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Home in John McGahern's Prose

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2025 Jana Sekaninová

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Zásady pro vypracování

Autorka se ve své práci bude zajímat problematikou domova ve vybraných dílech Johna McGaherna, jednoho z nejvýznamnějších irských prozaiků druhé poloviny dvacátého století. S použitím relevantních zdrojů zejména z oblasti humanistické geografie (např. Tuan, Morley, Cresswell) zmapuje významy, které se s pojmem "domov" v odborné diskusi obecně spojují. Na tomto metodologickém základě se v rozborech zaměří na vybranou románovou a povídkovou tvorbu Johna McGaherna – např. *The Barracks* (1963), *The Pornographer* (1979) a *Getting Through* (1978). Cílem autorky bude zjistit, jak tento autor domov tematizuje. Soustředit se bude na postavy, pro které je domov a jeho hledání zásadní otázkou a výzvou. Mezi možná podtémata zahrne problematiku útěkářství, pocitu bezpečí, nostalgii. Cílem práce jako celku bude prozkoumat povahu vztahů mezi postavami a jejich prostředím včetně jejich následného vlivu na pocit příslušnosti k danému místu. Práci uzavře kapitola, která z dílčích zjištění vyvodí obecnější závěr.

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **PhDr. Ladislav Vít, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D. v.r.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D. v.r.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 7. října 2024

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis examines the depiction of certain aspects of home in selected literary works by John McGahern. Drawing on the concepts from humanistic geography, the thesis defines key terms that form the atmosphere of home, namely, love, safety, and belonging. Through the analysis of the selected literary works, the thesis examines the impact of the absence of these aspects on the characters and their perception of home with emphasis on feelings of alienation and loss of home.

KEYWORDS

Love, safety, belonging, home, loss of home

NÁZEV

Domov v próze Johna McGaherna

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením vybraných aspektů domova v díle Johna McGaherna. S využitím odborných konceptů z humanistické geografie byl vytvořen teoretický rámec, který se zaměřuje na klíčové prvky utvářející atmosféru domova, jako láska, pocit bezpečí a sounáležitost. Prostřednictvím analýzy daných děl je poté zkoumán dopad absence těchto prvků na postavy a jejich vnímání domova. Práce se soustředí na pocity odcizení a ztráty domova.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Láska, bezpečí, pocit sounáležitosti, ztráta domova

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Introduction

Home is one of the fundamental aspects of human existence. It is both a relevant concept of humanistic geography and an everyday human experience. The home must be viewed as a complex and multidimensional term, which manifests in the physical world and the internal world of the human psyche. The home may be one's ultimate haven in the world, protecting and welcoming. However, this idyllic atmosphere might prove fragile, and its inhabitants left estranged and lost in the world. This compelling duality leads various authors to devote their time and resources to unraveling the mystery of this familiar and yet not easily decipherable concept. One of such authors is John McGahern.

John McGahern is recognized as one of Ireland's most renowned authors of the 20th century. For his original style, his works were not praised by the prude and rigid society of his Ireland. Despite the mistreatment he endured from the state itself, his love for Ireland remained. Still, to reach that state of acceptance, many years had to pass. As a result, he is known for depicting home in his works. Through his narratives, he creates a credible and striking image of his homeland through the lives and struggles of ordinary people. Therefore, his literary works can be viewed as a window into the past.

This thesis is divided into three chapters based on the fundamental aspects of home relevant to McGahern's prose. These chapters combine the theoretical framework with analysis to examine the concepts in detail. The theoretical concepts are then applied in the analysis of John McGahern's literary works. This structure is applied to every chapter.

The selected aspects are examined in order of love, safety, and sense of belonging. By exploring these concepts in John McGahern's works, this thesis aims to explore the way they appear in his narratives. On the whole, this thesis should provide a detailed analysis of McGahern's depiction of home.

I. Home as a Beloved Place

Love is a compelling emotion that has captivated humanity since the very beginning of its existence. This fascination is likely connected to its richness and diversity. Moreover, love often takes on various forms which are difficult to name and define. To narrow it down, Amelie Rorty divides love into two general types: personal and non-personal. Personal love is found in relationships, for instance, the love between family members, friends, or romantic partners. Non-personal love concerns one's love for home, profession, or other inanimate objects and phenomena.[1] This type of division is a common one and feels natural. However, it reveals the ability of love to bind people to different aspects of their lives and influence the way a person perceives the world.

A love can be formed to a place as well. Such a bond transforms a mere location into an emotion-evoking place. Yi-Fu Tuan uses the term "topophilia" when referring to this bond, which he defines as "the affective bond between people or setting."[2] Nonetheless, topophilia should not be understood as a monolithic feeling. This unique bond involves a large scale of emotions connected to the physical world, ranging from a comforting sense of familiarity to a shocking experience that may leave one breathless. The type of place then determines the intensity of the lasting impact on the person. In the end, this emotional connection might lead to a simple momentary captivation or blossom into devotion to one's homeland.[3]

Home is one of the most notable sources of love for a person — a sanctuary, which should create a nurturing and loving atmosphere. It is a multifaceted concept that can be examined from different points of view. Namely, Tim Creswell describes home as "the most familiar example of place and its significance to people."[4] The meaning of home is highly subjective to all people across the globe and generally, the word provokes a strong inner reaction upon hearing it. Despite its familiarity, home is difficult to define because the accrual of meaning associated with home is salient and long-term but mostly unconscious. Tuan speaks of this common experience, claiming that "one person may know a place intimately as well as conceptually. He can articulate ideas but

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[1] Amelie Rorty, "The Burdens of Love," *The Journal of Ethics* 20, no. 4 (2016): 347, accessed January 10, 2025, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44077337.
[2] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 4.
[3] Tuan, *Topophilia*, 93.
[4] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A short introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 24.

he has difficulty expressing what he knows through his senses of touch, taste, smell, hearing, and even vision."[5] This observation underscores the idea that the concept of home extends beyond the level of intellectual understanding. Undoubtedly, a proper comprehension of this notion is tied to one's sensory perception. In brief, this reveals the complexity of this concept, noting that home is not a mere physical space but a collection of memories, sensations and meanings.

Gaston Bachelard offers another notable insight into this issue. He uses the visual aid in the form of a childhood house, a place one knows intimately like no other, and its parts when examining the concept of home. To illustrate, he uses a metaphor of a simple corner to narrow down the broadness: "For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word."[6] It implies that home is the center of our most primitive and earliest experiences. A house, a home in which a person has grown up, harbours their secrets and intimate thoughts. He accentuates this with another comment about home, calling it: "an image that moves us to the unimaginable depth."[7] Its mere mention and existence should suffice in making one overcome with emotion. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that home should fulfill the function of one's intimate haven.

According to David Seamon, the experience of home strongly correlates with the feeling of "at-homeness."[8] He compares this feeling to the comfort and small, mundane moments of everyday life to which a person eventually grows apathetic. He identifies five components that constitute this unique emotion. One particularly connected to the theme of love is "warmth."[9] This quality is tied to comfort, friendliness, and affection, which a home is supposed to be filled with and with which it provides its residents. He states that a home must be "lived in" to be deserving of its name. To achieve this, a home has to be inhabited by residents living in harmony.[10] This is in agreement with Tuan's comment: "familiarity breeds affection when it does not breed contempt."[11] For fellowship to be beneficial or home to radiate that pleasant warmth, one has to associate it with gentleness and love. Additionally, Seamon points out that once the element of warmth is present,

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[5] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 6.
[6] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 4.
[7] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 6.
[8] David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), 78.
[9] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 84.
[10] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 84.
[11] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 99.

"care" emerges.[12] This concerns a person's care for other residents sharing the living space and the place itself. A person is inclined to tend to their home and nurture it the same way they would a loved one. In comparison to other components, this quality of "at-homeness" is far more difficult to grasp or measure but, at the same time, frequently lacking in many homes. Consequently, many people find themselves isolated and lacking companionship. Hence, this makes their homes loveless, regardless of condition or housekeeping.[13]

As previously discussed, a bond formed to home in one's mind does not necessarily have to entail inanimate objects or places. A firm connection can be forged with a person as well. In his study, *Space and Place*, Tuan states, "we say of young lovers that they dwell in each other's gaze. They are free of attachment to things and to locality; they will abandon their homes and elope if they have to."[14] He is of the belief that young people are more prone to letting go of their ties to their homeland or city in order to build a new home with the person they love. Moreover, this tendency to disregard the attachment to a locality can intensify with age. He argues: "old couples are attached to place but they are even more attached to people, services, and each other."[15] This comment might create an illusion that people are the exquisite source of at-homeness. As Tuan later states, the truth is that the quality human relationships cannot offer in building a home is permanence.[16] It is only feasible if those people and relationships in one's vicinity can provide stability and the element of long-lastingness. Due to various reasons, for instance an unforeseen tragedy or fragility of human relationships, this basis is on its own inadequate for a regular person. On the whole, while interpersonal connections cannot serve as the sole basis for a home, they are still a vital part of it.

Gaston Bachelard draws a peculiar parallel between a human home and an animal shelter in relation to love. In particular, he focuses on nests, given their natural imagery of a secure, hospitable space bound to the miracle of the new blossoming life. He claims that a nest can often reawaken the memories of one's childhood or perhaps even a childhood one desired to have had.[17] He further specifies that for a home to become such a nest, the place has to be built on happiness and affection, which then lives on in one's mind for years to come and serves as a symbol of

[12] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 85.
[13] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 85.
[14] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 139.
[15] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 139.
[16] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 140.
[17] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 93.

intimacy.[18] This statement supports the hypothesis that love captures the essence of the previously mentioned feeling of at-homeness. As perceived, a house or a place that is not linked to fond memories or people we hold dear is nothing but a sterile and inanimate structure.

While scholars portray love as one of the core elements of home, McGahern's fiction mostly depicts its absence. This turns McGahern's home into a place of emotional detachment and longing for restoration. His narratives mostly revolve around the themes of loss and trauma, with characters struggling to preserve even small bits of love. Both the internal and external worlds of the characters seem to lack the affection of Bachelard's loving nest. Instead, there is a sharp contrast between the comforting familiarity and the harsh realities they need to face. Their relationship to the home and their families is strained and tainted with negative memories, which creates an oppressive atmosphere. Trying to escape these circumstances generally deepens their confusion and entanglement in loneliness. Slowly, their memories of home turn even more sour, and the cherished ones fade away. In essence, McGahern turns a home either into a tragic relic of lost love and isolation or a place of longing and distant dreams.

