest’s behaviour shows that there were very rare individuals capable of standing up to the all-powerful representatives of the Church, while the majority of the society found it impossible to face the monolith of power. Inglis states that journalists, politicians, and other professionals were openly loyal to the Church and their censorship was often self-imposed as questioning the authority of the Church meant being ostracised and in fact destroyed.³⁵⁰ O’Brien agrees and writes about the fear of generations of Irish journalists to reveal any immoral conduct of the cloth.³⁵¹

The Church’s resources, both in terms of finances and staff, were another source of its power in the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism. The manpower of the Catholic Church as well as its assets were enormous. Inglis clarifies that only the Church could equal the State in the level of organisation and depth of resources; it owns large areas of valuable land often near the centre of towns and cities. As to its manpower, the Church had thousands of clergy and religious at their disposal.³⁵² Due to the vast majority of schools owned by the Church or under its influence, the Church had every new generation at its disposal for recruitment into their ranks. Tom writes how nuns used to whisper to him: ‘You’ll be a grand priest when you grow up, Tom’³⁵³ or ‘You have the fingernails of a priest.’³⁵⁴ Although the nuns probably meant well, their encouragement can be also seen as subtle indoctrination. Tom also describes a Christian Brother trying to recruit boys in his class, and the Brother’s immaculate attire also testifies to the wealth of the order:

³⁴⁸ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 34.

³⁴⁹ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 12.

³⁵⁰ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 74-75.

³⁵¹ Mark O’Brien, “Sex, lies and horsewhipping boys: a history of clerical cover-ups,” *The Irish Times*, April 27, 2017.

³⁵² Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 40.

³⁵³ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 67 and 80.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

‘Good health beamed off the Christian Brother. His black suit was without a speck of dirt; it looked new and fitted him like a glove. His shoes were shining...he talked about Saint Mary’s College, the Christian Brothers school in Marino, in Dublin, where brothers in training lived manly and exciting lives...’³⁵⁵

Tom’s father managed to dissuade Tom from joining the order and found it very hard when his son later left the farm to pursue priesthood.

Indeed, Inglis claims that it was the mother rather than father in Irish rural families who managed the education of their children and attempted to improve the standing of the family by rearing a priest or a doctor.³⁵⁶ Hugo says that all his grandmother wanted in her life was ‘to make sure that her two sons were educated, one an engineer and the other a Jesuit.’³⁵⁷ But it is Patrick’s mother who best reflects the social prestige that the Irish society attributed to bringing up a priest. When her son Cahir unexpectedly returned from Maynooth with the intention of abandoning his priesthood training, his mother made it plain that his perspective on the matter was irrelevant:

‘‘Oh Jesus, Mary and Joseph. All these years I’ve waited for you to be ordained. Five years your Daddy and myself have scrimped and saved and now you do this...’

‘I’m sorry, Mammy, I’m really sorry. I didn’t know how to tell you. I didn’t want to disappoint you.’ I never heard him cry before...

‘Disappoint me? What will the neighbours say? And Mrs. Post Office. Her son, Philip was ordained last year.. I prayed for the day you’d say your first Mass in the chapel...All of Malin Head would’ve come...I’d have died happy. What’ll I tell Father Kelly?’³⁵⁸

The crying boy had no choice but get back in Father McGuire’s car and return to the seminary. Nevertheless, the fact that much later his daughters appeared at their grandfather’s funeral³⁵⁹ suggests that Cahir eventually managed his own life despite the enormous pressure from his mother. Her utterance ‘I’d have died happy’ is particularly striking and appears to reflect a deep conviction of her life only having any real sense or value with a son-priest. In this respect Inglis cites Stivers according to whom the Irish mother often desired that at least one son become a priest since the priest was the mother’s ideal of manhood,³⁶⁰ a view raising eyebrows of the author of the thesis. Be that as it may, Patrick’s mother’s despair at the reason of Cahir’s unexpected arrival testifies to the tremendous value of a son-priest in her eyes.

³⁵⁵ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 91.

³⁵⁶ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 73.

³⁵⁷ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 100.

³⁵⁸ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 125.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁶⁰ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 189.

Patrick and Frank recount their experience of recruitment into clergy and religious orders, too. Patrick writes: ‘Father Kelly used to come into my primary school and talked to the boys about going to the priesthood. He talked to the girls about...going to be nuns. He gave us glossy leaflets with pictures of priests working with children in Africa.’³⁶¹ Similarly, Frank says: ‘priests come to the school to recruit us for the foreign missions, Redemptorists, Franciscans, Holy Ghost Fathers, all converting the distant heathen.’³⁶² Frank ignores them until a priest from the order of the White Fathers rouses his interest, being a missionary for the nomadic Bedouin tribes and a chaplain to the French Foreign Legion. Had Frank’s doctor given him his consent, Frank might then have abandoned his firm determination to live in America. It has been shown that the immense prestige of the cloth in the Irish society coupled with their recruitment in schools were the chief factors in the maintenance of Church’s manpower.