John McGahern's first novel, *The Barracks*, presents us with a grim world of mid-twentieth-century rural Ireland seemingly devoid of love and hospitality. The story focuses on a middle-aged former nurse, Elizabeth Reegan, living in the barracks with her husband's family. As Grace T. Ledwidge points out, Elizabeth is predisposed to lead a fulfilling life, given her position in society as an educated woman and wife of a sergeant. Despite her ostensible privilege, Elizabeth finds herself in a state of physical and emotional decline that escalates throughout the story and ends in her death.[19] The reason for her suffering cannot be attributed to a single factor. She struggles with the loss of her sense of identity, a cancer diagnosis, and feelings of estrangement in her own home. However, on the whole it can be safely assumed that the loveless environment does not help her overcome these issues.

First, the reader observes the lack of warmth and affection in Elizabeth and John's marriage. The relationship between them is presented as depleted of mutual admiration and one that has lost all its depth and passion. Often caught up in her mind, Elizabeth wonders about the state her marriage had deteriorated into. She ponders: "She feared she still loved him, and he seemed to care

[18] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 100.
[19] Grace Tighe Ledwidge, "Death in Marriage: The Tragedy of Elizabeth Reegan in 'The Barracks," *Irish University Review 35*, no. 1 (2005): 90, Accessed January 1, 2025, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25517242.

hardly at all, as if he had married a housekeeper."[20] Her role in Reegan's household is far from that of a family matriarch with an equal say in family matters. On the contrary, she is, in her opinion, reduced to a worker who is supposed to be immune and content with her duties. Still, she shows an admirable resolve to use this to her advantage. Till her last breath, she is desperate to repair the breach by numerous acts of servitude, hoping to earn her place in the household where she feels her presence is not appreciated and her absence not registered.

The absence of love is evident not only in Elizabeth's strained marriage but also in her relationship with her husband's children. What could potentially be her greatest source of solace only deepens her sorrow and solidifies her isolation. This is depicted in a scene where she is in the middle of disciplining the children:

> What does it matter what blind was down or not down? —only give me a little peace for once," was on her lips when her name, her Christian name —Elizabeth—struck at her out of the child's appeal. She was nothing to these children. She had hoped when she first came into the house that they would look up to her as a second mother, but they had not.[21]

This is one of Elizabeth's deepest emotional wounds throughout the novel. She is once more reminded of the bitter reality of her situation. The children recognize her authority as their father's wife and a caretaker to substitute for their deceased mother. All the same, the affection they have for Elizabeth can never match the love they had for their mother. This is noticeable in their habit of calling their stepmother by her first name, Elizabeth. Throughout the entire story, she is never once referred to by the title of mother, despite the years she has spent in the family, trying to earn their favour. This knowledge directly feeds into her lack of confidence and, thus, her withering away.

Another proof of one's need for love in their home is Elizabeth's pursuit of it outside of it. She finds this solace in the form of a ghost from the past. During WWII, Elizabeth served as a nurse in London. Long before her marriage to Reegan, she encountered a man at her workplace, Michael Halliday, and fell for him. Their relationship was unbalanced, making Elizabeth feel overwhelmed and dominated. Notwithstanding these issues, he becomes her anchor in the present moment. Naturally, Elizabeth often reminisces about this relationship:

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[20] John McGahern, *The Barracks* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2009), chap.1.
[21] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 1.

> He'd been a doctor with her in the London Hospital and he changed her whole life. She'd listened to him for so many hours in the long London evenings that were lovely now in the memory; read the books he gave her; went with him to films and plays and concerts; and most of all he made her suffer, he put her through the frightful mill of love.[22]

This relationship is described as turbulent, which made her experience all the joys and sorrows of love. Everything her marriage is not. The moment Halliday dies in a tragic car accident, so does Elizabeth's life in London. This reflects Tuan's theory about lovers finding a home in each other. Following this tragedy, Elizabeth soon meets a freshly widowed Reegan and leaves London, which she learned to associate with this painful memory and loss of love.

As exemplified, this novel illustrates the consequences of living in a loveless environment. Elizabeth is denied all aspects of love that should be present in one's home, as demonstrated by various scholars. Through her story, McGahern convincingly demonstrates his internal feelings about Ireland at the time *The Barracks* was written. As Maher states in his study, McGahern highlights the stultifying and rigid reality of the rural parts of Ireland, which explains the pessimistic and loveless mood of the novel.[23] Essentially, Elizabeth is killed by residing in a loveless environment just as much by her illness.

McGahern's later novel *The Pornographer* offers a completely different narrative and dynamics concerning both the setting and attitude towards love. The reader is thrown into the bohemian life of a nameless middle-aged male character, referred to by the nickname "the pornographer." He lives alone in an apartment in Dublin and earns a living by writing pornographic stories featuring two fictional actors, Colonel Grimshaw and Mavis Carmichael. Similarly to *The Barracks*, this novel is centered around the theme of love as well. The difference is that whilst Elizabeth's environment is loveless and at fault, on this occasion, it is the protagonist himself. At first glance, he avoids love like a plague and wishes to keep his relationships as vague as possible. Unlike Elizabeth, he is surrounded by people willingly offering the luxury of love, but he is keen on resisting them. As a result, his experience of home feels as unfulfilling as his relationship.

The pornographer's primary source of love is his family from the countryside. He was raised by his uncle and aunt, whom he holds in high regard. Due to his aunt's hospitalization in a

[22] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 2.
[23] Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003), 20.

Dublin hospital, he often retreats there to converse with her. Their secret love language seems to be the regular gift he brings to her – a bottle of brandy. This can be seen in the following scene:

> "God bless you," she said as I put the brandy down. "I wouldn't take it off you but I know you have plenty of money, but I'll never forget it," and I saw her eyes fasten on the chrysanthemums in disapproval. "What did you want to go bringing in those old flowers for?" "I was just passing them and I thought they looked nice."[24]

The protagonist is well aware that alcohol might worsen her condition, yet he sneaks it into the hospital for her to bring her happiness. The brandy and, in this scene, even a bouquet of flowers are a testament to his loving care for her. Throughout the novel, his aunt is the personification of home to him among the indifferent mundanity in his world and the person with whom he does not resent emotional intimacy.

The underlying reason for the pornographer's phobia of intimacy is rooted in his past. The reader learns that his emotional numbness stems from experiencing unrequited love. It is addressed in a conversation with his uncle when he probes for more information about the mystery woman who broke the pornographer's heart:

> "And that girl you used to bring down in the summer, do you still see her?"
>
> "No. I haven't seen her for almost a year."
>
> "That must be a great relief to you."
>
> "No." I was forced to laugh outright. "On the contrary, I loved her."[25]

This incident is shrouded in secrecy and never truly examined in depth. It is another example of a ghost from the past haunting McGahern's character. Moreover, it hints at the emotional rawness and dimensionality of the protagonist's nature, showing that he is not as dead inside as he likes to believe. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the impact of the emotional wound and its consequences on the character.

McGahern shows an intriguing amount of mercy to the pornographer. His situation is paradoxical, analogous to many of McGahern's characters. In contrast, he is offered a chance at redemption multiple times. The first opportunity arises when he meets a woman named Josephine at a dance and later takes her back to his apartment, where their love affair begins. She falls madly in love with him, expressing her excitement freely. The same cannot be said about the protagonist,

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[24] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 60-61.
[25] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 17.

as he clearly does not share the sentiment. He entirely dismisses her with a statement: "And you don't think you love me even a little?" "No. Love has nothing to do with it."[26] After he accidentally impregnates her, they part ways. He does not feel a pang of sympathy for her and refuses to be a part of her or the child's life except for monetary support. John Cronin concludes this relationship with the term "full circle moment."[27] The trauma of lost love was now proliferated.

The pornographer is inexplicably offered another chance at love. During his visits to the hospital, he encounters Nurse Brady and falls for her, abandoning his avoidant tendencies. During their date, he goes through a symbolic epiphany:

> An old sweet scent rushed through the taxi window as soon as we passed beyond the hospital, so familiar that I started, and yet I could not place or find its name, it so surrounded the summers of my life, lay everywhere round my feet; not woodbine, not mint, not wild rose.… […] she gave the name. Of course, it was hay.[28]

With the nurse, he suddenly relives a memory he associates with his real home. This corresponds with Tuan's theory of experiencing home with all senses. This is the turning point of the novel as the pornographer's almost nihilistic approach to life shifts and the pornographer opens up emotionally. Finally, he regains his consciousness.

Both *The Barracks* and *The Pornographer* feature the death of the central mother figure at the end of the story. Yet, beneath these similar endings, the two narratives unravel differently. One represents the final tragedy and end of suffering, whilst the other a new path forward. After leaving his aunt's funeral, the pornographer shares with others shocking news: "I'm thinking of proposing marriage to a woman and coming back here," I said suddenly."[29] Instantly, the mood of the otherwise grim occasion improves. The pornographer rides off, rejoiced and full of life. In conclusion, with the rediscovery of love, his love for home returns too.

In summary, *The Pornographer* ends with another full-circle moment. As previously noted by Cronin, this is not the first instance in this novel. This is also noted by Maher, who views this as a natural progression of McGahern's beliefs, shaped by his life experiences.[30] In *The Barracks*, Elizabeth's home becomes her grave with no legacy of her own. Meanwhile, the pornographer is

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[26] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 42.
[27] John Cronin, "Art and the Failure of Love: The Fiction of John McGahern," Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review 77, no. 306 (1988): 215, Accessed January 6, 2025, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30091292.
[28] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 172-173.
[29] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 250.
[30] Maher, *Local to the Universal*, 57.

set on a psychological journey, which ends victoriously and on a note of possibility. This altogether marks a turning point in McGahern's doomed characters, proving that some may break free and reunite with their home.

McGahern's short stories collected in *Getting Through* also shed light on the problematic family dynamics of his characters. The stories portray characters in different stages of life, beset with difficulties surrounding their homes. The scholars reviewing McGahern's short stories collections do not share common ground regarding the coherence between the stories. Still, the characters have in common the themes in their lives, for example, a pattern of rocky, love-hate relationships, which will be analyzed in this chapter.