The last of the three interrelated ways used by the Church to maintain its power was its enormous influence in other social fields, particularly in education and health. It was within the network of the church, school, and hospital that generations of Catholics were imbued with rules and regulations of the Church. Education was crucial for the loyalty of the laity as the years spent in Catholic schools enabled systematic indoctrination of successive generations by the Church’s rules. The rule of paramount importance, i.e. attending Mass on Sundays, has already been discussed. For the teaching of whole doctrine, the tool of primary importance was the official catechism. According to Inglis, the Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, the ‘penny’ catechism or ‘little green book’ (a version of which is in Appendix 8.) was already used in hedge schools throughout the eighteenth century, on a larger scale in the first half and massively in the latter half of the nineteenth century when the Church gained full control of the national school system.³⁶³ The penny catechism included all crucial parts of the Catholic doctrine: the chief commandments of the Church as well as the Catholic version of the ten commandments, the explanation of the Sacraments and other central points, all mostly in the form of questions and answers.³⁶⁴ Inglis states that in 1984, 3400 National Schools out of the total of 3500 schools were under Catholic management and that it was a mortal sin not to send one’s children to Catholic schools.³⁶⁵ Thus, the vast majority of Irishmen were educated under the guidance of the Catholic Church in schools where religious instruction was a major part of the syllabus. The

³⁶¹ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 126.

³⁶² McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 338.

³⁶³ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 30-31.

³⁶⁴ “The Penny Catechism,” St. Mary’s Parish, <https://www.stmarys-dunstable.org/faith-formation/the-penny-catechism>.

³⁶⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 58-59.

testing of the knowledge of the (Catholic) commandments is remembered by both Tom and Frank. Tom writes:

‘‘Tom Phelan, say the Tenth Commandment.’

‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods, sir.’

Neighbors to my childish brain meant the people who lived on Laragh Lane, so this commandment was easy to obey. None of them had a radio, Aladdin lamp, gramophone, or fourteen piglets slobbering at their mother’s milky teats; nor did they have a shed full of dry turf as winter approached.’³⁶⁶

Nevertheless, not all the Penny Catechism words and questions were as easy as Tom recalls:

‘Trying to memorize the answers to the Penny Catechism questions was as painful as forcing a path through a stand of blackthorn bushes on a dark winter’s night. The words were assembled in lawyerly language unsuited to a young mind. There was no music, no rhythm, no comfort. Chanting the text in class quickly became a cacophony as thirty children wrestled with tongue-tying words that were coal cinders in the mouth: ex cathedra, eucharistic, plenary, absolution...’³⁶⁷

Frank’s account of points learnt from the catechism at school is impressive:

‘The master, Mr. Benson...tells us we have to know the catechism backwards, forwards and sideways. We have to know the Ten Commandments, the Seven Virtues, Divine and Moral, the Seven Sacraments, the Seven Deadly Sins. We have to know by heart all the prayers, the Hail Mary, the Our Father, the Confiteor, the Apostles’ Creed, the Act of Contrition, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We have to know them in Irish and English and if we forget an Irish word and use English he goes into a rage and goes at us with the stick.’³⁶⁸

Only this list suggests the great amount of time and effort that must have been spent on the teaching (and learning) of the Catechism. It appears that the little green Penny Catechism was memorised by pupils before their First Communion while a thicker red Catechism was used before their Confirmation:

The master says we’re each to bring threepence for the First Communion catechism with the green cover. The catechism has all the questions and answers we have to know by heart before we can receive First Communion. Older boys in the fifth class have the thick Confirmation catechism with the red cover and that costs sixpence. I’d love to be big and important and parade around with the red Confirmation catechism...’³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn’t Know It*, 99.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁶⁸ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 129-130.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

O'Collins explains that the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist together constitute full initiation into Catholic life and that Eastern Catholics administer them all together even to infants. In the West, however, Catholics have developed separate rites: Baptism at infancy, First Communion 'at the age of reason,' and Confirmation later still, in 'adolescence or early adulthood.'³⁷⁰ In Ireland, Confirmation was performed earlier, at ten years of age, as Frank writes: 'I'm ten years old and ready to go to St. Joseph's Church for my Confirmation.'³⁷¹ It is likely that he experienced the First Communion aged between seven and nine as is customary in the Church.³⁷² The two rites were of paramount importance for the Catholic society since the Sacraments were perceived as watersheds in the religious life of the child and as such were also major social events. From the social point of view, perfect attire was necessary for either occasion. Hugo mentioned his German mother's astonishment at the Irish custom of 'spending all their money on First Holy Communion outfits'³⁷³ and both Frank and Patrick noted the immaculate clothes of all children at their Holy Communion and Confirmation. When Frank's Confirmation was endangered following his suspected observation of nude girls, his mother ruled out his absence at the rite because of his clothes:

'I don't know about the rest of the world but I saved a whole year for Frank's Confirmation suit and I'm not going to the priest to have him tell me my son is not fit for Confirmation so that I'll have to wait another year when he grows out of this suit...'³⁷⁴

Frank's First Communion suit is described as 'a black velvet suit with the white frilly shirt, the short pants, the white stockings, the black patent leather shoes.'³⁷⁵ Boys in Patrick's time wore black jackets, grey trousers, white shirts, red ties and red badges and their hair shone with Brylcreem.³⁷⁶ The impeccable attire reflects the major importance of to the events in the eyes of the Irish Catholic society. In Frank's time and location, it was customary to collect money and sweets from the public after both events and this, in their eyes, meant that the days of the rites were among the happiest of their childhood: 'First Communion day is the happiest day of your life because of The Collection and James Cagney at the Lyric Cinema.'³⁷⁷ Adults were proud of their children passing the milestone; after Frank's First Holy Communion, his relatives

³⁷⁰ O'Collins, *Catholicism*, 70 and 72.

³⁷¹ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 211.

³⁷² "What are the current rules for determining the age of reason for first holy Communion?," Simply Catholic, <https://www.simplycatholic.com/age-of-reason/>

³⁷³ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 98.

³⁷⁴ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 214.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁷⁶ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 29.

³⁷⁷ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 141.

‘told him it was the happiest day of his life and they each cried all over his head’³⁷⁸ presumably because of the religious importance of the event: ‘The moment the Holy Communion is placed on our tongues we become members of that most glorious congregation, the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church.’³⁷⁹ (A photo of a boy receiving his First Communion is in Appendix 9.) Also before Frank’s Confirmation, his master told the class that ‘they will become part of Divinity’ and that ‘Confirmation means you’re a true soldier of the Church and that entitles you to die and be a martyr.’³⁸⁰ Martyrdom is another area heavily accentuated by the society, yet unfortunately cannot be delved into for the lack of space; suffice it to say that martyrs (to both the faith and the nation) were revered to such an extent that Frank wonders if anyone would like them to live.³⁸¹ Preparation and rehearsal for the First Confession, First Communion and Confirmation as well as the actual acts of them are lengthily described by both Frank and Patrick and both authors agree on that particularly the First Communion was a very stressful occasion due to their teachers’ emphatic warnings not to commit a sin inadvertently. Patrick shares Mrs. Monaghan’s instructions: ‘Close your eyes. Put your tongue out properly. Make sure it’s clean. Don’t let it stick to the roof of your mouth. It’s the body of Christ. It’s a mortal sin. You’ll have to go to Confession immediately.’³⁸² This is why stress emanates from Patrick’s experience of the Sacrament:

‘*Me Before Communion Prayer*. I must say it or it’ll be a sin...The host goes soggy. I want to suck it. I ken’t. It’ll be a mortal sin. I swallow. Some of it’s gone. I’ll hev to go to Confession. Father Kelly’ll shout at me. He’ll tell Mrs. Monaghan. She’ll shout too. She’ll tell Mammy. Mammy’ll be upset. Me prayer. *Me After Communion Prayer*. ‘Lord Jesus...’...I move my tongue. The host’s gone. I don’t hev to tell anywan.’³⁸³

The anxiety and fear about fulfilling the duty exactly as required, typical for legalist-orthodox religious behaviour, as well as the relief experienced at the disappearance of the host are almost palpable. Frank’s account of the event is very similar:

‘It’s on my tongue. I draw it back. It stuck. I had God glued to the roof of my mouth. I could hear the master’s voice, Don’t let that host touch your teeth for it you bite God in two you’ll roast in hell for eternity. I tried to get God down with my tongue but the priest hissed at me,

³⁷⁸ McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*, 143.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁸² Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 29.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Stop that clucking and get back to your seat. God was good. He melted and I swallowed Him and now, at last, I was a member of the True Church, an official sinner.³⁸⁴

Patrick received his certificate, but Frank's ordeal was not over yet. He was sick in his grandmother's garden which is why he was taken to Confession, and by the time the problem of 'God in his grandmother's garden' was solved he had missed the longed-for Collection.