First, the short story "The Stoat" investigates the trauma and vulnerability that accompany human relationships. At its core, the main theme of the story is the disintegration of home due to the loss of love and the inability to reclaim it. The story follows a widowed teacher who informs his adult son about his plan to remarry. Despite the years that passed, the father never entirely stops grieving his late wife. He gets visibly upset while recalling the incident during a conversation: "…the voice floated brittlely along on emotion that it could not control. The son hoped the father wouldn't break down cry…"[31] The son's reaction shows that the father's grief remains unresolved. The simplest of this incident would suffice to profoundly upset his father. Hence, the father's ambition to remarry is perplexing. Given this could be the first time he considers a second marriage, he is driven by the panic to salvage the remnants of Seamon's warmth in his home. He reveals his motivation in a statement: "At my age you don't expect much from marriage, but at least I'd have companionship."[32] His reason to remarry does not stem from a genuine desire, but a need to fill the void left after his late wife. This gives his search for love a bitter undertone. Ultimately, this turns his search for love into a pragmatic strategy to replace what is lost rather than rebuild.

The wound and lasting presence of a past lover is comparable to the one in *The Barracks*. Similarly to Reegan and Elizabeth, the father seeks solace and hope in another love affair. Unlike them, his pragmatism reaches utterly new heights. His pursuit of love transforms into a hunt. He posts an ad in the local newspaper to increase his reach and chances at success: "Teacher fifty-two. Widower. Seeks companionship. View marriage."[33] His description of himself and his aim are

[31] John McGahern, *Getting Through* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1980), 62.
[32] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 62.
[33] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 63.

bluntly straightforward, which results in countless arranged dates to which the son refers as "interviews."[34] His goal is not to become enamored with any of those women but rather to find a suitable candidate in a minimum time frame. The implicit cause for this behavior may be an attempt to repel the emptiness of his home once his son leaves for his studies. Yet, this transactional approach breeds a mere illusion, which proves to be fragile and short-lasting.

Initially, his plan seems to bear fruit. Through the ad, he meets and starts courting Miss McCabe. She appears to meet the standard he set for his new partner. She is a woman in her forties, a teacher like him, and plain in every sense.[35] Everything unfolds as he envisions. In addition, the father receives blessings from his son to integrate Miss McCabe into their family. Nonetheless, an accident occurs, which thwarts the father's plans. Unexpectedly, Miss McCabe suffers a mild heart attack during her visit to the baths.[36] Following this incident, the father resolutely breaks off the engagement. He argues: "Isn't it enough to have buried one woman?"[37] This climactic moment depicts the significance of genuineness regarding love. The father's affection for this woman is not strong enough to overcome his deep-seated fear of reliving the death of his beloved wife. Miss McCabe is then abandoned without a proper goodbye in a difficult situation and the father appears to have made a full circle.

It is another failed attempt at filling one's home with love in McGahern's fiction. Love is nearly exclusively tainted with disappointment and unreliability. Maher calls attention to this recurring motif with McGahern's characters and their pursuit of love, calling it a "type of Holy Grail that always eludes them."[38] Likewise, Shaun O'Connell also notes the circular character of McGahern's prose.[39] Unless the characters confront their struggles, their journey ends tragically with an undertone of inevitability and hopelessness.[40] In "The Stoat," the father retracts back to his solitude, sentencing himself to loneliness. It is his punishment for chasing love without an honest emotional investment. In consequence, the love he attempts to fabricate cannot become the foundation of his home and fill his home with liveliness.

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[34] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 63.
[35] John McGahern, *Getting Through*, 64.
[36] John McGahern, *Getting Through*, 68.
[37] John McGahern, *Getting Through*, 68.
[38] Maher, *Local to the Universal*, 77.
[39] Shaun O'Connell, "Door into the Light: John McGahern's Ireland," *The Massachusetts Review 25*, no. 2 (1984): 256, Accessed November 12, 2024, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25089546.
[40] O'Connell, "Door into the Light," 256.

Another short story from the collection *Getting Through*, "A Slip Up," explores the portable nature of home. It tells the story of an elderly couple, Agnes and Michael, spending their last years in London. The husband is often reminiscent of their farm in Ireland, regretting the departure in a moment of weakness. He is thinking to himself. "…so he walked safe in the shelter of those dead days, drawing closer to the farm between the lakes that they had lost."[41] This shows a thorough longing for the home they left behind, with which he stubbornly refuses to come to terms. For that reason, he sometimes balances dangerously close to the edge of misery, typical for McGahern's characters.

Contrary to the norm, Michael is able to escape the loveless reality of home thanks to the love he has for his wife. In addition to being a caring partner, concerned with her husband's well-being, she anchors him to London. Tim Creswell's hypothesis on the creation of places supports the idea that Michael might yet embrace this change of place. He is of the belief that: "in general places are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming - in process."[42] This proposes a solution to Michael's dilemma. Despite leaving their farm in Ireland due to existential reasons, the possibility of creating a new home is not yet entirely dismissed. This is consistent with previously discussed theories of home, in particular with Tuan's statement about elderly people prioritizing the presence of each other over the location. Therefore, what led Michael to the new uncharted territory of a big city from the Irish countryside, is his wife. In other words, love is the binding element that allows him to slowly form a bond to a place where he feels alienated.

In parallel with Elizabeth from *The Barracks*, the likelihood of Michael deteriorating to a similar state is rather high. Were he to live in London alone, his distaste might cause him to isolate. However, his love for Agnes proves to be stronger than his antipathy. He benevolently allows her to guide him through this change. This is reflected in a scene where she encourages him to accompany her on an evening event: "I don't know if I want to go out tonight." "Of course you'll go out tonight. There's nothing wrong with you, is there?" When she said that he knew he had to go."[43] This exchange between them may indicate that Michael is not yet prepared to confide in his wife about his struggles with adapting to city life. Nonetheless, he still indulges her wishes, socializing and starting anew. This paves the way for an eventual attachment to form in the future.

[41] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 29.
[42] Cresswell, *Place: A short introduction*, 37.
[43] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 32.

Like *The Pornographer,* this short story leaves the reader with an ambiguous resolution. However, both narratives are infused with subtle hope at a new beginning. The characters do have a solid basis in certain people around them, that tie them to their original or forming homes. Creswell notes that places, above all, are made with noteworthy experiences.[44] To present this idea, he lists multiple examples of places, for instance, a town center to one's bedroom or even the Earth.[45] For Cresswell, what makes these locations extraordinary is that "they are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of place - a meaningful location."[46] Creswell's definition of a place supports the narrative that Michael's situation is not hopeless. London is now a meaningless place for him. Still, this uneasiness might fade. As aforementioned, the places are not static. London shall probably never replace Ireland and their late farm. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Michael navigates and attempts to embrace this transition. In doing so, McGahern shows that while a home may be lost, it can still be rebuilt.

[44] Cresswell, *Place: A short introduction*, 7.
[45] Cresswell, *Place: A short introduction*, 7.
[46] Cresswell, *Place: A short introduction*, 7.

II. Home as a Shelter

Another essential aspect of the home is safety. This emotion or need is generally associated with existential stability and the state of being protected from danger. According to psychotherapists Podolan and Gelo, safety is a primary need for the human brain, which seeks it subconsciously. The brain demands an abundant stable level of safety during the process of maturing, provided by the primary caretaker.[47] From this, it can be deduced that safety is an instinctive human need that an ordinary individual requires to flourish in their environment. Furthermore, in cases of severe lack of safety in one's home, especially during early development, it might even result in pathological defects in one's psyche.[48] This altogether suggests that safety is not just a core need, but a vital condition a home must ensure.

Given the fundamental nature of this concept, various scholars conceptualized the relationship between safety and home. In his book, Edward Relph states that the home is: "a centre of safety and security, a field of care and concern, a point of orientation."[49] Relph's description aligns with the traditional understanding of home as a place. He perceives home as a source of safety and care, where the physical and psychological well-being of its inhabitants are fostered. Primarily, the home should serve as a sanctuary with a unique ability to anchor one in the world.[50] As a result, it is a place where one instinctively searches for shelter and comfort in times of crisis.

Seamon agrees with Relph's hypothesis. His theory of at-homeness considers comfort and peace to be the elemental features of the home. In general, an individual should be able to call their home a place of rest and contentment. For Seamon, regeneration is one of the aspects that constitute the feeling of at-homeness.[51] This encompasses both the physical and psychological aspects of recovery. However, he emphasizes the importance of physical rest as the basic need of a human organism, essential for its proper functioning. This process requires vulnerability, which is achievable only in a safe place. The ultimate symbol of trust in a place is then sleep.[52] Still, the psychological aspect must not be omitted. In summary, the home must be an adequately secure

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[47] Martin Podolan and Omar C. G. Gelo, "The Functions of Safety in Psychotherapy: An Integrative Theoretical Perspective across Therapeutic Schools," *Clinical Neuropsychiatry 20*, no. 3 (2023): 194, Accessed December 10, 2024, https://doi.org/10.36131/cnfioritieditore20230304.
[48] Podolan and Omar, "Safety in Psychotherapy," 194.
[49] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 142.
[50] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 142.
[51] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 81.
[52] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 82.

place filled with a peaceful atmosphere to serve as the haven that one seeks in times of ailment or personal failure.[53]

This closely coincides with appropriation, another aspect of Seamon's at-homeness.[54] Appropriation governs one's authority over their living space. He states that control over one's living space is essential for their sense of safety.[55] Provided someone disregards the established rules, the inhabitants of the home will react with distress and displeasure. Moreover, frequent violations of one's personal boundaries in their home might even provoke animosity and distrust towards the place itself.[56] In fact, psychological discomfort combined with physical one, would reverse the healing effect of the home. Therefore, should appropriation be absent in one's home, it would inevitably result in a loss of at-homeness.[57] On the whole, the home would transform into a site of unease and potential danger with no regenerative ability.

Similarly to Seamon, Tuan recognizes the remedial ability too.[58] In his opinion, a person relies on the familiarity found within their homeplace, which generates a sense of safety necessary for an individual to revitalize. Tuan observes that "unique to human beings among primates is the sense of the home as a place where the sick and the injured can recover."[59] Humans tend to view home as a base with abundant resources to outlast the period of bad fortune. Learning to associate the home with well-being by, for instance, overcoming sickness then deepens one's affiliation to the place. Tuan compares the process of recovery to one's childhood.[60] When confined to bed, a person is reminded of the time when they were fully dependent on their parents, who tended to all their needs. Thus, the protection found in one's home reinforces the bond between the place and the people who inhabit the same place.

This correlates with Gaston Bachelard's theory of home. His image of the house as the home presents a very vivid place now enriched by the protective aspect. In introducing the house, he already alludes to this by declaring: "this is the environment in which the protective beings live. We shall come back to the maternal features of the house."[61] This statement focuses more on the

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[53] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 82.
[54] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 80.
[55] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 80.
[56] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 81.
[57] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 82.
[58] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 137.
[59] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 137.
[60] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 138.
[61] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 7.

emotional aspect, which is likely connected with one's parents. Similarly, the physical body of the house offers an undeniable level of protection as well. Bachelard illustrates this protective quality by using Henri Bosco's imagery of a house in his novel *Malicroix*. The house demonstrates considerable durability while withstanding a storm:

> The house was fighting gallantly…the awful gusts were attacking it from every side at once, with evident hatred and such howl of rage that, at times, I trembled with fear. But it stood firm…The house clung to me, like a she-wolf, and at times, I could smell her odor penetrating maternally to my very heart. That night she was really my mother.[62]

The house is depicted as almost a living entity that is physically defending its inhabitants with the ferocity of a loving mother. As Bachelard states, the painting of the image of the house, in this case, does not concern intimacy but protection.[63] Notable is also the metaphor in which the person compares the house to his mother. Universally, the bond between a person and their mother is one of the most natural and vital ones. This maternal quality, combined with sturdiness, proves a home's ability as a shelter against the chaos of the external world.

As already indicated, the term safety is commonly tied to the mother figure. A mother is a universal and unique person in one's life that might manifest in various forms. Across most of the animal kingdom, she is the primary caretaker, responsible for nurturing and raising offspring. Tuan notes this safety when discussing a child's thought process and development of such a complex concept as home: "mother may well be the first enduring and independent object in the infant's world of fleeting impressions. Later she is recognized by the child as his essential shelter and dependable source of physical and psychological comfort."[64] Tuan's remark on the issue highlights the mother's pivotal role in shaping a child's understanding of security. The mother symbolizes one's first home, an unparalleled source of safety that surpasses the limits of the physical place. Correspondingly, the mother's absence causes disarray in the child's internal world. As Tuan claims: "a child is adrift—placeless—without the supportive parent."[65] The mother's presence in one's life is acutely connected with the very concept of place. The loss of her during childhood or

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[62] Henri Bosco, *Malicroix*, 115, quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 44–45.
[63] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 45.
[64] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 29.
[65] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 29.

at a later stage of life might lead to feelings of alienation and severely undermine one's attachment to the home.

The tendency to uplift and idealize the role of the mother and woman in relation to the home is a recurring theme in humanistic geography. Many scholars designate the mother as the embodiment of the security and affection one's home can offer. Bachelard and Tuan describe the mother as protective and nurturing, with an enduring memory of her existence. In terms of feminist studies, Gillian Rose disagrees with this portrayal. She claims that "humanistic geography feminizes its notion of place."[66] Such imagery describes the home as a domestic and intimate place with no sorrows or strains, like in the case of Bachelard.[67] Conversely, white feminists in the second half of the 20th century argued against it. According to their findings, the home could often be the hub of oppression for most women.[68] Chiefly, they criticized that a woman's worth depended on childbearing and the quality of catering to the needs of the entire household.[69] As a result, the image of the home as a haven was lost on them.[70] This approach offers an utmost differing perspective of home. Ultimately, the home can be a place of inherent contradictions, either reinforcing or undermining one's sense of safety and place.

In light of the aforementioned theories, the home is generally viewed as a place of safety and stability, yet McGahern's literary works counter this notion. McGahern's homes do not inherently provide stability and protection to their inhabitants. Instead, the characters are faced with unease and conflict in their living environment. This recurring theme might be influenced by McGahern's autobiographical tendency, given his own challenges while growing up. Having lost his mother in early childhood, he was left at the mercy of his father. Equally, his characters must endure the oppressive presence of the father figure, whilst the mother and her protection are absent. Consequently, the characters are forced into figurative imprisonment in their home, while being unable or reluctant to escape and face the dangers of the outer world. In brief, this leads to an erosion of trust between the characters and their home, which turns the home into a prison.

The disruption of safety is exceptionally portrayed in the novel *The Barracks*. From the very beginning of the novel, Elizabeth is placed in an environment that never fulfils her emotional

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[66] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 45.
[67] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 53.
[68] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 54.
[69] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 54.
[70] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 55.

or physical needs. She is the sole person responsible for the state of the Reegan household and caretaker of her husband's children. She is unreasonably burdened with work that visibly exceeds her physical limits. Moreover, this exhaustion is amplified by the cancer her body is battling. She occasionally reflects on her situation, thinking: "an hour ago she'd been on the brink of collapse and if she finally collapsed did anything matter?"[71] When on the verge of exhaustion, she still attempts to fight the fatigue. This is illustrated in another scene where she nearly succumbs to exhaustion: "She had to grip the back of the chair fiercely, use all her determination not to go down. She could not let herself collapse. The fit passed; but she'd not be able to go on long like this, not more than days now; […]"[72] This directly contradicts Seamon's at-homeness. Instead of offering a moment to pause and regenerate, the home is detrimental to Elizabeth's well-being. The motive of sleep, highlighted by Seamon as the greatest symbol of vulnerability and security, is distorted in Elizabeth's case. Falling asleep is not a display of trust and vulnerability but rather an act of desperation and biological shutdown. Hence, Elizabeth's home fails to be a centre of regeneration. Instead, it turns to a place that actively drains her energy and where she is abandoned in her suffering.

The discussed lack of love and warmth in Elizabeth's home is intertwined with her missing sense of safety. She is expected to satisfy everyone's needs, yet the same courtesy is not shown to her. As noted by Rose, Elizabeth, as a woman, might feel underappreciated in her home. She is recognized for being a caretaker and overseeing the household. Once her ability to perform diminishes, so does her worth. In the last stage of her illness, she is bedridden and unable to ensure her own care. In addition, she spends this time by large alone. Her last days are a blur of mundane moments of observing irrelevant details: "The most Elizabeth saw of this spring and early summer was Reegan's tiredness at night, loose clay on the policemen's boots when they came to visit her, a little bunch of primroses Sheila brought."[73] Her interactions with other family members are reduced to an absolute minimum. Being denied the support and symbolical protection from them, it is utterly impossible for her to recover. As aforementioned by Tuan, Elizabeth's condition could be compared to the one of a vulnerable child. Furthermore, Her illness prevents her from maintaining the same level of independence as before. Thus, she should be treated accordingly and

[71] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 2.
[72] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 2.
[73] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 7.

with similar gentleness. On the contrary, she is the one preserving her husband's mental stability as he struggles to accept the new reality of their life. Resultantly, Tuan's principle of recovery is reversed like Seamon's and Elizabeth remains in the position of the provider without Reegan assuming the role.

Reegan significantly augments the unease and instability of their home. He is the typical representative of McGahern's complex and struggling fathers. His dissatisfaction with his job, in particular his supervisor, Quirke, makes him the unstable element of their home. Since he is not allowed to voice his thoughts openly, his frustration follows him back home:

> "If your father sees a late rush at night there'll be trouble." […] "Wet to the bloody skin," he complained. "A terrible night to have to cycle about like a fool." The children were very still. He had an intense pity for himself and would fly into a passion of reproaches if he got any provocation.[74]

Elizabeth and the children distance themselves from Reegan to not upset him further, being aware of his bad temper. This deepens the ridge between him and the children and simultaneously makes them more dependent on Elizabeth's protection. However, unlike other fathers in McGahern's literary works, he is not abusive. Still, his outburst can only be placated by Elizabeth's intervention. Through this, McGahern shows Reegan's incompetence in navigating his emotions or properly addressing them.

Reegan is an anomaly within his own home. In his study, Siobhán Holland describes McGahern's fathers both as victims and products of the traditional and stern patriarchal society of Ireland at that time.[75] As a veteran of the War of Independence and a former high-ranking member of the IRA, he is filled with bitter disappointment. Moreover, he grapples with monetary issues, which starts his attempts at farming. Elizabeth points out that "his greed for money to go free out of the police had grown to desperation…"[76] as he forces the children to dig turf. She advocates for them, stating that they are not physically able to withstand such hard labor. In his pursuit of money and providing a safe and stable home as the man of the house, he undermines his own efforts. Moreover, having lost his first wife, Elizabeth's sudden diagnosis shatters his dream. Holland notes

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[74] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 1.
[75] Siobhán Holland, "Marvellous Fathers in the Fiction of John McGahern," *The Yearbook of English Studies 35* (2005): 186, Accessed January 5, 2025, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3509333.
[76] McGahern, *The Barracks*, chap. 5.

that in McGahern's prose, the masculinity of home prevails over the feminine notion.[77] With Elizabeth's illness and gradual retirement from her duties, there is no softening element of the mother figure. Compared to Bachelard's house battling the storm, Reegan becomes the embodiment of it. Hence, he transforms the home, for himself and his family, into a site of tension and suppressed frustration.

In *The Barracks*, John McGahern presents safety as an unattainable ideal. All members of the Reegan family perceive its scarcity to an extent. In contrast to the presented theories about the home, theirs fails to meet the expectations. Elizabeth's continuous deprival of renewal ultimately leads to her death. Through her, McGahern defies both Seamon and Tuan's theories about the home's regenerative ability. Furthermore, the domestic atmosphere is complicated by Reegan as the father does not offer protection to his family. Alternatively, he reinforces the instability of their home by abusing his authority, turning into a volatile force that others are wary of. By creating the disproportion between maternal and paternal energy, the children are subjected to an unsafe environment as well. Doing so, McGahern paints a tense, unease image of home where moments of peace are rare and fragile.

McGahern's other novel, *The Pornographer*, emphasizes the impact of emotional ties on the feeling of safety in one's home. In parallel to *The Barracks*, the main mother figure, the pornographer's aunt, also suffers from a terminal illness, for which she is being treated in a Dublin hospital. Paradoxically, she feels threatened and shows signs of profound distrust towards the personnel and the hospital itself. She confides in the pornographer during one of his many visits: "I don't trust those pills. They give you those pills to get rid of you."[78] As indicated, the aunt considers the pills more detrimental to her health than the illness. The lack of safety she experiences in the hospital compromises her journey to recovery. Her despair grows as the medication seems to be ineffective. Her ultimate goal is to return to her house and husband in the Irish countryside. In accordance with Seamon's at-homeness, the aunt requires a substantial level of security in order to thrive. Aside from regeneration, the aunt is likely lacking the aspect of appropriation as well. Unlike Elizabeth in *The Barracks*, she is respected and portrayed as the family matriarch. Therefore, being stripped of her authority and not being in charge of her personal space is a

[77] Holland, "Marvellous Fathers," 187.
[78] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 46.

humiliating experience for her. As a result, her sole source of safety is her nephew, the pornographer, as he represents a fragment of her lost at-homeness.