Shouting mentioned above throughout the chapter was a standard way of treating pupils in the memoirists' time and was a mild form of punishment. Frank writes that all masters in Leamy's National School have leather straps, canes, and blackthorn sticks and hit them on the shoulders, the back, the legs, and especially the hands.³⁸⁵ He also describes his classmate Quigley being flogged and mocked for asking questions.³⁸⁶ Yet it appears that lay masters under the Church's supervision were poor imitation of some Church's officials, at least those encountered by Patrick in his college. His words 'I'm a culchie...A poor farmer's son with big hands an long steps. A thick boy who shudn't be at The College. I'll only iver be a farmer'³⁸⁷ indicate internalisation of his teachers' insults in all likelihood rife in an environment where severe corporal punishment was the norm. Only priests are mentioned as teachers at Patrick's college and none of them is portrayed as kind. Father O'Reilly lifted Patrick's brother by the sideburns³⁸⁸ and strapped Patrick for Latin mistakes.³⁸⁹ Father Campbell used a strap, too, and hated Patrick, which is why Patrick in turn hated history;³⁹⁰ he also made Patrick's brother Cahir bend over and hit him with a hurling stick.³⁹¹ Father Gallagher was perhaps the worst of the priests: he hit Cahir with a chair leg³⁹² and attacked Patrick with a camogie stick following his supposedly imperfect definition of the Pythagoras theorem:

'He taps the flat end of the stick twice on the red line on the cement.

'Let's be having you.'

I place me toes against it. I bend over til me fingers touch me laces.

'This might teach you to learn Pythagoras properly.'

Grippen it with both hands, he swings it across his chest. It hits me backside so hard I lunge forward.

³⁸⁴ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 142.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁸⁷ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 88.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

'One. Get back here,' gritted his teeth... A tear drops near me toes. I want to scream but don't. I mustn't show the others I'm a softie. I don't cry. Maybe I shud. I want to grab the camogie stick an force him to bend over. I want to beat him so hard he'll bleed...

'Six. Learn it properly for tomorrow.'

I don't reply.

'I said learn it properly for tomorrow.'

'Yes, Father.'

He stands Excalibur in the corner... I slide to and fro to aise the stingen. A warm damp seeps through the backside a me trousers. It goes cold. The back a me knee is wet. The patch grows bigger round me thighs... His eyes bulge. He swings the stick above his head an bangs it on his desk. We jump. He laughs.³⁹³

Not surprisingly, Patrick passionately hated his college. Even many years later, at his father's funeral, Patrick found the presence of the Mass celebrant Father Campbell unbearable, wondering: 'Were the leather strap or his curved pipe still deep in his pocket?' And when the priest started speaking, Patrick's memories surfaced causing a bodily reaction: 'My hands began to perspire. My face burnt. I couldn't look at him. I couldn't go to Holy Communion and be close to him again.'³⁹⁴ The cleric's swaying of the censer over the coffin reminded Patrick of the swinging of the priest's leather strap and made him wonder whether he hit the altar boys in the presbytery.³⁹⁵ Although Irish emigration was caused by a number of factors, economic ones being at the fore, its rates appear only natural when reading about experiences of Irish education such as Patrick's. He left to study at a Catholic University in England where he lived until his retirement. Cahir, his brother, left the clergy, as noted above, and so did Tom after eleven years of priesthood and in a state of utter disillusionment.³⁹⁶ Tom settled in New York as did Frank and all Frank's brothers; only Hugo remained in his native Dublin. The behaviour of many a priest in the memoirs evokes the words of Durt Donovan, Tom's neighbour; having learnt about Tom's upcoming departure for the seminary, Durt told him:

A priest! Well for you! Nothing to do all day only play golf with the big nobbs; eating the best, drinking, too; warm and clean all the time with a woman to buy the food and cook for you, and you not having to marry her. Grand life. But still and all, a lot of them fellas turn into contrary old shites, all thorns and no flowers...³⁹⁷

³⁹³ Doherty, *I Am Patrick*, 83-84.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Phelan, *We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It*, 197.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

Durt's description seems to aptly describe the majority of Irish Catholic priests and religious as the memoirists portray them. There were occasional exceptions to the majority of 'pompous priests and bullying schoolmasters'³⁹⁸ who often merged into 'bullying priests' if employed in education, despising those they were to serve. They make the author of the thesis wonder whether they ever read at least parts of their leather-backed Bibles. They also repeatedly arouse amazement at Irish deference of their clerics who humiliated and brutalised them for so long despite the fact that the causes of their reverence have been explained above; the amazement wanes, however, at the remembrance of forty years of humiliation and brutalisation of the author's native country by communists. Many of the priests may have become brutes due to their continuation of the victim-turned-perpetrator vicious circle instead of seeking the strength and way to sever it. The power at their disposal was too sweet to forsake, an issue (often unconsciously and therefore all the more strongly) threatening teachers in general, let alone mighty priest-teachers in Catholic Ireland. The fact that they had made vows of poverty³⁹⁹ and lived in palaces,⁴⁰⁰ that people begged at their doors for remnants of their meals,⁴⁰¹ because they had 'lorries driving up to their houses with crates and barrels of whiskey and wine, eggs galore and legs of ham,'⁴⁰² and the fact that they had themselves titled 'Father' while mocking and beating children in their care arouse strong feelings of revulsion, anger, and sadness.