The pornographer finds himself in a similar predicament. Throughout the novel, he drifts back to the side of his aunt's hospital bed. This behaviour originates from his viewing his aunt as his mother figure. Having successfully replaced his deceased biological mother, she became his first safe shelter, corresponding to Tuan's theory about a mother. With his chaotic way of life, he searches for her instinctively in an attempt to find solace and stability in her presence. Equally, he rejoices at the arrival of his uncle in Dublin. Maher takes notice of their bond, too, stating that "There is an ease in the way the two men interact that betrays a mutual respect…"[79] This rejects the stereotype of McGahern's fathers described by Holland. For this reason, it can be assumed that Bachelard's vision of the home with protective beings inside is attained. The uncle, as the father figure, does not emanate fear but rather acts as a solid pillar of support. This indicates that he was able to provide a stable and safe home, unlike Reegan in *The Barracks*, for the pornographer back in his childhood.

The same cannot be said about the pornographer himself. Despite being spared the trauma inflicted by another paradigm of McGahern's fathers, the main character transitions into this role. Given his reckless love life, he manages to sire a child with a middle-aged woman named Josephine. Regardless of being the child's father, he refuses to be actively involved in the child's life beyond financial support. This is depicted in the scene following the child's birth: "The telegram came five days after Christmas, announcing the birth. I just waited. […] I hesitated for some days before writing that I would go to London. I'd see her to talk about what she intended to do, but under no circumstance would I agree to see the child."[80] His stance on the situation paints him as another addition to McGahern's problematic father figures. Nonetheless, Maher defends the pornographer's actions. He refers to Josephine as "an unsympathetic and manipulative woman who knows full well the probable consequences of her actions."[81] His critique is based on Josephine's foolish hope of tricking the main character into marriage, even though he never entertained her fantasies. Still, the pornographer allowed the problem to arise. Together, they create conditions that predispose their child to grow up in an unstable and unsafe home. In summary, their child is

[79] Maher, *Local to the Universal*, 46.
[80] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 224.
[81] Maher, *Local to the Universal*, 51.

possibly forced into the role of a character suffering from a lack of safety as typical for McGahern's writing.

This novel captures McGahern's redefined outlook on the Irish countryside. Whereas Elizabeth in *The Barracks* is constrained in an unsafe, unpredictable environment, the pornographer willingly embraces a chance at redeeming himself and starting anew in the countryside. His visit to his childhood home due to his aunt's funeral solidifies his decision. There, he is reminded of the security a life at a farm in rural Ireland offers in comparison to his anarchic lifestyle in Dublin. As Maher notes, the pornographer is convinced of the rejuvenating power of his home in the countryside.[82] What symbolized entrapment for Elizabeth in *The Barracks*, is the ultimate haven for the pornographer. For him, it satisfies all the conditions set by the aforementioned scholars regarding the necessity of safety in one's home. By such duality, McGahern presents safety as a fluid concept with a potential for evolvement, given the right circumstances, people, and state of mind.

McGahern's collection of short stories, *Getting Through*, also addresses the issue of safety within the characters' respective homes. The short story "A Slip Up" investigates the difficulties surrounding attempts at rebuilding the lost home. Michael is removed from his home environment after leaving for London with his wife. His resentment towards the city is indisputable. When he complains about problems, he insists: "it wouldn't have happened if we'd kept the farm."[83] He shifts the blame for the simplest inconvenience to the place itself. Clearly, he does not consider London to be his home. After spending the majority of his life at their farm in the Irish countryside, the likelihood of him reconsidering is low. Following Relph's theory, the farm was Michael's secure place in the world. By selling the farm, he severed that safety line. Hence, his sense of safety and overall stability in the world has been irreparably impaired.

Despite Michael's internal turmoil, his emotions do not lead to actions. His and his wife's departure from Ireland, though heartbreaking, was based on relevant facts. The reason for their decision is revealed in Agnes' remark directed at her husband: "We'd be retired all right, into the graveyard long years ago if we'd stayed."[84] From this statement, it is possible to conclude original way of living in the countryside no longer befitted them. As they grew older, it is reasonable to

[82] Maher, *Local to the Universal*, 55.
[83] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 32.
[84] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 27.

assume that their age might have started to limit their physical capacity. Based on this evidence, the farm lost Seamon's regeneration. The detrimental effect of its absence was thoroughly explored in *The Barracks*. Unlike Elizabeth, Michael and Agnes were offered a chance to escape and averted their demise. Therefore, their determination to survive and regain a sense of safety surpassed their attachment to the home.

This relocation to London comes with its own risks. The urban scenery is entirely foreign to Michael. In order to navigate this change, he returns mentally to their farm. This lasting fixation results in prolonged periods of lingering. This culminates in an incident when he is accidentally left by Agnes outside the local Tesco till late at night. After finally taking notice of her husband's absence, she grows severely upset and frightened for his safety. She and their mutual friend then spend some time driving around the city, anxiously searching for him. Michael is luckily found unharmed but disoriented. Agnes describes the situation in the following way: "And there you were, with the empty shopping bag in front of the Tesco's window."[85] Despite the positive outcome, this incident jeopardized Michael's safety. In that dreamy state, he is left vulnerable and defenceless against any kind of threat in the urban setting. The city, in contrast to his farm, does not provide the same familiarity and predictability. On the whole, his physical fragility only highlights the severity of the lack of safety and security in his life.

This short story visualizes McGahern's gradually growing appreciation for the rigid countryside. Analogously to the aunt in *The Pornographer*, Michael's sense of safety is not connected to his surroundings only. Whilst the city satisfies their need for safety in the form of convenience, it does not suffice in recreating the at-homeness. Although Agnes and Michael succeeded in preserving their physical well-being, Michael's demand for psychological safety is not met. McGahern, by doing so, creates a dilemma with no clear resolution. In terms of safety, Michael becomes another character trapped in a cycle of hopelessness, where no place can offer all the aspects of home.

McGahern's other short story, "The Stoat," also delves into the emotional aspect of safety. The widowed teacher and his son are both impacted by the loss of the mother figure in their home. The relationship between the two central male characters is strained and marked by emotional distance. When confronted with the question of remarrying, the son replies stoically: "I think you

[85] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 29.

should do exactly what you want to do. It's your life." The father looked hurt, as if his life had been brutally severed from the other life by the son's words."[86] It is another example of McGahern's tense dynamics involving a father figure in the home, as previously examined by Holland. Were that the case, the son's reluctance to freely express his emotions in front of his father likely stems from his childhood. As noted by Danine Farquharson, the story closely parallels McGahern's own life.[87] In reference to Tuan and Bachelard, the absence of maternal energy disrupts the fragile stability of the home. As a result, the son experiences tension in the presence of his father and avoids direct confrontation.

The son compensates for the lack of security in his home by seeking the presence of his uncle. As his father occupies himself with finding a suitable candidate to be his new wife, the son retreats to his uncle's place. They bond over long walks that involve long discussions free of the unease with his biological father. He describes their relationship as follows:

> "You know, if your father does succeed in getting himself hitched, you'll be able to spend much more time here. I'd like that." He'd like that too. With his uncle everything seemed open […] nothing was closed. This freedom was gaiety, even though it seemed that it caused him to seem most lonely."

The uncle assumes the role of the father figure as in the case of *The Pornographer*. His presence offers the narrator the safety that his father fails to provide. As the excerpt suggests, the son is painfully aware of the gap between him and his father. His loneliness is reinforced as he observes his father try to build a new home, rather than mend their relationship. In doing this, the son's home loses its stability as his shelter in the world.

Similarly to *The Barracks*, in "The Stoat" McGahern explores the difficulties surrounding the relationship between his enigmatic and authoritative fathers with their children. This results in pathological defects in children's internal worlds, given that there is no mother to shield them. It is plausible that "The Stoat" is an illustration of a plausible future awaiting the Reegan family after Elizabeth's death. If that is the case, it is another showcase of McGahern's recurring vicious cycle of the lost at-homeness. Based on the overview of his literary works, McGahern proves that the

[86] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 62.
[87] Danine Farquharson, "Violence and Ontological Doubt in 'The Stoat,'" *Journal of the Short Story in English* 53 (Autumn 2009): 146, accessed February 4, 2025, https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1009.

notion of home when fractured, turns the place into cold and unsettling, instead of the promised picture of shelter.

III. Home as a Rooted Place

The third core aspect of home is belonging. This need is commonly understood as a person's desire to be part of a unit. It often includes feelings of acceptance, approval, and belongingness. Mark Leary and Roy Baumeister define belonging as a fundamental human need transcending cultural barriers.[88] This need originates from the biological instinct of self-preservation. In the past, belonging to a specific group ensured a person's survival in terms of reproduction and protection. Leary and Baumeister believe that this evolutionary pattern led to the natural tendency to form social groups and foster meaningful connections with others.[89] According to their findings, an absence of belonging is inherently pathological for human psychological well-being. Moreover, estranged individuals without their own community are more likely to develop various mental disorders.[90] On the whole, the need to belong is essential for the human species in order to thrive and retain a positive outlook on the world itself.

Seamon highlights the necessity of acceptance in his notion of at-homeness, too. For one to experience the at-homeness in their home, they must first feel unfettered in their living space. Seamon demonstrates this in another of his attributes, at-easeness.[91] This quality centers around personal freedom in its rawest form. Home is the place where people can remove the mask of their societal roles and allow themselves to exist as they are.[92] The reason is that the risk of being subjected to scrutiny and shame that ensues does not exist in one's home. Similarly to regeneration, this attribute is also essential in overcoming an illness. It is expected that in a close circle of one's family, a person can be vulnerable to appear imperfect and weak. Moreover, the liberty of self-expression might manifest even in the character of the home itself.[93] It is usual for the person to somehow mark the place in a way that mirrors their character and preferences. As a result, a person should view their home as a place bound to their identity.

Alongside freedom and vulnerability, the home provides a sense of groundedness in the world. This is examined on Seamon's final attribute of at-homeness, rootedness.[94] Rootedness manages the

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[88] Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 499, accessed February 10, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497.
[89] Baumeister and Leary, "The Need to Belong," 499.
[90] Baumeister and Leary, "The Need to Belong," 511.
[91] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 83.
[92] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 83.
[93] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 84.
[94] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 79.

vastness of the outside space. A person is anchored to the location of their home, which aids them in orienting themselves in the world.[95] In relation to this, Seamon stresses the motion of leaving and returning.[96] Regardless of a person's location, they are instinctively capable of finding their way home. This quality of home stems from a substantial level of familiarity with a place that is established through the repetition of activities and spatial familiarity.[97] Additionally, routines and rituals constitute a vast part of creating a sense of rootedness. However, rootedness is the least transferable of all Seamon's attributes.[98] Once the person leaves their home permanently and moves to a different location, the rootedness is lost. Consequently, dissatisfaction with the new home can even deteriorate into a sense of alienation and placelessness.

Placelessness is a term in humanistic geography, first introduced by Edward Relph. It refers to a state when a location loses its significance and uniqueness to people.[99] This condition renders the emotional depth with which a person experiences the place and endangers one's sense of belonging. Relph describes the true lived place as: "an authentic sense of place is above all that of being inside and belonging to *your* place both as an individual and as a member of a community, and to know this without reflecting upon it. This might be so for home, for hometown or region, or for the nation."[100] For a person to belong to a place, they must embrace it with genuineness. That might include becoming part of the community or interacting with the local culture. Consistent with Relph, David Morley bases his notion of rootedness and belonging on cultural identity.[101] Successfully integrating oneself into a community or creating a new one is not only a fundamental human need but a necessity for a secure sense of self.[102] In case a person fails to become part of a group, it leads to their estrangement. In addition, prolonged loneliness and detachment from others may result in pathological isolation. Subsequently, a person may become detached from reality and prone to nostalgia.

Nostalgia is a part of alienation from a place. This emotion is characterized by profound sadness and longing for what is lost and affects people regardless of their background. The feelings of nostalgia can be especially intense in times when a person is away from their home for longer

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[95] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 79.
[96] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 79.
[97] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 79.
[98] Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 79.
[99] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 6.
[100] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 65.
[101] David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 212.
[102] Morley, *Home Territories*, 252.

periods of time. Though seemingly harmless, this emotion can turn detrimental to a human psyche. David Lowenthal states: "What nostalgia does require is a sense of estrangement; the object of the quest must be anachronistic."[103] When a person withdraws from the present moment, they do so due to a lack of contentment in the present moment. Furthermore, this displeasure is enforced by hopelessness.[104] Generally, a person is faced with a situation with no plausible resolution or forced upon him by events beyond his influence. Hence, the common coping mechanism for this condition is escapism.

Escapism is a natural response to estrangement. This practice encompasses a range of activities that divert one's attention from the painful reality of his life. Lowenthal claims that the motivation behind the mental escape is to relive the past in which the issue was still nonexistent.[105] Tuan records that escapism is, on the whole, perceived negatively.[106] That is due to the fact that a person intentionally avoids the harsh facts of reality instead of facing them.[107] Moreover, escapism seems to be the luxury of humankind and their indolence. Any other species would meet their demise if they adopted the same approach when exposed to danger.[108] Still, Tuan excuses the human tendency to escape from reality to an extent. He claims that escapism is "human–and inescapable."[109] By reliving the exhilarating situations from the past, a person is reminded of the positive aspects of their life. Furthermore, it may even help them overcome their remorse and motivate them in the future. In summary, escapism has both beneficial and harmful effects on a person's life and should be moderated.

As illustrated, belonging is a principal part of the home and its lack undermines its entire notion, but John McGahern frequently omits it in his narratives. His characters lack the rootedness in their environment and exist outside the local community. By majority, they fail to integrate themselves into a group and are unable to solve their predicament. As a result, they wallow in nostalgia for their past lives. Resultantly, they indulge in disconcerting habits and coping

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[103] David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review 65, no. 1* (January 1975): 2, accessed February 4, 2025, https://doi.org/10.2307/213831.
[104] Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present," 5.
[105] Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present," 4.
[106] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 5.
[107] Tuan, *Escapism*, 5.
[108] Tuan, *Escapism*, 5.
[109] Tuan, *Escapism*, preface.

mechanisms to outlast the challenges. Ultimately, their paths reflect a need to connect with their home that remains out of their reach.

John McGahern's novel *The Barracks* depicts the cruelty and consequences of being exiled from one's community. Elizabeth is presented as an outsider in her own home, despite residing in that place for years. Over such a long time, she has no real friends in the village and her relationship with other family members lacks depth. Morley notes an underlying issue complicating Elizabeth's situation. He claims that the villages are specific in their homogeneity. The openness to welcome strangers into the community is drastically lower than it would be in the case of a city.[110] The people form a unit in smaller numbers, bound by familiarity. Therefore, creating belongingness in this environment is significantly more challenging for Elizabeth as a Londoner. Despite her genuine effort to appease others through servitude and compliance, she is not embraced by them. Altogether, this negatively affects her mental health and self-worth.

The home undermines Elizabeth's self-esteem and sense of identity. Her contribution to the household is underappreciated not only by her family but herself as well. Ledwidge observes Elizabeth's harsh evaluation of herself as well. As Elizabeth's condition worsens, Reegan comments on it. She plainly replies with: "Don't be foolish," she tried to laugh. "How could I work too hard with the few things that'd have to be done in this house!" From the standpoint of feminist literature, Rose considers Elizabeth's reaction as a common pattern with working-class mothers.[111] They must maintain the perfect image of an unbreakable woman, that is immune to pressure.[112] Based on this notion, it is safe to assume Elizabeth is missing the attribute of at-easiness in her home. Even as her condition worsens, she does not feel comfortable being vulnerable and exposing herself as weak. Hence, her road to recovery is obstructed both by external circumstances and by herself.

The hopelessness of Elizabeth's life is heightened by the futility of her attempts to fight her fate. Notwithstanding her incredible efforts, she fails to embody the standard of a stay-at-home wife in the countryside. Given her infertility and age, she feels that she failed in her role as a wife, mother, and woman. In a rare moment, she ventilates her frustration:

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[110] Morley, *Home Territories*, 244.
[111] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 53.
[112] Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, 53.

> "If you had a child or something you'd be better able to knuckle down! But when you have nothin', that's the thing! I was at Ned to adopt one out of the Home but he wouldn't hear of it. They'd have bad blood or wild, their father's or mother's blood, he said. What does he care? He's down in the dayroom here or at court or out on patrol most of the time but where am I?"[113]

Since her step-children do not love her and she is unable to give Reegan another child, she constantly compares herself to her husband's deceased wife. Ledwidge notes the symbolism behind the cancer striking Elizabeth's breast. According to her, this is the final attack on Elizabeth's femininity and sense of identity.[114] Unfortunately, the child might have been the solution to Elizabeth's problems. Possibly, it could have become her anchor in the village. Instead, she is left estranged in the world with nobody to confide in.

Conforming to the standards and adopting local customs only deepens Elizabeth's uprootedness. Having experienced life as a modern, emancipated woman, she believes she sacrificed part of herself. Despite identifying as an atheist, she participates in a family ritual of regular praying as follows: "Elizabeth's fingers slipped heedlessly along the brown beads. No one noticed that she'd said eleven Hail Marys in her decade."[115] This action is motivated by her desperate need to belong. Baumeister and Leary declare that religious participation stems more from the motivation to be accepted by others than actual genuine faith.[116] In accordance with their theory, Elizabeth is left unphased by the prayer. Instead of finding peace and relief in the religion, she is silently contemplating the state of her health and postponement of the doctor's appointment. This alludes to a conflict between her and Seamon's rootedness. The rituals and habits do not ground her; rather, she feels suffocated by them. Unsurprisingly, this results in the rapid progression of her illness.

Once her illness confines her to bed, she fully endorses escapism. Being almost utterly isolated from others, she reflects on her past to pass the time. Unexpectedly, she is able to find solace in nature. To illustrate:

> "It was so beautiful when she let up the blinds first thing that, "Jesus Christ", softly was all she was able to articulate as she looked out and up the river to the woods across the lake,

[113] McGahern, The Barracks, chap. 5.
[114] Ledwidge, "Death in Marriage," 93.
[115] McGahern, The Barracks, chap. 1.
[116] Baumeister, Leary, "The Need to Belong," 522.

> black with the leaves fallen except the red rust of the beech trees, the withered reeds standing pale and sharp as bamboo rods at the edges of the water, […].”[117]

What Elizabeth experiences is Tuan’s topophilia. This revelation is sudden and disarming for her. What she found mundane and familiar in the past, now perceives as beautiful and soothing. Maher quotes directly John McGahern and his statement: “When you’re in danger of losing a thing it becomes precious and when it’s all around us, it’s in tedious abundance and we take it for granted as if we’re going to live forever, which we’re not.”[118] In conclusion, Elizabeth is granted in her final moments a newfound serenity, which eases her departure from the world.

The Barracks is one of McGahern’s most depressive literary works. His depiction of rural Ireland as Elizabeth’s personal prison reflects his personal frustration with the place. According to Liam Harte, “a 1950s Ireland that, in McGahern’s view, was ‘a theocracy in all but name”[119] which likely influenced his literary works. He portrays the place’s rigidity and cruelty by rejecting Elizabeth. However, his anger seems to be more directed at the societal norms of that time than the place itself. This novel marks the beginning of McGahern’s complex journey in the perception of his homeland.

The other novel, *The Pornographer*, centers around the reverse problem. The central male character drifts through his life in the city. He acts as an unrestrained antihero in his own story, roaming the streets of Dublin and merely looking for a way to satisfy his needs. That mainly includes him frequenting local pubs and dances. He rejoices at his plan for the night once: “I am impatient for the jostle of the bar, the cigarette smoke, the shouted orders, the long, first dark cool swallow of stout, the cream against the lips, and afterwards the brushing of the drumbeat as I climbed the stained carpeted stairs to the dancehall.”[120] Unlike Elizabeth in *The Barracks*, he seems to find rootedness in routine and rituals. At first, he appears to have adapted well to the city life. However, the nature of his habits is questionable. Namely, his need for alcohol and sex. They do not generate a true sense of belonging. Alternatively, they give the impression of mere distractions. Thus, he participates in escapism rather than deepening his sense of belonging.