There is one last important point about the Catholic Church running Irish education, and that is their education of the future elite. Inglis explains that apart from the recruitment into their ranks and the creation of loyal Catholic laity, there was or is one more reason for the Church holding onto Irish education: the influencing and control over the future dominant class or political elite.⁴⁰³ Frank describes the role of two religious orders in the matter:

'We go to school through lanes and back streets so that we won't meet the respectable boys who go to the Christian Brothers' School or the rich ones who go to the Jesuit school, Crescent College. The Christian Brothers' boys wear tweed jackets, warm woolen sweaters, shirts, ties and shiny new boots. We know they're the ones who will get jobs in the civil service and help the people who run the world. The Crescent College boys wear blazers and school scarves tossed around their necks and over their shoulders to show they're cock o' the walk... We know they're the ones who will go to university...run the government, run the world.'⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁸ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 1.

³⁹⁹ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 42.

⁴⁰⁰ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 353.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 371.

⁴⁰³ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 61.

⁴⁰⁴ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 316.

According to Inglis, half of religious brothers in Ireland were Christian Brothers whose main work was teaching males who were to attain a high position in Irish society. He goes on to say that they also brought the possibility of secondary education to poorer people before the end of the 1960s (when the state introduced free secondary education)⁴⁰⁵ but to what extent this was true is debatable: both O'Toole⁴⁰⁶ and Keogh (cited by Barkham)⁴⁰⁷ see this as the Christian Brothers' foundation myth rather than reality and stress their focus of higher levels of the society. Frank experienced the Brothers' lack of interest in him first hand when his mother was asked by Frank's headmaster to plead with them for Frank's further education in their college: Brother Murray simply stated that they had no room for him and closed the door in their faces.⁴⁰⁸ Being educated by the Brothers may have been a privilege at a cost not merely financial; Hugo says that after his brother Franz was bullied by other boys to the point that his head was banged against railings until bleeding, the Brother punished Franz along with the perpetrator, because in his view, hitting everyone was the only way to stop abuse.⁴⁰⁹ This was not only the Brothers' outlook, however. According to O'Toole, the Catholic Church as a whole strongly opposed any reforms in education proposed by Montessori, Dewey and others.⁴¹⁰

Apart from educating children of well-to-do parents, the Christian Brothers also ran some of the so-called industrial schools in Ireland, appalling prison-like institutions rife with all forms of abuse.⁴¹¹ Frank noted his mother's remark about the orphanage in Glin, county Limerick, where she would never place her children 'no matter what' because 'you could never trust the Christian Brothers there... beating boys and starving the life out of them.'⁴¹² That her knowledge of conditions in the institution, a former workhouse turned into an industrial school, was correct has been evidenced for instance by Tom Hayes (one of the unfortunate boys placed there)⁴¹³ as well as generally by the so-called Ryan report⁴¹⁴ published by The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. Its findings were, to put it succinctly, that rape and abuse of Irish

⁴⁰⁵ Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 52.

⁴⁰⁶ Fintan O'Toole, "Lessons in the power of the church," *The Irish Times*, June 6, 2009.

⁴⁰⁷ Patrick Barkham, "The Brothers Grim," *The Guardian*, November 28, 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 337.

⁴⁰⁹ Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, 276.

⁴¹⁰ Fintan O'Toole, "Lessons in the power of the church," *The Irish Times*, June 6, 2009

⁴¹¹ "Suffer the Little Children: The Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools," Publishers Weekly, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780826413376>.

⁴¹² McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*, 265.

⁴¹³ Patrick Barkham, "The Brothers Grim," *The Guardian*, November 28, 2009.

⁴¹⁴ "St Joseph's Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, Limerick/Glin, Co. Limerick, Republic of Ireland," Children's Homes, <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/LimerickStJosephIS/>.

children in Catholic institutions was endemic.⁴¹⁵ This topic is, however, outside the scope of this thesis due to its space constraints and the fact that the memoirs in question have been narrated by men fortunate enough to have spent their childhood with their families.