The pornographer exists on the periphery of the local community like Elizabeth in *The Barracks*. He moves through the city and his life with a detached and cold attitude. He shares

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[117] McGahern, The Barracks, chap. 5.
[118] Maher, Local to the Universal, 16.
[119] Liam Harte, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 28.
[120] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 24.

Elizabeth's awareness of his situation. He comments on this: "I was ashamed of the violence that reflected my own emotional idleness […] the dead of heart can afford to be violent."[121] This kind of attitude deprives him of genuine connections. In contrast to Elizabeth, the place and its inhabitants are not responsible for his estrangement. The pornographer actively and with a willingness chooses to exist outside the society, except for fleeting shorter romances. Uniquely, this defies Baumeister and Leary's notion of belongingness as a fundamental human need. The pornographer does not seek to belong in the city and boast about his lifestyle. In consequence, he strengthens his alienation and assumes the role of an outsider.

Subconsciously, the pornographer might know he belongs somewhere else. As examined in previous chapters, he feels a bond of affection for his parental figures, aunt and uncle. They and the rest of his family in the countryside are his community. In their presence, he instantaneously obtains Seamon's at-easiness. The same applies to his aunt. When informed about a short release from the hospital, she seems to beam at the prospect of returning home. To cite: "My aunt was sitting up in bed, combed and made-up when I brought her in the bottle of brandy the next evening. She looked excited and happy. "I'm going home," she said […]."[122] As Seamon's rootedness dictates, the aunt wishes to return to her home. It is the place where belongs and which bears marks of her touch over the years. The pornographer follows her back to the countryside to his childhood home. Here he is reminded of the beauty of the countryside. During a walk, he makes an observation: "I felt easier outside in the fields, the crowns of the lime trees, the glint of water through the moss-grown orchard, and the mountains beyond."[123] His experience mirrors Elizabeth's from *The Barracks*. He is overcome by the beauty of the scenery and his worries regarding his life in Dublin and pregnant Josephine dissipate. From this moment forward in the story, he begins to contemplate his return to the countryside.

By the end of the novel, McGahern grants the pornographer his wish. His decision to return is further cemented by his new love interest, Nurse Brady, joining him. He partially uncovers his fascination with her: "she'd grown up on a farm outside Monasterevin, an only girl with eight brothers. She'd never been treated differently from the boys, being let drive the tractor, work the milking machines, fight and kick football with them in the river meadow, two uprights crossed with

[121] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 13.
[122] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 72.
[123] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 72.

fishing twine."[124] In contrast to a city-born and raised Josephine, this woman is a product of the pornographer's home and part of the original community. They share the same background and upbringing. Resultantly, she embodies the life the pornographer occasionally longs for. The pornographer rediscovers his need for belonging through her. Hence, starting anew and returning to his roots is made plausible with her by his side.

This novel of McGahern's adopts a radically different tone from *The Barracks*. His attitude towards rural Ireland visibly shifts. Frank Shovlin states that "by the closing years of his writing life McGahern appears to have come close to some sort of rapprochement with his homeland."[125] The pornographer is removed from the oppressive countryside presented in *The Barracks* and allowed to enjoy the freedom and anonymity of the city. Nonetheless, he begins to sincerely desire to return to the place that killed Elizabeth in *The Barracks*. In summary, McGahern's own dissatisfaction with the rural countryside, his own, begins to ease as he allows the possibility of it being a place of belongingness.

The short stories collected in *Getting Through* show a variety of opinions regarding the sense of belonging. As in both novels, the characters show a tendency to oscillate between disdain and nostalgia for their home. In the short story "Gold Watch," McGahern creates another chance at an escape from rural Ireland. The story follows an unnamed son through chapters of his life. After leaving the farm and escaping the grasp of his authoritative father, he starts a new life in Dublin. There he marries and has a child with the woman he loves. As a result, he efficiently anchors himself in the new place and creates a sense of belonging for himself. However, his attachment to the farm is not easily severed. When his wife asks him about it, he replies: "That's something in my own nature. I have to face that now. It's easier for me to go back than cut."[126] He finds himself returning to the farm annually for the summer to help with hay. It is a habit he has known since his childhood. This supports Seamon's theory of rootedness. The son may still intuitively perceive the farm as a place where he is obligated to return. Furthermore, his reluctance to abandon the farm fully might stem from more than nostalgia. Tuan explains that the bond between farmers and their land is deeply intimate and almost impossible to sever. [127] Similarly to

[124] McGahern, *The Pornographer*, 170.
[125] Shovlin, Frank. " Half-Arsed Modern: John McGahern and the Failed State." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Fiction*, edited by Liam Harte, 312. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
[126] McGahern, Getting Through, 125.
[127] Tuan, *Topophilia*, 96.

the main character in *The Pornographer*, the son faces difficulties when attempting to forget his roots in the countryside entirely. This displays that whilst rootedness requires the longest to develop, its permanence outlasts other attributes of at-homeness.

The reason for the son's departure lies with his despotic father. Such a situation is not unheard of in McGahern's narratives. In this case, the animosity and lack of warmth between them overrode the sense of belonging and attachment to the place. However, the son wishes to keep their relationship amicable. Nonetheless, the son's actions might not be based on a wish to reconcile, but rather his profound attachment to the place itself. After the father intentionally cuts the hay before his arrival, the son is hurt and anxious since it interferes with the habit that fosters his sense of home. To punish his father, he lies to him about his pocket gold watch. Tuan notes that "a man's belongings are an extension of his personality; to be deprived of them is to diminish, in his own estimation, his worth as a human being."[128] Equally to the son's dismay at the disrupted ritual, the father experiences uprootedness after the loss of his watch. In the end, the conflict remains unresolved and the son continues the cycle of fleeting visits between the two places he calls home.

This short story partially recreates the dynamics presented in *The Pornographer*. Both central male characters are inclined towards returning to their childhood home in the countryside. The main difference between these two narratives is the impaired atmosphere of at-homeness in one of their former homes. The pornographer is more drawn to the local community of his family, whereas the son in "Gold Watch" is rooted in routine and loyalty to his land. Nevertheless, the pornographer's childhood is not compromised by the oppressive father, which would make him wish to remain in Dublin. Ultimately, the story reveals the fragility of belongingness when other aspects of at-homeness are not present or disrupted.

The other short story, "Faith, Hope and Charity," also depicts the fates of characters removed from their home. Murphy and Cunningham are two Irish blue-collar workers from the countryside, employed abroad in London. The content of their work involves digging trenches in harsh terrain. Their relationship with London is devoid of any sense of belonging or rootedness. Nevertheless, they do not concern themselves with sadness commonly induced by nostalgia and longing for their homeland. Their primary concern is maximizing their earnings. Moreover, it is revealed that they work under fake aliases in order to flout the law and avoid paying taxes.[129] After,

[128] Tuan, *Topophilia*, 99.
[129] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 51.

they yearly return to their homeland with the entire financial amount. Unlike in *The Barracks* and *The Pornographer,* their longing for homeland does not manifest in escapism, though not less tangible. Their primary focus is ensuring their safety while risking their lives. On the whole, this suggests that while belonging is an essential human need, it can sacrificed for a certain period of time.

All the same, not even they are able to escape the negative effects of estrangement. As the time of their return to Ireland approaches, the verve and aggressiveness with which they perform spikes. In the heat of a moment, an accident occurs, and Cunningham dies. The local teacher is tasked with informing Cunnigham's family about his death. Regardless of their emotional distress, the family is unified by the tragic news. The father declares: "I'll have to go to London. I'll have to bring him home."[130] He shows fierce determination to bring his son back to their home. Seemingly, the father is more upset by the thought of burying his son in London than by his death. The act of retrieving the body acts as a strong symbol of ultimate belongingness. Even in death, the son is not left placeless and lost in a foreign city but returned to his roots.

What follows demonstrates Morley's cultural identity and the potential of a close-knit community. The information about the costs of transporting the body soon spreads, given the lack of anonymity typical for this type of place. However, the family is not abandoned in their suffering like Elizabeth in *The Barracks*. Following Cunnigham's funeral, the entire village proposes a means to support the remaining family members. They organize a benefit dance to raise money for the Cunninghams, helping them cover the expenses for the funeral and transportation of Cunnigham's body. This is a heartfelt moment that highlights the solidarity found in being part of the group. To conclude, this proves that a sense of belonging and integration into a group can aid a person in outlasting times of unfortunate and alleviate their burden.

John McGahern offers yet another version of rural Ireland in this short story. The representation of a community in this narrative redeems it since the time of *The Barracks*. What was presented as cold and rigid in *The Barracks* is now portrayed as warm and welcoming. This marks another end of McGahern's cycle. However, instead of remaining stuck and going through another repetition, there is a newfound hope for a renewal. Though far from being perfect, the sense of belonging in relation to Ireland appears to be more resilient and fuller of promise.

[130] McGahern, *Getting Through*, 54.

Conclusion

This bachelor thesis examines the portrayal of certain aspects of home in the literary works of John McGahern. The concepts were selected to correlate with the themes and atmosphere of McGahern's works. In particular, the analyzed aspects include love, safety, and belonging. Each chapter is devoted to one aspect of home, which is then analyzed in detail with the use of literary texts.

The first chapter inspects the aspect of love. Scholars agree that affection wields the power to transform the nature of a place. Associating a place with pleasant memories creates an affective bond between the location and the person. In comparison to mundane, regular places devoid of this affection, they are memorable and draw people back to them. The center of care in a person's life is their home. Moreover, home promotes intimacy and familiarity. It is the place where a person takes their first steps as a child and knows intimately its every corner. The home must be infused with warmth to nurture a person. To obtain this quality, its inhabitants must live in harmony with each other. Though difficult to grasp and often absent, affection and fellowship are essential for the home to fit the role of a loving place. Given the need for partnership, the aspect of love is transferable. In the presence of a loved one, a person can experience the at-homeness even miles away from the location of their home. McGahern's prose defies most of these rules. His characters are forced to live in loveless, cold places, that could scarcely be referred to by the title of home. Consequently, they suffer from states on the verge of depression and existential crisis. In their search to satisfy their need for love, they employ various strategies to recreate that lost warmth in their home. Some succeed through genuine care and effort. However, even attempts based on sincerity can prove futile. On the whole, love is the aspect that, above all others, transforms a house into a home.