In conclusion, this chapter begins with the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland from its attempted suppression first by Reformation and later by the Penal Laws to its blossom in the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism. It reveals the reasons behind the boom of the Catholic Church in Ireland both from the viewpoint of the state and that of the Catholic population. It explains that the Church maintained its enormous power by three interrelated ways: by educating the vast majority of the Irish population to legalistically observe its rules and regulations, by the role of being a good Catholic in economic survival and social advancement, and by its resources including immense manpower. As far as manpower is concerned, the memoirists' experience of recruitment into the ranks religious orders has also been discussed, as has the prestige of having a priest in one's family. The chapter shows the authors' experience of being or attempting to become altar boys, of their living alongside Irish Protestants, and of their acquisition of Catholic practices of both magical-devotional and legalist-orthodox type. Magical-devotional practices included the use of holy pictures, statues, holy water, rosaries, and other objects, as well as prayers to Virgin Mary and saints. Legalist-orthodox behaviour included weekly attendance at Mass and attendance the rites of one's First Confession, First Communion and Confirmation. Preparation for these Sacraments constituted a large part of children's education. Children often experienced more or less severe maltreatment from the hands of their teachers and priests. The chapter is concluded by hinting at the role of specific religious orders in the education of Irish social elite and at endemic abuse suffered by children from poor families in institutions run by the Catholic Church in Ireland.

⁴¹⁵ Henry McDonald, "'Endemic' rape and abuse of Irish children in Catholic care, inquiry finds," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2009.

CONCLUSION

This master thesis consists of three parts.

In its Introduction, it clarifies the nature of the literary genre of memoir, particularly in contrast to novel. It explains that on the one hand, memoir belongs in the vast area of nonfictional life writing and on the other, its aesthetic properties push it toward the fictional area of writing. It also clarifies that the so-called autobiographical pact at the heart of the genre significantly limits the genre's artistic rendering and imposes ethical obligations on its writers. Lastly, its merits for its readers, writers and the society are dealt with.

The first chapter of the thesis delves into Irish nationalism. The beginning of the chapter deals with the concepts of nation and nationalism. Next, the way in which two Irish memoirists were inculcated with nationalist views and beliefs is explored. The thesis shows that they were taught to view their Irishness predominantly in contrast to Englishness: the vilification of the English enabled them to see their own nation as an innocent victim of centuries long English aggression and perversity and to celebrate their national heroes' valiantness. To be able to pass on this straightforward message, their nationalist reading of history involved substantial distortion of historical facts and their causal and teleological interpretation. The fulfilment of several human needs by the nationalistic ideology is also discussed, as is the relation of nationalism to religion and to democracy. Two types of nationalism from the viewpoint of inclusivity, i.e. civic and ethnic, conclude the chapter.

The theme of the last chapter of the thesis is Irish Catholicism. The beginning of the chapter deals with the history of the Irish Catholic Church from Reformation onwards and shows historical reasons for the fusion of Catholicism with Irish national identity. It also explains the reasons for the enormous power of the Catholic Church in Ireland and ways in which its power was maintained: control over the education of the vast majority of the Irish schools was pivotal. During the 'long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism,' i.e. from about 1850 to 1970, nearly all Irishmen were educated by the Catholic Church and were imbued with its rules and regulations. The Church was with them incessantly: during their schooldays, the syllabus stressed their acquisition of the Catholic Doctrine by rote learning of catechism, on Sundays they went to church and thrice daily the Angelus bell toll called them to pray. They learnt to go to Mass every Sunday in their best clothes, they strove to become altar boys and at school experienced attempts at their recruitment into the ranks of religious orders. They absorbed both various magical-devotional practices of their social environment as well as its legalist-orthodox religious behaviour. The rites of the First Confession, First Communion and

Confirmation were events of primary religious and social importance and required immaculate attire. Irish mothers longed to improve the social standing of their family by rearing a priest, and the modus vivendi of the society as a whole was the acquisition of religious capital in order to gain communal acceptance. Thus the Irish Catholic Church maintained its immense power which kept it above any public accountability or criticism.

RÉSUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce sestává ze tří částí.

Ve své úvodní části se práce zabývá žánrem memoáru, jeho vymezením především ve vztahu k románu a význačnými charakteristikami, které ho od románu odlišují. Jde především o tzv. autobiografický pakt ležící v samém středu žánru a definovaný v 70. letech 20. století prof. Lejeunem. Ten spočívá v identitě autora, vypravěče a protagonisty a u čtenáře vyvolává očekávání četby reality a nikoli fikce, a to i přesto, že z hlediska formy se memoár od románu nemusí lišit. Memoár náleží k literatuře faktu, jakkoli je na samém okraji této oblasti a literatury fikční se bezprostředně dotýká. Práce diskutuje i to, jak se memoár odlišuje od románu pro svého čtenáře, autora i pro celou společnost. Memoárový žánr je předmětem zájmu této práce proto, že irskou identitu, jež je její náplní, čerpá právě a výhradně z tohoto literárního útvaru.