The second chapter revolves around the aspect of safety. According to psychological studies, it is a need that the brain demands from the time of birth. The home where a person is born and raised should, therefore, guarantee one's personal safety. Subsequently, it becomes a symbol of protection for the person. Home is a center of rest, vulnerability, and especially no threat. A person expects and values predictability in their home where clear rules are established. Only then can it function as a place of rejuvenation. Similar traits are frequently associated with one's mother. She is the person who ensures one's safety in childhood and tends to their needs. Unfortunately, this may lead to the idealization of her role even though she is just a regular inhabitant of the home, whilst being underappreciated. As with love, McGahern homes do not offer the spatial and

emotional safety they should. The lived experience of characters sometimes resembles terror rather than peace. They must withstand oppression from the ever-present authoritative fathers, exhaustion, and the unpredictability of new environments. The restoration of safety occurs rarely and could even be attributed to mere luck or coincidence. Consequently, McGahern's version of the home offers an unfiltered and naturalistic insight into the harsh reality of many homes.

The third chapter examines the aspect of belonging. This need originates from the concept of safety as its main role lies in self-preservation. To belong could be translated into thriving mentally and physically. In order to feel welcome in a place or a social group, the person must be accepted as they are. The home should offer complete relief from societal roles and provide space for self-expression. More importantly, home is a place that stabilizes a person in the vastness of the world. This is realized through a variety of personal or cultural rituals. Unlike love, belonging cannot be transferred, only fostered over the passage of time. The absence of belonging is a disaster for a person's well-being. If they fail to integrate into a community, they cope by using their imagination. However, reliving positive experiences may even deepen their struggle to connect with others. As in the case of the first aspect, McGahern does not include belonging naturally in his narratives. Belongingness is influenced by various conditions that the characters might fail to meet despite their best efforts. On the whole, the nature of belonging is unpredictable as it's dependent mostly on external factors.

To conclude, John McGahern's literary works prove that home, in its essential form as it should be, cannot be formed when one or more core aspects of at-homeness are missing or impaired. His narratives seem to have a circular structure, which then creates a pattern of a vicious cycle of search for a home. This cycle can be divided into stages of idealization, escaping, and longing. When a character escapes from their problems, they restart the cycle. From that moment forward, it is only a matter of time till they start to long for what they lost. Unless they confront the problems in their original locality, they are never granted peace of mind as the cycle restarts continuously.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje analýze domova a jeho klíčových aspektů ve vybraných dílech irského spisovatele Johna McGaherna. Autorovo pojetí domova zkoumáno skrze tři vybrané koncepty domova, a to, láska, bezpečí a pocit sounáležitosti. Práce je dělená do tří hlavních kapitol, přičemž každá se věnuje jednomu z uvedených aspektů. Daný koncept je nejprve definován a zasazen do teoretického rámce na základě kvalitních sekundárních zdrojů. Následně je aplikován při analýze vybraných děl Johna McGaherna.

Tato práce vychází z teoretických konceptů domova a humanistické geografie, které primárně formulovali Edward Relph, David Morley, Yi-Fu Tuan a Gaston Bachelard. Práce se velmi opírá o práci s koncepty „topophilie“, hluboké lásky k místu, of Yi-Fu Tuana a „at-homeness“, pocitu bytí doma, od Davida Seamona. Dále je využita teorie domova jako domu kde člověk prožil dětství od Gastona Bachelarda a okrajově je zmíněna feministická kritika, která upozorňuje na možná úskalí spojené s přílišnou idealizací koncepce domova a jeho propojení s figurou ženy. Mezi primární texty využité pro účely této práce patří vybrané romány a povídky od Johna McGaherna. Konkrétně se jedná o romány The Barracks a The Pornographer, jejichž analýza je obohacena povídkami „A Slip Up,“ The Stoat,“ „Gold Watch,“ a „Faith, Hope and Charity“ ze sbírky povídek Getting Through. Díla jsou volena tak aby obsáhla větší časový rámec autorova života za účelem zkoumání možného vývoje a změny postojů.

První kapitola se zaměřuje na lásku jako klíčový prvek domova. Láska je představena jako základní emoční potřeba člověka a faktor ovlivňující klima panující uvnitř domova. Domov je definován jako intimní místo, které v lidech vyvolává silnou citovou odezvu. Tato reakce má být dle teoretického rámce pozitivní. Je to nutná podmínka pro splnění Seamonova aspektu domova, který tvrdí, že domov má být zdrojem lidského tepla. Tato hypotéza je taktéž podpořena Gastonem Bachelardem a jeho vizí domova jako hnízda, kde má člověk pod křídly domova růst s vědomím, že je milován. Dohromady tyto koncepty tvoří hlubokomyslnou vizi domova, kde člověk ví, že je a bude vždy milován svými blízkými, jimž tyto emoce opětuje. Kapitola se následně věnuje analýze jednotlivých děl a zkoumá do jaké míry dokázaly tuto vizi domova naplnit. V McGahernově prvním románu, The Barracks, potkáváme postavu Elizabeth, která zažívá opak lásky ve svém domě. Absence lásky se negativně promítá do celé řady sfér jejího života. Neštěstí, které cítí ve svém domě se taktéž negativně podepisuje na jejím fyzickém zdraví. V druhém zkoumaném románu, The Pornographer, lze naopak pozorovat aspekt lásky jako něco nevítaného. Nejmenovaný

hrdina se staví do této nevýhodné pozice dobrovolně. V případě druhého románu je nicméně zachována vize domova jako zdroje lásky a útěchy v podobě domova na irském venkově a náhradních rodičů hlavního hrdiny. Poté co dojde k odstranění jeho patologického strachu z lásky, je připraven tuto emoci přijmout zpět ve svém životě. To vede ke zlepšení jeho mentálního zdraví a znovunalezení touhy žít plnohodnotně. První povídka „A Slip Up“ následně pracuje s láskou jako s částečnou náhradou fyzické podoby domova. Po opuštění farmy v Irsku, je stárnoucí Michael vystaven městskému životu. Město jako takové v Michaelovi žádné pocity lásky nevzbuzuje, naopak k němu pociťuje zášť. Tato negativita je značně mírněna vzájemnou láskou mezi ním a jeho ženou. Ona představuje a nahrazuje ztracené teplo domova, o které svých odchodem přišel. Povídka „The Stoat“ nám naopak ukazuje, že aspekt lásky nelze v domově replikovat, pokud nejsou záměry člověka založeny na pravdě a skutečné něze.

Druhá kapitola se soustředí na koncept bezpečí jak základní podmínce domova. Vybrané studie, například od Edwarda Relpha a Davida Seamona, vnímají pocit bezpečí jako nedílnou součást domova. K této tezi se přidává Gaston Bachelard, který vyzdvihuje úlohu domova svým obyvatelům poskytnout ochranu. Proti tomu se vymezuje feministická kritika křehkost a vzácnost tohoto aspektu. McGahernova tvorba vykazuje místy silnou autobiografickou tendenci, co se týče vyobrazování otců jako autoritářských postav. K tomuto dochází z důvodu absence mateřské postavy, která by byla schopná napětí v místě domova zmírnit. Na románu The Barracks je právě tento scénář aplikován. Reegan, otec rodiny, vytváří skličující atmosféru díky čemuž trpí všichni členové rodiny. Tento tlak blokuje jinak léčivé aspekty domova a přispívá ke skonu Elizabeth, hlavní mateřské postavy. V románu The Pornographer se naopak dá pozorovat zrod jednoho z těchto scénářů. Ústřední hrdina se vzdá svých otcovských povinností a ponechá matku svého syna, aby žila bez trvalého zaměstnání u azylových rodin v Londýně. Povídka „A Slip Up“ tento druh zápletky postrádá, jelikož zde téma rodičovství neexistuje. Michael se zde učí vyrovnat se ztrátou místa, které vnímal jako zdroj bezpečí a to i přestože bezpečné být přestalo. Povídka „The Stoat“ znovu nastiňuje problém otců v McGahernově díle a jejich emočního odloučení od rodiny.

Třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na koncept sounáležitosti. Tato potřeba se úzce odvíjí od lidské přirozenosti být součástí určité skupiny nebo prostoru. Motivace jsou v tomto případě velmi podobné potřebě bezpečí, ale tento koncept zasahuje více do sociologie. V této kapitoly byly využity studie o „placelessness“ od Edwarda Relpha, teorie klutrní identity od Davida Morleyho za podpory materiálů týkající se psychologie. McGahernovi postavy vykazují touhu po začlenění

do komunity. I tento aspekt je jim však mnohokráte odepřen. Postava s největším přáním o začlenění je bezpochyby Elizabeth z románu The Barracks. V jejích případě se nedá jednat o nedostatku snahy nebo neochotě přijmout zvyky lidí v jejím okolí, ale přesto na pocit sounáležitosti nedosáhne. Naopak hlavní hrdina románu The Pornographer možnost začlenění má, ale cíleně se rozhoduje existovat na okraji společnosti. Tohle rozhodnutí pochází z faktu, že si je sám vnitřně vědom, že jeho komunita se nachází jinde. Podobně jako s láskou je na závěr schopen návratu do jeho původního domova.

Ze závěrečné kapitoly vyplývá že existence či tvorba domova je plně závislé na zastoupení všech výše zmíněných aspektů domova. V případě, zdali je, byť jen jeden narušen nebo není přítomen vůbec, není možné mluvit o pocitu skutečného domova. McGahern vykazuje tendenci využívat ve svých dílech kruhovitou strukturu, která funguje jako past pro jeho postavy. Vytváří tím bludný kruh nepřetržitého hledání domova, který se zdá být nedosažitelný. Tento cyklus lze rozdělit do tří fází. Konkrétně se jedná o idealizaci, útěk a nostalgii. Postavy mají sklony tento cyklus opakovat. Utíkají před problémy ve svém původním domově, pouze aby se ocitli v situaci, kdy touží po místě, které tímto krokem ztratili. Nedílnou součástí tohoto cyklus je patologický podtón idealizace. Po uplynutí určité doby postavy zapomenou na vážnost důvodů, které je vedly k útěku, a proto touží po návratu. Tato idealizace není založena na skutečnosti, nýbrž iluzi a dostatečné vzdálenosti od jejich původního domova, aby dokázali zapomenout. Klíčem pro únik z tohoto cyklu se zdá být přímá konfrontace problémů, které je povětšinou následují i do nových domovů. Pouze poté jsou schopni zažít pravý pocit domova.

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