V další části se práce zabývá pojmy národa a nacionalismu a poté ukazuje, jakým způsobem společnost vštěpovala autorům memoárů své chápání podstaty irského národa. Práce ukazuje, že irský národ se v dané době vnímal především jako protipól k národu anglickému, který zobrazoval jako odvěké nepřátele a zlosyny a nad kterými svou chabrostí a vytrvalostí nakonec zvítězil. Práce též poukazuje na zploštění až pokroucení spletité národní historie tak, aby vyhovovalo snadnému přenosu jednoduchého nacionalistického narativu. Důležitou součástí tohoto narativu je též glorifikace národních hrdinů. Práce se také zabývá psychologickými přínosy národnostního citění jako je naplnění potřeby sounáležitosti a uznání a u některých jedinců i potřeba přesahu sebe sama. Právě v těchto případech, kdy lidé národ zbožšťí, mají však tendenci k vnučování (své verze) své modly ostatním k jejich nesmírné škodě, jak rozsáhle ukazuje příběh Hugův. Z toho důvodu práce stručně pojímá i vztah nacionalismu k náboženství a k demokracii.

Ve své poslední a nejdělnější části se práce zabývá irským katolictvím. Nejprve nastiňuje historii irské katolické církve, aby ukázala, proč časem došlo ke splynutí irského národního citění s katolicismem do té míry, že je již nebylo možno oddělit, a proč katolická církev získala v Irsku takovou moc, že ovládala tamní společnost po dobu delší než sto let. Klíčovou roli zde sehrával fakt, že se katolické církvi podařilo ovládnout národní školy, které byly původně zamýšlené jako nenedominační. Svým vlivem ve školách svých i národních působila na generace Irů několika směry. Zaprvé poskytovala výhradní vzdělání irské elitě národa. Zadruhé svou obšírnou výukou katolické doktríny zabezpečovala loajalitu široké laické veřejnosti a udržovala stav, kdy poslušnost církvi a hledání jejího uznání znamenalo komunitní přijetí i případný postup. V neposlední řadě také ve školách získávala své další členy a obnovovala či

rozšiřovala tak svou členskou základnu. Memoáry také vykreslují osvojování si obou typů náboženského chování té doby, tedy magické zbožnosti a zbožnosti legalisticky ortodoxní. Přestože druhý způsob od poloviny devatenáctého století převládl, Irové si oproti jiným evropským katolíkům zachovali velké množství prvků magické zbožnosti. Tak se mladí Irové odmala učili se křížovat, používat svěcenou vodu, svaté obrázky a sošky, růženec a další svaté předměty a rituály. Legalisticky ortodoxní zbožnosti se učili ve škole a doma memorováním katolického katechismu, který je také připravoval na první svaté přijímání a biřmování. Tyto svátosti zaujímaly v irské společnosti ústřední místo, o čemž vypovídal i dokonale slavnostní oděv dětí. Irské matky často toužily svou rodinu společensky pozvednout tím, že se některý ze synů stane knězem. Přípravou na této cestě mohlo být i ministrování na mších, které však nebylo dosažitelné každému. Totéž platilo i druhostupňovém vzdělání, jež stát poskytoval zdarma až od samého konce šedesátých let a do té doby ho zabezpečovala pouze církev. Ve školách církev odmítala poznatky a postupy moderní pedagogiky a svého postavení nedotknutelné moci namnoze zneužívala fyzickým i psychickým trestáním dětí. Toto trestání pak často nabylo podob týrání a zneužívání v institucích, odkud děti nemohly uniknout, např. v industriálních školách. Pouze jediný ze čtyř autorů ze smaragdového ostrova v mládí neemigroval a v Irsku zůstal. Jeden strávil svůj produktivní život v Anglii a dva našli nový domov v americkém New Yorku.

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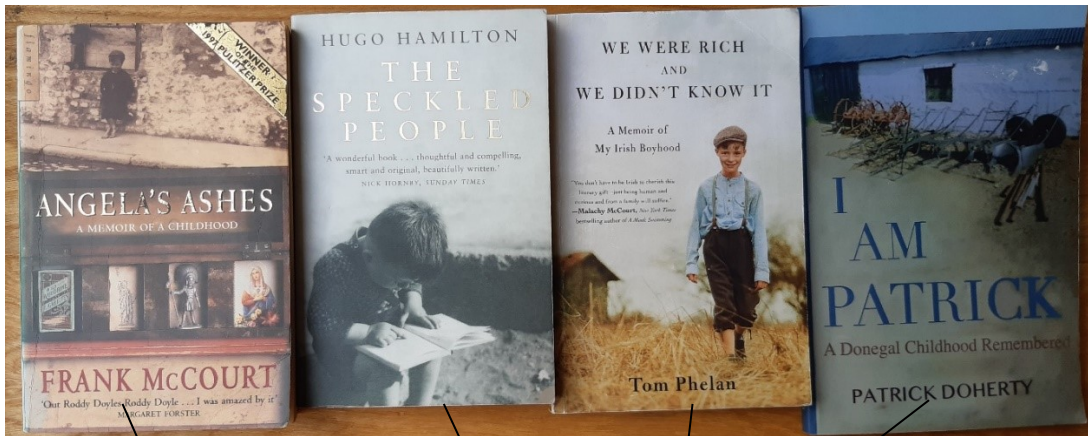
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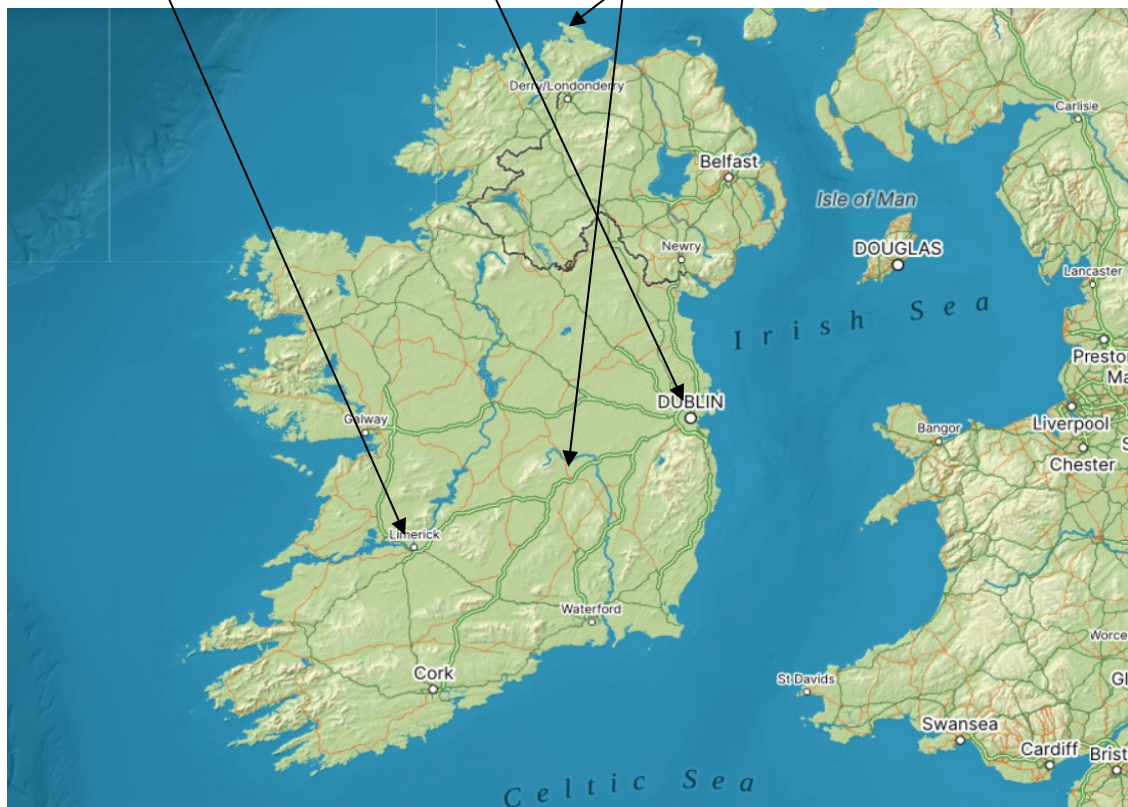
APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Four memoirs by Irish authors



Appendix 2.

Distribution: Frank in Limerick, Hugo in Dublin, Tom in Mountmellick, and Patrick in Malin Head



Appendix 3. A Rosary



Appendix 4. A Modern Sacred Heart Lamp



Appendix 5. Ireland's holy mountain Croagh Patrick in County Mayo and a barefoot pilgrim



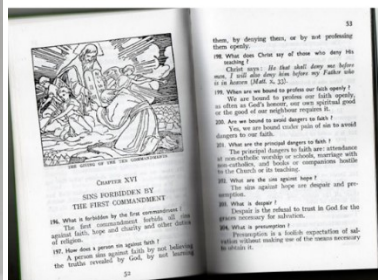
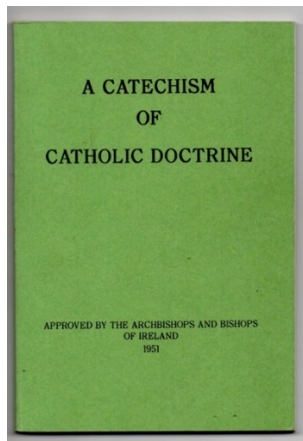
Appendix 6. Stations of the Cross in a Catholic church



Appendix 7. St. Oliver Plunkett's Shrine in St. Peter's Church, Drogheda



Appendix 8.
The Penny, Little, Green Catechism



Appendix 9. A boy at his First Holy Communion

